



Teachers' Developmental Roles in Local Wisdom-Based Character Education Across Learning Phases: A Phenomenological Study at Primary School

Fuji Afriani^{1✉}, Anggianita Putri Wulandari², Marina Luksiana Az'han³, Suherli Kusmana⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati, Indonesia

Jl. Perjuangan, Karyamulya, Kec. Kesambi, Kota Cirebon, Jawa Barat 45131

✉Corresponding Author: afrianifuji43@gmail.com

Abstract

Local wisdom-based character education plays a vital role in strengthening students' cultural identity and character development. However, studies examining teachers' roles in implementing local wisdom-based character education across different developmental phases remain limited, particularly within the cultural context of Cirebon, Indonesia. This study aimed to analyze teachers' roles, instructional strategies, and implementation challenges across Phases A, B, and C while developing an implementation framework for local wisdom-based character education. A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed involving three purposively selected teachers representing Phases A, B, and C at SDN 1 Kedawung. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and documentation. Data analysis followed phenomenological procedures involving bracketing, identification of meaning units, thematic clustering, and synthesis of participants' lived experiences, supported by the interactive analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation, member checking, and researcher reflexivity. The findings revealed that teachers adapted their roles and instructional strategies to students' developmental characteristics across learning phases. Local wisdom-based activities, including Cirebon mask dance, batik-making, educational visits to the Kesepuhan Palace, and regional culinary projects, fostered discipline, responsibility, cooperation, creativity, cultural appreciation, and self-confidence. This study proposes a six-stage implementation framework integrating teacher roles, developmentally appropriate instructional strategies, local wisdom, and character outcomes, providing a practical model for implementing contextually relevant character education in elementary schools.

Keywords: character education, elementary schools, local wisdom, teachers.

Peran Perkembangan Guru dalam Pendidikan Karakter Berbasis Kearifan Lokal pada Berbagai Fase Pembelajaran: Studi Fenomenologi di Sekolah Dasar

Abstrak

Pendidikan karakter berbasis kearifan lokal memainkan peran penting dalam memperkuat identitas budaya dan pengembangan karakter siswa. Namun, studi yang meneliti peran guru dalam mengimplementasikan pendidikan karakter berbasis kearifan lokal di berbagai fase perkembangan masih terbatas, khususnya dalam konteks budaya Cirebon, Indonesia. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran guru, strategi pengajaran, dan tantangan implementasi di Fase A, B, dan C sekaligus mengembangkan kerangka kerja implementasi untuk pendidikan karakter berbasis kearifan lokal. Pendekatan fenomenologi kualitatif digunakan dengan melibatkan tiga guru yang dipilih secara purposif yang mewakili Fase A, B, dan C di SDN 1 Kedawung. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan dokumentasi. Analisis data mengikuti prosedur fenomenologi yang melibatkan pengelompokan, identifikasi unit makna, pengelompokan tematik, dan sintesis pengalaman hidup partisipan, didukung oleh model analisis interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña. Kepercayaan dipastikan melalui triangulasi, pengecekan anggota, diskusi dengan rekan sejawat, dan refleksi peneliti. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa guru menyesuaikan peran dan strategi pengajaran mereka dengan karakteristik perkembangan siswa di berbagai fase pembelajaran. Kegiatan berbasis kearifan lokal, termasuk tari topeng Cirebon, pembuatan batik, kunjungan edukatif ke Istana Kesepuhan, dan proyek kuliner daerah, menumbuhkan disiplin, tanggung jawab, kerja sama, kreativitas, apresiasi budaya, dan kepercayaan diri. Studi ini mengusulkan kerangka implementasi enam tahap yang mengintegrasikan peran guru, strategi pembelajaran yang sesuai dengan perkembangan anak, kearifan lokal, dan hasil karakter, serta menyediakan model praktis untuk mengimplementasikan pendidikan karakter yang relevan secara kontekstual di sekolah dasar.

Kata kunci: guru, kearifan lokal, pendidikan karakter, sekolah dasar

✉ Corresponding Author:

Affiliation Address: Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati, Indonesia

E-mail: afrianifuji43@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Character education is a systematic effort to instill values, attitudes, and good habits in students through the learning process and school culture (Kusuma & Aprinawati, 2023; Sabir et al., 2025; Maghfiroh et al., 2024). Character education is important to implement in elementary schools as it forms the foundation for students moral development, discipline, responsibility, tolerance, and social awareness from an early age. The elementary school period is a crucial phase for value formation that will be carried throughout adulthood (Fitriyah & Wardani, 2022). However, globalization and technological development have given rise to various character-related issues, such as declining manners, low social awareness, and increasing dependence on gadgets and digital media (Hidayat & Kurniawan, 2024).

In the millennial era, character education is no longer sufficient through knowledge transfer alone; it must be integrated into all learning activities and school culture so that moral values are truly internalized in students (Suprayitno & Wahyudi, 2020). This situation demonstrates that education must not only focus on academic aspects but also needs to instill character values through meaningful and contextual learning. The reinforcement of character education aligns with the national development vision in the Asta Cita, particularly in shaping superior and characterful human resources, while also supporting the 4th Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on quality education.

One approach to strengthening character education is through local wisdom-based approaches, since cultural values such as mutual cooperation, tolerance, responsibility, and courtesy are relevant for implementation in elementary school learning (Ardiyanti & Hanip, 2022). The main theory used in this study is Thomas Lickona's character education theory, which states that character education is a conscious effort to help students understand, care about, and apply moral values in daily life, emphasizing the importance of habituation of positive attitudes and actions (Saiful et al., 2022). The dimension of character education in schools is highly dependent on the active role of teachers, as teachers do not merely deliver subject matter but are also responsible for building meaningful relationships with students so that character values can be effectively instilled (Mardiyanto et al., 2023; Pike et al., 2021).

Internationally, this local wisdom-based approach resonates with the broader frameworks of culturally responsive pedagogy and place-based education. Culturally responsive education situates teaching and learning within children's lived cultural experiences, integrating local cultural resources into the curriculum to strengthen children's cultural identity while addressing the practical challenges teachers face in doing so (Nganga et al., 2025; Shih, 2022). Similarly, place-based education emphasizes the pedagogical value of connecting learning to the physical and cultural place in which teachers and students are situated, extending learning beyond the classroom walls into the surrounding community and environment (Yemini et al., 2025). These international perspectives reinforce the relevance of grounding character education in the specific cultural landscape of Cirebon, while also positioning the present study within a wider global discourse on culture-based pedagogy.

