



Needs Analysis of Early Childhood Education Teachers Regarding the Integration of Acehese Heroic Values in Character Education

Elfiadi¹, Panggung Sutapa², Nur Hayati³, Anisaturrahmi⁴

Department of Early Childhood Islamic Education, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, Universitas Islam Negeri Sultanah Nahrasiyah Lhokseumawe, Aceh, Indonesia¹

Department of Early Childhood Education, Faculty of Education, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia^{2,3}

Department of Curriculum Studies, Sultan Idris Education University, Perak, Malaysia⁴

E-mail: elfiadi@uinsuna.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Patriotism in early childhood is a key foundation for social cohesion and national identity. However, integrating local cultural values into character education remains a challenge in many early childhood settings. This study explores early childhood education teachers' needs for integrating Acehese heroic values into character learning. A mixed-methods sequential explanatory design was employed, involving a survey of 86 kindergarten teachers in North Aceh, followed by focus group discussions (FGD) and in-depth interviews. The findings revealed three main themes: (1) learning practices were largely dominated by conventional approaches, with limited use of Acehese heroic narratives; (2) teachers faced challenges related to inadequate training in contextual pedagogy, limited learning resources, and difficulties in designing meaningful learning activities; and (3) most teachers expressed a strong need for innovative learning models grounded in local wisdom, active child participation, and practical teaching guidelines. The study identifies three key areas of need: content, pedagogy, and system support. Its main contribution lies in linking teachers' needs analysis with local heroic values as a foundation for integrating character education into early childhood learning.

INTRODUCTION

Patriotism education in early childhood settings in Indonesia continues to face significant challenges. Learning activities are often limited to conventional and symbolic practices, such as drawing the national flag or singing patriotic songs, with little emphasis on meaningful and contextual understanding of the values they represent (Hasanah et al., 2023; Latif et al., 2023; Wartini et al., 2019). Data from the 2021 Pancasila Actualization Index (PAI) further indicate that Aceh and Papua scored below the national average in the implementation of the third principle of Pancasila, which reflects the value of patriotism and national unity (BPIP, 2021). The urgency of this study lies in the need to develop meaningful learning approaches that foster patriotism in early childhood education, particularly in Aceh, which possesses rich local heroic values that have not yet been optimally integrated into classroom practice. This study aims to explore the needs of early childhood education teachers in North Aceh as an empirical foundation for developing a learning model based on Acehese national heroes.

Theoretically, effective character education in early childhood should be grounded in direct experiences, meaningful narratives, and exemplary role models (Bates, 2019; Selinger, 2019). In the Indonesian context, character development has become a national agenda, as affirmed by Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 on Strengthening Character Education, which mandates the internalization of character values across all levels of education, including early childhood education (Indonesia, 2017). The value of patriotism is of paramount importance in character education and serves as a key instrument for fostering children's national identity from an early age (Utari et al., 2023). Recent policies through Minister of Education Regulation No. 10 of 2025 on Graduate Competency Standards and Regulation No. 13 of 2025 on the Early Childhood Education Curriculum, further emphasize the civic dimension of education, particularly pride in cultural identity and commitment to national unity. Therefore, pedagogical innovation is needed to bridge abstract values with children's socio-cultural realities through contextual and meaningful learning experiences (Rabindran, 2020; Yusuf et al., 2025).



One promising approach is the use of local wisdom rooted in heroic values. Aceh Province is rich in historical narratives of struggle reflected in national heroes such as Cut Nyak Meutia, Cut Nyak Dhien, and Teuku Umar, whose lives embody values of courage, strategic intelligence, and sacrifice (Amin, 2022; Burhanuddin, 2024; Junaidi & Wardani, 2022). These values are highly relevant for strengthening patriotism in early childhood character education. More broadly, systematic studies indicate that patriotism-based character education for young children involves the introduction of national symbols, cultural diversity, *Pancasila* values, as well as respect for history and heroism (Elfiadi et al., 2026). Previous studies have shown that the integration of local heroic narratives into learning can enhance children's empathy, sense of identity, and national pride (Hasanah et al., 2023; Uliasari & Kristiana, 2024). However, these studies have several limitations: (1) tend to focus only on the implementation of methods or the development of instructional media partially, without being preceded by a comprehensive analysis of teachers' needs; (2) have not systematically integrated local heroic values into a structured, specific, and practical learning model for early childhood education; and (3) overlook gaps in teacher capacity and systemic support (training, learning media, and operational guidelines) as integral components of model development. Research on the development of teaching materials based on national heroes (Ahmad & Fitriani, 2017; Kurnita et al., 2022) is also still limited to simple learning media products and has not yet been integrated into a comprehensive and coherent instructional model.