While previous studies on local wisdom-based character education have largely treated teachers' roles as a static, undifferentiated variable, typically describing what teachers do in general rather than how their pedagogical roles change as students develop, this study departs from that assumption by explicitly theorizing teachers' roles as a developmental construct. This study makes a theoretical contribution by integrating Lickona's character education theory, culturally responsive pedagogy, and place-based education into a single explanatory framework that accounts for how teachers' pedagogical roles evolve alongside students' developmental stages, rather than treating these three perspectives as separate, parallel bodies of literature as in most prior work. Rather than viewing local wisdom merely as cultural content, the study conceptualizes it as a developmentally responsive pedagogical resource that enables teachers to recalibrate instructional strategies to students' cognitive, social, and moral maturation. This integrated, developmental lens distinguishes the present study from prior local wisdom research, which has generally examined implementation strategies or challenges at a single grade level or within a generalized "elementary school" category rather than tracing how these elements co-vary across developmental phases, thereby offering a phase-differentiated theoretical account rather than only a developmentally grounded description of the teacher's role in implementing character education rooted in local wisdom.

Several recent studies confirm that the success of integrating local wisdom values is largely determined by the learning strategies designed by teachers. The development of a character value-based learning model within local wisdom has been proven capable of accommodating the diversity of student characteristics while strengthening local cultural values in a global educational perspective (Kusuma & Aprinawati, 2023). In line with these findings, teachers' strategies in internalizing local wisdom values also play a significant role in strengthening the character of elementary school students (Darmayanti et al., 2026;

[Qudwatullathifah et al., 2025](#)). Recent literature reviews also confirm that the integration of local wisdom in character education in schools has a positive impact on student character formation ([Sabir et al., 2025](#)).

Nevertheless, the implementation of local wisdom-based character education in the field is not without challenges. Explorations of elementary school teachers found that limited teacher understanding of local wisdom concepts, difficulty linking local values to curriculum competencies, lack of teaching materials and learning media, and insufficient training are the main obstacles in integrating local wisdom values into learning ([Sumartini et al., 2024](#)). These findings reinforce the need to deeply explore how teachers in the field, within the specific context of each school, carry out their roles, apply strategies, and face obstacles in instilling local wisdom-based character education.

Based on the results of interviews conducted with teachers at Kedawung 1 Public Elementary School, learning still tends to focus on academic aspects, while the use of local culture as a learning resource has not been optimized. Therefore, learning strategies that integrate local wisdom-based character education are needed to help students develop strong character, foster appreciation for regional culture, and enhance their ability to face global challenges in accordance with the values of Pancasila, Asta Cita, and the SDGs.

Unlike previous studies that examined the integration of local wisdom primarily from the perspectives of curriculum, policy, or general instructional implementation ([Kusuma & Aprinawati, 2023](#); [Fathurrochman et al., 2025](#); [Sabir et al., 2025](#)), this study adopts a developmental perspective by analyzing how teacher roles, instructional strategies, and implementation challenges evolve across Phases A, B, and C within the same cultural context. This perspective expands existing insights by demonstrating that the implementation of local wisdom-based character education is shaped not only by cultural values but also by students' developmental characteristics, thereby requiring teachers to continuously adapt their pedagogical practices. Furthermore, this study aims to develop an implementation framework that synthesizes teacher roles, developmentally appropriate instructional strategies, local wisdom integration, and character outcomes. The resulting framework is expected to provide both a theoretical lens for understanding teachers' pedagogical adaptation and a practical guide for implementing contextually responsive character education in elementary schools.

This distinction is theoretically significant: whereas ([Kusuma & Aprinawati, 2023](#); [Sabir et al., 2025](#)) demonstrate that local wisdom values can be embedded in learning models and curricula in general, and ([Fathurrochman et al., 2025](#)) examine local-content curriculum integration in rural school settings, none of these studies explicitly theorizes how the teacher's role itself must be reconstructed as students move through different developmental phases within the same school. Likewise, international studies on culturally responsive pedagogy ([Gulya & Fehérvári, 2024](#); [Shih, 2022](#)) and place-based education ([Yemini et al., 2025](#)) have clarified how cultural and place-based resources can be integrated into curricula, but have not examined how the intensity and form of teacher guidance itself should shift developmentally. By foregrounding this developmental reconstruction of the teacher's role as its central theoretical object, rather than as a secondary observation, this study extends the local wisdom-based character education literature beyond an implementation-and-outcome logic toward a developmentally grounded theory of teacher practice, and, in doing so, addresses a gap that neither the Indonesian local wisdom literature nor the international culturally responsive and place-based education literature has yet closed.

Based on the description above, the research questions in this study are: 1) What is the role of teachers in instilling local wisdom-based character education at SDN 1 Kedawung? 2) What strategies do teachers use to integrate local wisdom values into learning at SDN 1 Kedawung? 3) What challenges do teachers face in instilling local wisdom-based character education at SDN 1 Kedawung? This study aims to explore the roles, strategies, and challenges of teachers in instilling local wisdom-based character education at Kedawung 1 Public Elementary School, so that it can serve as a reference for teachers in developing learning oriented toward the character formation of students.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences, strategies, and challenges in implementing local wisdom-based character education in elementary schools. The research focus includes the role of teachers, strategies for integrating local wisdom values into learning, and the challenges faced by teachers in its implementation.

A phenomenological design was selected over alternative qualitative approaches, such as case study or descriptive qualitative research, because the central concern of this study is the lived meaning teachers attach to instilling local wisdom-based character education, rather than a bounded description of a single case or institutional process. Following ([Creswell & Poth, 2018](#)), phenomenology is the most appropriate

design when a study seeks to uncover the essence of a phenomenon as experienced by several individuals who share that experience, which in this study corresponds to the shared yet phase-specific experience of teaching local wisdom-based character education across different grade levels. A case study design was considered less suitable because it would foreground the school as a bounded case rather than the teachers' lived experience, while a purely descriptive qualitative design would not be oriented toward uncovering the underlying meaning structures of that experience.

The research was conducted at SDN 1 Kedawung, Cirebon Regency. Data sources consisted of primary data, namely teachers as research subjects, and secondary data in the form of teaching modules, school documents, and other supporting archives. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) actively teaching in Phases A, B, or C; (2) having direct experience in implementing local wisdom-based character education; and (3) being willing to participate in in-depth interviews. Three teachers representing Phases A, B, and C were selected to capture variations in teachers' lived experiences across developmental learning phases.

Three teachers, each representing a distinct learning phase (Phase A, B, and C), were considered sufficient for this phenomenological inquiry for two main reasons. First, the study's purpose was not to generalize across a large population of teachers but to obtain an in-depth, within-case understanding of how the same broad phenomenon instilling local wisdom-based character education is experienced differently across developmental phases at a single school; phenomenological studies typically rely on a small number of participants who have direct, rich experience of the phenomenon rather than a large sample. Data saturation was determined when successive interviews no longer generated new meaning units, categories, or themes related to teachers' roles, instructional strategies, and implementation challenges. After the third interview, recurring patterns consistently emerged across participants, while documentation served to confirm rather than extend the identified themes. Therefore, additional interviews were considered unlikely to contribute substantially new insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

Researcher reflexivity was maintained throughout the study. Before data collection, the researchers conducted bracketing (*epoché*) to suspend prior assumptions about local wisdom-based character education. Reflexive notes were used throughout the analysis to minimize bias and ensure that interpretations reflected participants' lived experiences.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews and documentation. In-depth interviews were used to explore teachers' experiences, strategies, and challenges; documentation was used to supplement data in the form of teaching modules, lesson plans, activity photos, and school records. Research instruments consisted of interview guidelines and documentation guidelines.

Before being used in data collection, the research instrument in the form of interview guidelines was validated by two validators: an expert lecturer in elementary education and a practitioner in education (elementary school teacher), to ensure the appropriateness of the instrument from both academic and practical perspectives.

Table 1. Validation Results of the Interview Guide

Assessment Aspect	Indicator
Clarity of interview objectives	Each interview question clearly reflects the specific research objective it addresses and is easily understood by respondents.
Relevance of questions to research focus	Interview questions are directly aligned with the research questions on teachers' roles, strategies, and challenges in local wisdom-based character education.
Alignment with qualitative approach	Questions are open-ended and exploratory, allowing participants to elaborate on their lived experiences in a manner consistent with a phenomenological design.

Table 1 presents the indicators used to assess the quality of the interview guide together with the aspect of validity each indicator was designed to capture. Both the expert and practitioner validators confirmed that the interview guide met all three indicators and was suitable for use without revision.

Beyond instrument validation, trustworthiness was established following (Lincoln & Guba, 1985): criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was ensured through triangulation of in-depth interviews and documentation, as well as member checking, in which participants

verified the accuracy of the summarized interview transcripts. Dependability was supported through a consistent interview protocol and a documented analytical procedure. Confirmability was enhanced by grounding interpretations in participants' statements and maintaining reflexive notes to minimize researcher bias. Transferability was supported through a thick description of the research context and participants, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar contexts.

Data were analyzed using descriptive phenomenological procedures integrated with the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The analysis began with bracketing (*epoché*) to minimize researchers' prior assumptions. Interview transcripts were read repeatedly to identify significant statements, which were organized into meaning units, coded inductively, and clustered into themes representing teachers' roles, instructional strategies, implementation challenges, and character outcomes. Finally, these themes were synthesized to describe the essential structure of teachers' lived experiences across Phases A, B, and C. The stages of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing were applied throughout the analysis to ensure analytical rigor and consistency.

RESULTS

Research findings were obtained through in-depth interviews with three classroom teachers representing three phases of learning achievement: the Grade 1 teacher (Phase A), the Grade 4 teacher (Phase B), and the Grade 6 teacher (Phase C) at SDN 1 Kedawung. The interviews were structured around ten questions covering teacher understanding, instilled values, exemplary roles, integration strategies, learning media, challenges, and efforts to overcome challenges in instilling local wisdom-based character education. Rather than presenting the ten questions sequentially, the responses were analyzed following the phenomenological procedure described above and are reorganized here around three major themes that emerged from the meaning-unit analysis: (1) the developmental evolution of teachers' roles, (2) contextualized instructional strategies and learning media, and (3) challenges and collaborative support structures. Table 2 presents a condensed thematic summary and cross-phase comparison; the full set of interview excerpts that informed this synthesis is presented within each thematic subsection below.

Table 2. Thematic Summary and Cross-Phase Comparison of Teachers' Roles, Strategies, and Challenges

Theme	Phase A (Grade 1)	Phase B (Grade 4)	Phase C (Grade 6)
Teacher's role	Direct modelling; teacher demonstrates behaviours first; intensive supervision	Reinforcement of values already introduced; correcting habits carried over from home	Mentoring; teacher guides while students take greater responsibility and independence
Instructional strategy	Role-play (buy-and-sell simulation) combined with Teams Games Tournament; concrete, sensorial media	P5 projects introducing batik motifs before practice; outdoor learning with full supervision	Project-based learning (batik production, Market Day); students work and reflect in groups
Learning media	Real/concrete objects, considered more understandable for lower-grade students	Smart TV and internet references provided by the school/government	Real activity materials (fabric, dye, culinary products) provided jointly with partners and parents
Main challenge	Diverse learning styles and characteristics of students newly transitioning from kindergarten	Impolite speech carried over from the home environment; bullying among students	Logistical coordination and timing of cross-class, external-partner activities
Support & evaluation	Weekly evaluation with principal and teachers every Saturday; firmness combined with affection	Cooperation with police (anti-bullying socialization); coordination with parents	Joint evaluation with teachers, parents, and external partners after each activity

Read across the three themes, Table 2 shows a consistent developmental gradient: teachers move from direct, high-supervision roles toward mentoring; instructional strategies move from concrete and teacher-controlled toward project-based and student-led; and the character of challenges shifts from individual behavioural/learning-style variation toward the logistics of collaborative, cross-class cultural projects. These patterns are elaborated and interpreted in the three thematic subsections below.

Finding 1: The Developmental Evolution of Teachers' Roles Across Phases A–C

Interview findings revealed that all three teachers shared a common understanding that local wisdom should be integrated into character education through authentic cultural experiences rather than being taught solely as cultural knowledge. When asked how they understood local wisdom-based character education, the three teachers described a similar activity base but with a markedly different degree of teacher control.