Accordingly, the research gap identified in this study lies in the absence of systematic studies that integrate teachers' needs analysis with local wisdom grounded in Acehese heroic values as a foundation for developing an early childhood learning model. In addition, gaps in teacher capacity (limited training in contextual pedagogy, lack of instructional media, and insufficient operational guidance) have not been adequately addressed in previous research (Erdiyanti & Syukri, 2021).

Therefore, this study was conducted as a needs assessment to explore early childhood education teachers' needs in North Aceh Regency for developing a learning model based on heroic values. The analysis focuses on three main domains: content (materials and values), pedagogy (teaching strategies and methods), and system support (learning media and implementation guidelines). The novelty of this study lies in integrating teachers' needs analysis with Acehese local wisdom grounded in heroic values, an approach that has not been comprehensively undertaken in previous research. Theoretically, this study contributes to the enrichment of literature on culturally based character education in early childhood. Practically, the findings provide an empirical basis for designing a relevant, applicable, and context-sensitive learning model for early childhood educators, as well as informing policy direction and teacher training programs at the local level.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study is a needs assessment that serves as the initial stage in the development of a learning model based on Acehese national heroes. In general, the research was conducted through three main stages:

Stage 1: Preliminary Study and Identification of Learning Characteristics

The researchers conducted a preliminary literature review and field study to understand the characteristics of early childhood learning, particularly in fostering patriotism. The literature review focused on theories of character education, contextual learning, and Acehese local wisdom. The initial field study involved informal observations and interviews with several kindergarten teachers in North Aceh to identify common instructional practices and the challenges they face. This stage revealed that patriotism education is still largely conventional and symbolic, and that teachers have not yet optimally utilized local heroic narratives in classroom practice.

Stage 2: Quantitative and Qualitative Data Collection

Based on the preliminary findings, the researchers developed research instruments (a questionnaire, an FGD guide, and an interview protocol). Quantitative data were collected through a survey involving 86 kindergarten teachers to obtain an overview of teachers' practices, challenges, and needs. This was followed by qualitative data collection through FGDs and in-depth interviews to further explore and elaborate on the quantitative findings, which provide explanations behind the numerical



data and contextualizing the survey results

Stage 3: Data Analysis and Integration

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. The findings from both datasets were then integrated using the connecting strategy (Creswell, 2018) at the interpretation stage to generate a comprehensive mapping of teachers' needs.

This study employed a mixed-methods approach with a sequential explanatory design (Creswell, 2017). Quantitative data were collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative data collection to explain and further elaborate on the quantitative findings. The integration of both datasets was conducted at the interpretation stage.

Research Flow

This study was conducted through several stages, as presented in Figure 1. Generally, the research process consists of three main phases: (1) preliminary study and problem identification, (2) quantitative and qualitative data collection, and (3) data analysis and integration. The details of each stage are as follows.



Figure 1. Research Flow

Research Site, Population, and Sample

This study was conducted in North Aceh, Aceh Province, Indonesia. To ensure a representative sample reflecting the geographical and socio-cultural diversity of the region, three sub-districts representing the western, central, and eastern zones were selected: Sawang, Matangkuli, and Seunuddon.

The population of this study comprised all kindergarten teachers teaching children aged 5–6 years in the selected areas. A purposive sampling technique was employed with the following inclusion criteria: (1) active kindergarten teachers, (2) at least two years of teaching experience, and (3) experience in teaching content related to national character or local wisdom.

A total of 86 teachers met the inclusion criteria and participated in the quantitative survey. For the qualitative phase, 12 teachers were selected as key participants using maximum variation sampling based on differences in location, institutional accreditation, and years of teaching experience. Moreover, in-depth interviews were conducted with five expert informants, consisting of three early childhood education supervisors and two Acehese cultural figures to support data triangulation.

Respondents' Characteristics

A total of 86 kindergarten teachers from three sub-districts participated in this study. All respondents were female (100%), with a mean age of 32.4 years (SD = 5.6). Regarding educational background, most respondents held a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education (68.6%, n = 59), followed by a Bachelor's degree in non-early childhood fields (18.6%, n = 16), and high school or equivalent qualifications (12.8%, n = 11). In terms of teaching experience, the majority had 6–10 years of experience (59.3%, n = 51), followed by 2–5 years (25.6%, n = 22), and more than 10 years (15.1%, n = 13). The distribution of respondents was relatively balanced across the three sub-districts: Sawang (32.6%, n = 28), Matangkuli (34.9%, n = 30), and Seunuddon (32.5%, n = 28). Detailed respondent characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted from June to August 2025 using two main instruments. First, survey questionnaire (quantitative). The questionnaire was administered online using google forms and consisted of 30 closed-ended items measured on a 5-point likert scale, along with 5 open-ended questions. Content validity was assessed by three experts in character education, early childhood education, and research methodology, with an average content validity index (cvi) of 0.91. Reliability



testing using cronbach's alpha showed values above 0.80 for all constructs, which indicates a high level of internal consistency.