"We introduce local wisdom through different activities. The children learn mask dance, visit Batik Trusmi and the Kesepuhan Palace, and during the P5 project they introduce Cirebon traditional foods such as empal gentong and tahu gejrot. The important thing is that the teacher has to set an example first." (Phase A teacher)

"In grade four, we introduce more about the culture and customs found in the surrounding environment broader than in the previous phase." (Phase B teacher)

"In grade six, children are not only introduced to Cirebon culture, but are also invited to understand the meaning and values within it so that these can be applied in daily life." (Phase C teacher)

These three excerpts already show a graded pattern: the Phase A teacher foregrounds her own exemplary action ("the teacher has to set an example first"), the Phase B teacher foregrounds breadth of cultural exposure, and the Phase C teacher foregrounds students' internalization and application of meaning. The same gradient appeared when teachers were asked how they modelled values directly.

"The teacher has to give an example first. In elementary school, the teacher has to demonstrate directly." (Phase A teacher)

"The teacher has to speak politely so that students imitate speaking politely." (Phase B teacher)

"I still have to set a good example. Grade six children are indeed more independent, but they still watch how the teacher behaves every day." (Phase C teacher)

Meanwhile, the Phase C teacher described his role as providing guidance while allowing students to take greater responsibility during cultural projects, and the Phase B teacher explained that at school, students are "guided again" because what they bring from home does not always match expected behaviour pointing to reinforcement rather than first-time modelling as the core mechanism at this phase.



Figure 1. Students Presenting Tahu Gejrot in the Regional Culinary Project

Figure 1 supports the interview findings by illustrating how teachers transformed Cirebon local wisdom into authentic learning experiences. Rather than introducing *tahu gejrot* merely as traditional cuisine, students collaboratively prepared, presented, and explained the cultural significance of the dish to their classmates. This learning process encouraged cooperation, responsibility, communication, and self-confidence while allowing teachers to model positive attitudes and facilitate students' participation throughout the activity. These findings indicate that teachers' roles extended beyond delivering cultural knowledge to creating learning environments in which character values were experienced and practised directly. This interpretation supports Lickona's view that character develops through modelling and habituation rather than through verbal instruction alone (Saiful, 2022). Similar findings have also been reported by (Saputra et al., 2024) and (Sutisna et al., 2019), who emphasised the importance of teachers' exemplary behaviour in character education.



Figure 2. Students' Educational Visit to the Kesepuhan Palace

The educational visit shown in Figure 2 further demonstrates how teachers connected classroom learning with students' cultural environment. Across the three learning phases, the teachers adjusted their guidance according to students' developmental readiness. Younger students received closer supervision during cultural visits, while older students were encouraged to observe, discuss, and reflect more independently on the cultural values represented in the palace environment. Through these experiences, students developed respect for cultural heritage, strengthened their local identity, and understood the importance of preserving Cirebon traditions. These findings reflect the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy, which emphasises learning that is grounded in students' cultural backgrounds (Nganga et al., 2025; Shih, 2022), as well as place-based education, which promotes learning through direct engagement with local communities and environments (Yemini et al., 2025).

The contribution of local wisdom activities to character development lies not only in introducing students to their culture but also in providing meaningful learning experiences through cultural practices (Shih, 2022; Yemini et al., 2025). Participation in mask dance fosters discipline, responsibility, and respect for cultural traditions (Supeni & Harini, 2021). Batik-making activities promote creativity, perseverance, and responsibility through students' active involvement in each stage of the production process (Kusnadi, 2023). Educational visits to the Kesepuhan Palace strengthen students' appreciation of cultural heritage and local identity (Yemini et al., 2025). while regional culinary projects encourage cooperation, communication, responsibility, and self-confidence through collaborative learning activities (Shih, 2022). These findings indicate that local wisdom serves as a pedagogical medium through which character values are experienced, practiced, and internalized in meaningful learning contexts (Saiful, 2022).

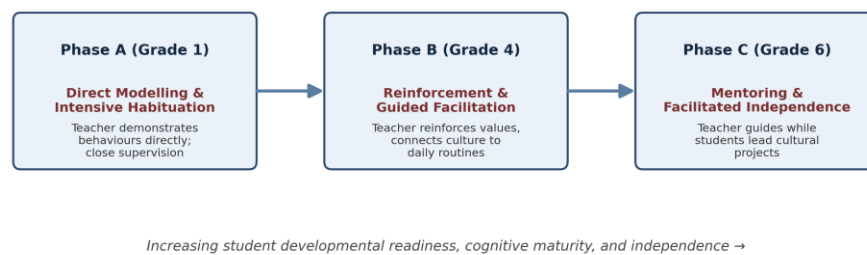


Figure 3. Developmental Progression of Teachers' Roles Across Phases A–C

Taken together, and as summarized in Figure 3, the experiences of the three teachers reveal that their roles evolved according to students' developmental characteristics rather than applying identical approaches across all grade levels: teachers adjusted the intensity and form of guidance from direct modelling in Phase A, to reinforcement of positive values in Phase B, and facilitation of independent cultural learning in Phase C. This finding extends previous studies by demonstrating that the effectiveness of local wisdom-based character education depends not only on teachers acting as role models but also on their ability to adapt their pedagogical roles to students' developmental needs.

Finding 2: Contextualized Instructional Strategies, Media, and Cultural Translation

Beyond the teacher's personal role, the three teachers also described strategies and media that were calibrated to their students' developmental phase, revealing a second, related pattern: teachers performed a repeated act of cultural translation turning an abstract cultural value or artifact into an activity that matched their students' cognitive and social capacities.

"We use more role-play than lecturing. The children become the seller and the buyer." (Phase A teacher, describing a buy-and-sell simulation combined with Teams Games Tournament)

"Before practising batik-making, the children are first introduced to the Mega Mendung motif, then they learn directly outside school." (Phase B teacher, describing outdoor learning combined with coloring activities for lower grades before hands-on practice)

"We integrate Cirebon culture into learning projects, for example batik-making activities, Market Day, or introducing regional history and culture." (Phase C teacher, describing project-based learning with more structured group task distribution)

The choice of learning media followed the same logic. The Phase A teacher explained that she preferred real, concrete objects "because lower-grade children find it easier to understand things they can see directly," whereas symbolic or representational media was considered less accessible at this age. The Phase B teacher relied on government-provided smart TVs and internet references to introduce batik motifs before hands-on practice, and the Phase C teacher used a combination of video, smart TV, internet references, and authentic activity materials fabric, dye, and culinary ingredients provided jointly with partners and parents, "so that the children get a direct experience."

Finding 3: Challenges and Collaborative Support Structures

The challenges faced by the Grade 1 teacher primarily relate to the characteristics of students newly transitioning from kindergarten, requiring more intensive classroom management, compounded by the diversity of student learning styles kinesthetic, visual, and auditory within one class. The teacher addresses this with firmness accompanied by affection, not anger, as well as through weekly evaluations with the principal and fellow teachers every Saturday.

The Grade 4 teacher faces challenges in the form of the influence of impolite speech from the home environment, including cases of bullying among students. The school addresses this through consistent re-habituation of polite behavior values and cooperation with the police in the form of anti-bullying socialization. Meanwhile, challenges in Grade 6 are more related to logistical coordination and timing of joint activities across classes and with external partners, addressed through joint evaluation after activities so that planning for subsequent activities can be improved.

The routine evaluation efforts made by the three teachers, both weekly and after activities, show that the success of local wisdom-based character education depends not only on learning strategies, but also on the consistency of evaluation and collaboration between teachers, principals, parents, and external parties.

These findings indicate that the roles, strategies, and challenges of teachers are interconnected and form a unified effort in instilling local wisdom-based character education in students at each phase of their development.

DISCUSSION

Discussion of Finding 1: Theoretical Interpretation of Teachers' Developmental Roles

Interpreting this gradient through the three theoretical expectations set out earlier, the pattern is consistent with, and also refines, Lickona's account of modelling and habituation. Because Phase A students are still developing basic self-regulation, social interaction, and concrete thinking, they require intensive modelling, repeated habituation, and direct teacher guidance to internalize character values; the teacher's exemplary action is therefore doing most of the developmental work. In Phase B, students begin to demonstrate greater social awareness and are better able to understand behavioural expectations through collaborative learning and contextual cultural activities; teachers accordingly shift from direct instructors toward reinforcers of behaviours that have already been modelled, correcting deviations (such as impolite speech carried over from home) rather than introducing behaviours from scratch. In Phase C, students possess greater cognitive maturity and independence, enabling teachers to emphasize reflection, collaboration, and responsibility through project-based cultural learning, with modelling reduced to an ambient, everyday example rather than an explicit teaching act. This developmental progression suggests that, within Lickona's framework, modelling and habituation are not simply two parallel techniques but form a continuum whose relative weighting must be recalibrated to the developmental phase—a refinement this study contributes to Lickona's originally undifferentiated account of habituation, and a plausible explanation, grounded in students' self-regulatory capacity rather than in grade level per se, for why teachers' roles differ as they do across Phases A, B, and C.

Positioned against international literature, these findings do more than confirm what is already established. (Kotten et al., 2025), studying culturally embedded character education across six schools in Eastern Indonesia, similarly found that teachers' moral character is central to institutional transformation, but treated teacher identity as a relatively stable professional attribute rather than as something that is recalibrated according to students' developmental phase; the present study extends this line of work by showing that even within a single school and a single cultural setting, the same teacher construct, exemplary modelling, is not a fixed trait but a variable that teachers themselves adjust in intensity and form as their students mature. Similarly, (Chi-Kin Lee et al., 2021), examining Hong Kong secondary teachers' self-efficacy for moral and character education, identified teacher confidence and training as key predictors of effective character education, a finding this study does not simply reproduce but complicates: the Phase A, B, and C teachers in this study did not report differing levels of confidence so much as differing role demands, suggesting that self-efficacy models developed in secondary settings may need to be reframed around role-appropriateness rather than role-confidence when applied to elementary teachers working across developmental phases. (Birhan et al., 2021), studying character education in Ethiopian preprimary and primary schools, reported that teachers often default to generic, one-size-fits-all strategies irrespective of children's developmental readiness; read against that finding, the present study's six-stage, phase-differentiated framework offers a concrete alternative model rather than merely another instance of the same generic pattern, indicating that the developmental recalibration observed at SDN 1 Kedawung is not an inevitable feature of local wisdom-based character education but an achievement that depends on how teachers, schools, and cultural resources are organized. Taken together, this critical positioning suggests that the present study does not simply corroborate existing international accounts of teacher role, self-efficacy, or generic practice, but instead extends them by demonstrating a mechanism, developmentally graded recalibration of modelling intensity, that helps explain variation these other studies documented but did not theorize.

Discussion of Finding 2: Cultural Translation Through a Culturally Responsive Lens

Interpreted through culturally responsive pedagogy (Anyichie, 2025; Shih, 2022), these findings suggest that cultural translation is not a single act performed once by the teacher, but a developmentally graded process repeated at increasing levels of abstraction across a student's schooling. For Phase A students, whose thinking is still tied to direct sensory experience, teachers had to perform an additional translation step: turning an intangible cultural value such as cooperation or fairness into a tangible, playable activity (a buy-and-sell simulation, a tournament-style game). For Phase C students, teachers could rely on

more abstract, project-based methods because students' cognitive maturity allowed cultural meaning to be engaged with more directly, through planning, production, and public presentation (Market Day). This is a context-specific extension of culturally responsive pedagogy: in this study, the depth of translation required from teachers decreases as students' capacity for abstract and reflective thinking increases, which helps explain beyond simple grade-level difference why the instructional strategies and media reported by the three teachers differ so systematically.

Discussion of Finding 3: Contextualizing Challenges Within Cirebon and the International Literature

The challenges found in this study align with the findings of (Sumartini et al., 2024) that limited teacher understanding of local wisdom concepts, difficulty linking local values to curriculum competencies, lack of teaching materials, and insufficient training are the main obstacles for teachers in integrating local wisdom values into learning. The challenge of home environment speech influence found in Grade 4 also supports the view of (Hidayat & Kurniawan, 2024) that globalization and technological development cause various character-related problems, such as declining manners and low social awareness, making the teacher's role as a value filter increasingly important.