Second, FGD and interview guide (qualitative). The FGD and semi-structured interview guides were developed based on the preliminary analysis of the quantitative data. The instruments focused on three domains of needs: content, pedagogy, and system support. The FGDs were conducted in two sessions, each involving six participants with a duration of 90–120 minutes. In-depth interviews were conducted with expert informants to strengthen data triangulation. All FGD and interview sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Table 1. Characteristics of Early Childhood Education (ECE) Teachers in North Aceh

Characteristics	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	86	100
	20-30	28	32.6
Age	31-40	42	48.8
	>40	16	18.6
	Bachelor in ECE	59	68.6
Education	Bachelor in Non-ECE	16	18.6
	High school/equivalent	11	12.8
	2-5 years	22	25.6
Work Experience	6-10 years	51	59.3
	>10 years	13	15.1
	Sawang	28	32.6
Sub-District	Matangkuli	30	34.9
	Seunuddon	28	32.5

Data Analysis

First, quantitative data. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, with the assistance of IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. The results of the analysis were presented in tabular form to facilitate interpretation. Second, qualitative data. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis in accordance with the framework proposed by Miles (2014) encompassing three key stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Coding was conducted using NVivo 12 Plus, which facilitated a systematic and consistent analytical process while enhancing the trustworthiness of the findings. Third, data integration (*mixed-methods*). The integration of data employed the connecting strategy outlined by Creswell (2018), in which the quantitative findings served as the basis for the development of the qualitative data collection instruments. The qualitative findings were then utilised to provide further explanation, depth, and contextual understanding of the quantitative results. The final synthesis yielded a comprehensive profile of teachers' needs across three principal domains, enriched by direct participant quotations.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Patriotic Character Education Practices in the Classroom

The findings reveal that the implementation of patriotic character education is still predominantly characterized by conventional instructional methods. The most commonly adopted practices were drawing and coloring activities (87.2%), singing the national anthem (84.9%), and the use of worksheets (76.7%). In contrast, active and contextual learning approaches were implemented far less frequently (Table 2). Only 15.1% of teachers reported regularly using role-playing activities, 9.3% employed dramatization techniques, and a mere 3.5% organized visits to historical sites or museums.

With regard to the use of local narratives, only 12.8% of teachers routinely shared stories about Acehese heroes, whereas 68.6% indicated that they had never incorporated such narratives into their teaching. These findings suggest that the potential of local wisdom has not yet been fully maximised during teaching and learning. Furthermore, the primary reasons for the limited use of narratives about Acehese heroes were the lack of engaging instructional materials (72.1%) and teachers' insufficient knowledge of the subject matter (65.1%).



Table 2. Teaching Methods for Patriotic Character Education Employed by Teachers.

Teaching Methods	Always/Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Never (%)
Drawing/coloring	87.2	10.5	2.3
Patriotism-themed worksheets	84.9	12.8	2.3
Singing the national anthem	76.7	19.8	3.5
Storytelling about national heroes (non-Acehnese)	31.4	44.2	24.4
Storytelling about Acehnese heroes	12.8	18.6	68.6
Role-playing activities	15.1	38.4	46.5
Dramatization activities	9.3	25.6	65.1
Educational visits to historical site	3.5	14.0	82.5

Challenges in Implementing Patriotic Character Education

The findings indicate that teachers face a range of challenges in fostering patriotic character values among young children. The three main challenges were the lack of training or guidance on effective instructional methods (52.3%), difficulties in designing engaging learning activities that are developmentally appropriate for children (44.2%), and the limited availability of relevant teaching resources (41.8%).

Other challenges included limited instructional time (37.2%), insufficient parental involvement (34.9%), and a lack of support from school principals or supervisors (19.8%). These findings suggest that gaps in teacher capacity and limited resources remain the primary challenges to the effective implementation of character education in early childhood education settings. Detailed information is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Challenges in Implementing Patriotic Character Education

Challenge	Strongly agree/ agree	Neutral	Disagree/extremely disagree
Lack of training/guidance on effective methods	52.3	24.4	23.3
Difficulty in creating engaging, age-appropriate learning activities	44.2	27.9	27.9
Limited availability of relevant media and teaching materials	41.8	30.2	28.0
Limited instructional time allocation	37.2	31.4	31.4
Low parental involvement	34.9	34.9	30.2
Lack of support from school principals/supervisors	19.8	24.4	55.8

These findings indicate that gaps in teacher capacity and limited resources become the main challenges to the implementation of patriotic character education in early childhood education. These findings are supported by interview data. One teacher stated: “I want to teach children about the heroism of Cut Nyak Meutia, but I do not know how to convey it. Illustrated storybooks about Acehnese heroes are also very difficult to find.” (G-23).