Critically, these challenges are not generic classroom-management issues but are shaped by the specific cultural and geographic character of Cirebon as a coastal, historically trade-oriented, and religiously diverse area where students routinely encounter a mixture of traditional courtesy norms and pragmatic, transactional speech patterns absorbed from the surrounding port-town environment; this context plausibly explains why impolite speech from home was a salient challenge for the Grade 4 teacher rather than, for instance, a language-diversity or attendance-related challenge more typical of other regional or rural Indonesian settings (Fathurrochman et al., 2025). Similarly, the logistical challenge reported by the Grade 6 teacher is closely tied to Cirebon's dense network of accessible cultural sites and partner institutions the Kesepuhan Palace, Batik Trusmi, and the local police which make ambitious, externally partnered projects feasible but also introduce coordination demands that would be less pronounced in a school without comparable access to such cultural infrastructure. This contextual reading indicates that some of the challenges identified here may transfer to other Indonesian elementary schools with similarly rich local cultural resources, while others particularly the speech-related challenge are more specific to Cirebon's coastal cultural profile and should be interpreted with that specificity in mind rather than generalized without qualification.

Viewed comparatively, the challenges reported here both echo and complicate international accounts of character education implementation. (Chairunnisa & Istaryatiningtias, 2022), studying character education in Indonesian junior secondary schools, similarly found that teachers function as a critical filter against negative external influences, which corroborates the Grade 4 teacher's role in countering impolite speech carried over from home; however, that study frames the teacher primarily as a corrective agent responding to a single, generalized societal threat, whereas the present findings show that the nature of the challenge itself, learning-style diversity, home-influenced speech, or cross-institutional logistics, systematically differs by developmental phase, a distinction the secondary-school literature does not need to make because it addresses a single age band. Likewise, (Birhan et al., 2021) reported that limited resources and generic strategies constrain character education across Ethiopian preprimary and primary schools; the present study's finding that the Grade 6 teacher's challenges stemmed not from resource scarcity but from the logistical complexity of abundant cultural partnerships suggests that resource-rich and resource-poor contexts may generate opposite kinds of implementation challenges, extending rather than simply reinforcing the assumption that scarcity is the primary barrier to local wisdom-based character education.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide a six-stage implementation framework that can guide elementary school teachers in integrating local wisdom into character education across different learning phases. Drawing upon the shared experiences of teachers in Phases A, B, and C, the findings suggest that local wisdom-based character education should not be implemented merely by introducing cultural content but through a systematic process consisting of six interconnected stages: (1) identifying local wisdom that is relevant to students' cultural context, (2) determining the character values to be developed, (3) adapting learning activities to students' developmental characteristics, (4) selecting appropriate instructional strategies, (5) engaging students in authentic cultural experiences, and (6) reinforcing character values through continuous reflection and habituation. This six-stage implementation framework was developed

from the synthesis of the present findings and is supported by previous studies emphasizing the integration of local wisdom, contextual learning, and character education (Kusuma & Aprinawati, 2023; Sabir et al., 2025).

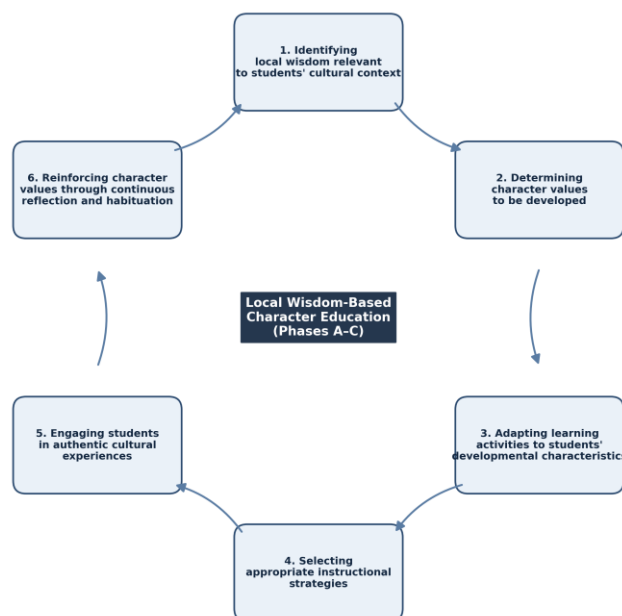


Figure 4. The Six-Stage Implementation Framework for Local Wisdom-Based Character Education

Each of the six stages was derived directly from the phenomenological findings rather than proposed a priori. Stage 1 (identifying relevant local wisdom) and Stage 2 (determining character values) emerged from the meaning units in which all three teachers, when explaining how they understood local wisdom-based character education, first named a specific cultural practice, such as mask dance, batik, the Kesepuhan Palace, or regional cuisine, before linking it to a character value, indicating that value identification followed cultural-resource identification in teachers' own accounts (Theme 1). Stage 3 (adapting learning activities to students' developmental characteristics) and Stage 4 (selecting appropriate instructional strategies) were abstracted from the cross-phase variation documented in Theme 2, in which teachers described a graded process of cultural translation, from concrete role-play in Phase A to project-based learning in Phase C, explicitly tied to students' cognitive and social maturity rather than to curriculum content alone. Stage 5 (engaging students in authentic cultural experiences) reflects the recurring emphasis, across all three teachers' narratives and the accompanying documentation in Figures 1 and 2, on direct participation, such as preparing and presenting tahu gejrot or visiting the Kesepuhan Palace, rather than passive cultural exposure. Finally, Stage 6 (reinforcing character values through continuous reflection and habituation) was drawn from Theme 3, in which the routine weekly and post-activity evaluations reported by all three teachers functioned as a recursive mechanism feeding back into subsequent cycles of local wisdom selection and activity design. Because these stages were induced from the thematic clustering and synthesis procedures described in the Methods section rather than derived from a pre-existing model, the framework in Figure 4 should be read as a direct theoretical abstraction of the three themes rather than as an independently proposed template that the findings happen to illustrate.

Figure 4 presents this framework as a conceptual model rather than a linear checklist: the six stages are depicted as an interconnected, revisitable cycle because, in practice, teachers in this study did not move through them only once per school year but returned to earlier stages for example, re-identifying relevant local wisdom or re-adapting activities whenever they moved from one phase-level cohort of students to the next. Presenting the framework visually, rather than only as an enumerated list, is intended to make explicit the relationships among teacher roles, instructional strategies, local wisdom content, and character outcomes that the narrative findings describe.

Based on this framework, elementary schools may utilize various forms of local wisdom, including traditional dances, batik cultural centres, historical heritage sites, and regional culinary traditions, as contextual learning resources. For younger students (Phase A), learning activities should prioritize concrete experiences through direct modelling, role-playing, and intensive teacher guidance. In contrast, students in Phases B and C may be encouraged to participate in educational visits, collaborative projects, presentations, and inquiry-based learning that promote greater independence and responsibility. Such an approach reflects the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy, which positions students' cultural backgrounds as meaningful learning resources (Shih, 2022), as well as place-based education, which emphasizes learning through direct engagement with local communities and cultural environments (Yemini et al., 2025).

Importantly, the findings indicate that the effectiveness of local wisdom-based character education depends not only on the selection of cultural activities but also on teachers' ability to adapt their pedagogical roles, instructional strategies, and levels of guidance according to students' developmental readiness. The framework proposed in this study may therefore serve as a practical model that can be adapted by elementary schools in different cultural contexts while preserving the uniqueness of their respective local wisdom.

Beyond individual classroom teachers, the findings also carry implications for four additional groups of stakeholders. School leaders can use the phase-sensitive framework to design a whole-school local wisdom calendar that deliberately varies the intensity of teacher modelling, the abstraction level of activities, and the degree of student autonomy across grade bands, rather than treating local wisdom activities as a uniform, one-off program. Curriculum developers may embed the six stages directly into local-content (mata pelajaran muatan lokal) syllabi so that the adaptation to developmental phase becomes an explicit curricular requirement rather than something left to individual teachers' discretion. Teacher educators can incorporate the phase-specific cases documented here modelling in Phase A, reinforcement in Phase B, facilitation in Phase C into pre-service and in-service training so that beginning teachers acquire a repertoire of role-adaptation strategies rather than a single, generic model of "being a role model." Finally, policymakers at the district or provincial education office (Dinas Pendidikan) level can use the framework to align local-content curriculum requirements with the developmental-phase structure already used in the national Merdeka Curriculum, and to justify targeted resourcing teaching materials, transport for cultural-site visits, partnership arrangements with cultural institutions for schools facing constraints similar to those reported by the teachers in this study. In this way, the study contributes not only to the theoretical understanding of local wisdom-based character education but also to its practical implementation across a wider range of educational stakeholders and settings.

Limitations

This study was conducted in a single elementary school involving only three teachers representing Phases A, B, and C. Although the participants were purposefully selected based on their experience in implementing local wisdom-based character education and the data collection process reached thematic saturation as operationalized above, the findings primarily reflect teachers' lived experiences within one educational and cultural context. Consequently, the transferability of the findings to schools with different cultural backgrounds or educational settings should be interpreted with caution, and, as discussed in Theme 3, some of the specific challenges identified particularly those tied to Cirebon's coastal cultural profile may not transfer directly to inland, rural, or culturally distinct settings.

Furthermore, this study focused exclusively on teachers' perspectives. The experiences and perceptions of students, school principals, parents, and community members were not included, which may limit a more comprehensive understanding of how local wisdom-based character education is implemented across the broader educational ecosystem, and means that the character outcomes reported here rest on teachers' own interpretation of student behaviour rather than on independent corroboration from students or families.

A further limitation concerns researcher bias and positionality. Although bracketing, member checking, and second-coder review were used to manage this risk (see the Reflexivity Statement in the Methods section), the researchers' own professional background in elementary and Cirebon-context education cannot be fully separated from the categories that were identified, and a different research team may have

foregrounded different aspects of the same transcripts. Readers should therefore treat the thematic structure presented here as one credible interpretation of the data rather than as the only possible one.

Future research is recommended to involve multiple elementary schools from diverse cultural regions, include a wider range of participants students, parents, principals, and community members and employ longitudinal or mixed-methods approaches to examine how local wisdom-based character education develops over time and across different educational contexts. Such studies would strengthen the transferability of the findings and contribute to the development of more comprehensive, empirically tested models for integrating local wisdom into character education.

CONCLUSION

The central contribution of this study is theoretical: it demonstrates that teachers' roles in local wisdom-based character education are not a fixed professional attribute but a developmental construct that must be systematically reconstructed as students move from Phase A to Phase C. This developmental reconstruction, evidenced by the shift from direct modelling, to reinforcement of previously modelled behaviours, to facilitation of independent cultural learning, provides an empirical basis for integrating Lickona's theory of modelling and habituation, culturally responsive pedagogy, and place-based education into a single, phase-differentiated account of teacher practice, rather than treating each perspective as separately, and only additively, relevant to the Cirebon context. Empirically, this developmental reconstruction is illustrated through the teachers' engagement with cultural practices such as mask dance, batik-making, educational visits to the Kesepuhan Palace, and regional culinary projects, which contributed to the development of character values including discipline, responsibility, cooperation, creativity, respect for cultural heritage, and self-confidence; these findings function as supporting evidence for, rather than as the central claim of, the developmental theory the study proposes. Teachers, in this account, do not function merely as facilitators of cultural knowledge but as role models, mentors, and learning designers whose specific configuration of these functions changes systematically across developmental phases.

Theoretically, this study extends previous research by providing a phase-sensitive understanding of teachers' roles in implementing local wisdom-based character education within the Cirebon cultural context, and by using Lickona's theory, culturally responsive pedagogy, and place-based education as active interpretive lenses rather than only background citations to explain why teachers' roles, strategies, and challenges differ systematically across developmental phases. Practically, the proposed six-stage framework, visualized as a conceptual model in Figure 4, offers a systematic reference that can assist elementary school teachers, school leaders, curriculum developers, teacher educators, and policymakers in integrating local wisdom into character education through the identification of local cultural resources, alignment of character values, adaptation of learning activities, implementation of contextual strategies, authentic learning experiences, and reflective evaluation.

This study is limited to one elementary school and three teacher participants, and to teachers' own perspectives; therefore, the findings should be interpreted within this context. Future studies are recommended to involve multiple schools, broader participant groups including students, parents, and school leaders and diverse cultural settings to examine the applicability of the proposed framework and further enrich the implementation of local wisdom-based character education across different educational contexts.

REFERENCES

- Anyichie, A. C. (2025). Developing and Implementing a Culturally Responsive Self-Regulated Learning Framework: Exploring How Teachers Could Empower Culturally Diverse Learners in Inclusive Classroom Environments. *Sage Open*, 15(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440251367830>
- Ardiyanti, S., & Hanip, S. P. N. (2022). *Pendidikan Nilai Melalui Bahan Ajar Muatan Lokal Budaya Sasak Pada Anak Usia Dini Di Lombok*. 6(2), 50–64.
- Birhan, W., Shiferaw, G., Amsalu, A., Tamiru, M., & Tiruye, H. (2021). Exploring the context of teaching character education to children in preprimary and primary schools. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 4(1), 100171. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2021.100171>

- Chairunnisa, C., & Istaryatiningtias. (2022). Character Education and Teacher's Attitudes in Preventing Radicalization in Junior High School Students in Indonesia. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 2022(97), 252–269. <https://doi.org/10.14689/ejer.2022.97.14>
- Chi-Kin Lee, J., Wong, K.-L., & Kong, R. H.-M. (2021). Secondary school teachers' self-efficacy for moral and character education and its predictors: a Hong Kong perspective. *Teachers and Teaching*, 27(1–4), 32–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2021.1920907>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Darmayanti, D. P., Nurlela, Salwia, & Manda, D. (2026). The Role of Teachers in Implementing Local Wisdom-Based Learning in Elementary Schools in Makassar. *Celebes Journal of Elementary Education*, 4(1), 136–149. <https://doi.org/10.31605/cjee.v4i1.6646>
- Fathurrochman, I., Asnawan, Monita, D., & Hasan, M. F. (2025). Integration of local wisdom in elementary school local content curriculum: A study in rural areas of Indonesia. *The Curriculum Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/curj.70029>
- Fitriyah, C. Z., & Wardani, R. P. (2022). *Paradigma Kurikulum Merdeka Bagi Guru Sekolah Dasar*. 236–243.
- Gulya, N., & Fehérvári, A. (2024). Fostering culturally responsive pedagogy related competencies among pre-service teachers: a systematic review of the recent research literature. *Research Papers in Education*, 39(2), 348–378. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2023.2228312>
- Hidayat, P. A., & Kurniawan, M. I. (2024). *Membentuk Generasi Pemimpin Toleran : Peran Sekolah dalam Menanamkan Nilai Toleransi pada Siswa Sekolah Dasar*. 7, 4824–4830.
- Kotten, N. B., Beda, E., Korosando, F., Nande, M., Arafat, S., & Suryani, L. (2025). Culturally Embedded Character Education: Teacher Identity and Institutional Transformation in Eastern Indonesia. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 24(11), 711–725. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.24.11.33>
- Kusnadi, K. (2023). Exploring character education through batik Pekalongan local wisdom: An innovative approach to character learning. *Jurnal Civics: Media Kajian Kewarganegaraan*, 20(2), 223–235. <https://doi.org/10.21831/jc.v20i2.57000>
- Kusuma, Y. Y., & Aprinawati, I. (2023). Pengembangan Model Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi Berbasis Nilai Karakter dalam Kearifan Lokal pada perspektif Pendidikan Global di Sekolah Dasar. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Konseling*, 5, 2936–2941.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Sage Publications.
- Maghfiroh, A. N., Salma, S. N., Islam, U., Maulana, N., & Ibrahim, M. (2024). Efektivitas penggunaan media pembelajaran interaktif dalam pembelajaran matematika di sekolah dasar. *Griya Journal of Mathematics Education and Application*, 4, 55–64.
- Mardiyanto, A.M, M. I., Asmara, A., Switri, E., Sukmawati, E., Sitorus, R. H., Amaliya, I., Indrawati, N., & Suryaningrum, S. (2023). *Mendidik Karakter dalam Dunia Modern*. PT. Mifandi Mandiri Digital.
- Nganga, L., Nydam, A., & Kambutu, J. (2025). Goal Setting for Teacher Development: Enhancing Culturally Responsive, Inclusive, and Social Justice Pedagogy. *Education Sciences*, 15(3), 264. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15030264>
- Pike, M. A., Hart, P., Paul, S.-A. S., Lickona, T., & Clarke, P. (2021). Character development through the curriculum: teaching and assessing the understanding and practice of virtue. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 53(4), 449–466. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2020.1755996>
- Qudwatullathifah, R. N., Nugraha, T. A., & Miftahurrohman, C. (2025). *Strategi Guru Dalam Menginternalisasi Nilai- Nilai Kearifan Lokal Untuk Penguatan Karakter Siswa Sekolah Dasar*. 6, 20–28.
- Sabir, R. I., Ulfa, A. Y., Imran, A., & Majid, A. (2025). *Integrasi Nilai-Nilai Kearifan Lokal dalam Pendidikan Karakter di Sekolah : Tinjauan Literature Review*. 14(2), 3151–3168.
- Saiful. (2022). *Implementasi Pendidikan Karakter: Perspektif Al-Ghazali & Thomas Lickona Di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Terpadu (MIT) Meunara Baro Kabupaten Aceh Besar*. 1, 721–740. <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v11i01.1900>
- Saiful, Yusliani, H., & Rosnidarwati. (2022). *Implementasi Pendidikan Karakter : Perspektif Al-Ghazali &*

- Thomas Lickona Di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Terpadu (MIT) Meunara Baro Kabupaten Aceh Besar. 1, 721–740. <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v11i01.1900>
- Saputra, D. T., Wulandari, M. D., & Darsinah. (2024). Penanaman Karakter Disiplin Peserta Didik Melalui Keteladanan Guru di Sekolah Dasar. *Jurnal Basicedu*, 5(5), 99–109.
- Shih, Y.-H. (2022). Designing Culturally Responsive Education Strategies to Cultivate Young Children's Cultural Identities: A Case Study of the Development of a Preschool Local Culture Curriculum. *Children*, 9(12), 1789. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children9121789>
- Sumartini, Lasmawan, & Kertih. (2024). Eksplorasi Kendala Guru dalam Mengintegrasikan Nilai-Nilai Kearifan Lokal pada Pembelajaran IPS di Sekolah Dasar. *Social: Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan IPS*.
- Supeni, S., & Harini, S. (2021). Internalizing character education through javanese traditional dance to realize child-friendly school. *Jurnal Civics: Media Kajian Kewarganegaraan*, 18(1), 61–69. <https://doi.org/10.21831/jc.v18i1.38452>
- Suprayitno, A., & Wahyudi, W. (2020). *Pendidikan Karakter di Era Milenial*. Deepublish.
- sutisna, D., Indraswati, D., & Sobri, M. (2019). Keteladanan Guru sebagai Sarana Penerapan Pendidikan Karakter Siswa. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar Indonesia*, September, 29–33.
- Yemini, M., Engel, L., & Ben Simon, A. (2025). Place-based education – a systematic review of literature. *Educational Review*, 77(2), 640–660. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2023.2177260>