Level of Need for a New Instructional Model

Almost all respondents (97.7%) indicated the need for the development of a new learning model to strengthen patriotic character values. A total of 90.7% of teachers expressed a preference for a model based on Acehnese local wisdom, 94.2% emphasized the importance of active student participation in learning, and 91.9% requested the existence of practical guidelines for teachers. These high percentages demonstrate a strong and urgent need for an innovative learning model that is relevant to the local context. The detailed data are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Level of Need for a New Instructional Model

Statement	Strongly needed/needed (%)	Neutral (%)	Not needed (%)
Need for a New Learning Model for Patriotic Character Education	97.7	1.2	1.1
A new learning model based on local wisdom	90.7	5.8	3.5
A new learning model that actively engages children	94.2	4.6	1.2
A new learning model accompanied by practical teacher guidelines	91.9	4.7	3.4



The very high percentage (97.7%) reflects an urgent need for the development of an innovative learning model to strengthen patriotic character education in early childhood education in North Aceh.

Teachers' Preferences for Ideal Instructional Methods

Teachers demonstrated a strong preference for active and contextual learning methods. The most preferred method was storytelling with supporting media (95.3%), followed by role-playing (87.2%) and dramatization (83.7%). Interestingly, these methods are among those least frequently used in daily classroom practice. This indicates a significant gap between actual instructional practices and teachers' preferred ideal approaches. Detailed data are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Teachers' Preferences for Ideal Instructional Methods

Ideal Method	Strongly agree/agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Storytelling with supporting media	95.3	3.5	1.2
Role-playing historical hero figures	87.2	9.3	3.5
Dramatization / drama of heroic stories	83.7	11.6	4.7
Demonstration / role modeling	79.1	15.1	5.8
Traditional games with heroic values	76.7	14.0	9.3
Field trips to historical sites/museums	76.4	17.4	8.2

There is a wide gap between the methods preferred by teachers (storytelling, role-playing, and dramatization) and those actually used in children's daily classroom learning.

Mapping Teachers' Needs across Three Domains

Based on the integration of quantitative and qualitative data, teachers' needs for the development of a learning model based on Acehese heroes can be mapped into three main domains: content, pedagogy, and system support (Table 6). In term of content, teachers need simplified narratives of Acehese heroes that are appropriate for early childhood characteristics, relevant heroic values, and engaging illustrated reading materials. In the pedagogical domain, the main needs encompass training in contextual storytelling methods, training in designing role-playing and dramatization activities, as well as guidance in developing thematic lesson plans based on heroic values. Meanwhile, in the system support domain, teachers require the availability of learning media, guidelines for collaboration with parents, and self-learning training modules. This mapping provides a clear direction for the subsequent development of the learning model. Mapping the needs across these three domains provides a clear direction for the development of the learning model to be designed in the subsequent stage.

Qualitative Findings from the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Interviews

The thematic analysis of the FGD and interview transcripts identified four major themes that reinforced the quantitative findings. First, teachers demonstrated a limited understanding of local heroic narratives that are appropriate for early childhood education. Most teachers lacked sufficient knowledge of Acehese heroes and their stories in forms suitable for young children. As one supervisor explained,

"Guru hanya mengetahui nama tokoh, tetapi belum mampu mengembangkan cerita yang relevan untuk anak." translated as "Teachers are familiar with the names of the figures, but they are not yet able to develop stories that are relevant and meaningful for children".

Second, there is an urgent need for a structured and practical learning model. Teachers expressed a strong preference for instructional models that are user-friendly and readily applicable in classroom settings. One teacher (G-08) stated,

"Kami membutuhkan contoh konkret kegiatan pembelajaran, bukan hanya teori" translated as "We need concrete examples of learning activities, not just theoretical explanations".

Third, adapting heroic values to children's everyday experiences remains a significant



challenge. Expert informants emphasized the importance of simplifying and contextualizing heroic values for young learners. One expert remarked,

“Nilai keberanian perlu diterjemahkan ke dalam konteks kehidupan anak sehari-hari, bukan dalam bentuk narasi perang” translated as *“The value of courage should be translated into the context of children’s daily lives rather than being presented through narratives of war.”*

Table 6. Mapping Teachers’ Needs across Three Domains

Domain	Specific Needs	Teacher’s Support (%)	Qualitative Evidence
Content	Simplified narratives of Acehese heroes (Cut Nyak Meutia, Cut Nyak Dhien, and Teuku Umar)	88.4	"Cerita pahlawan Aceh terlalu Panjang, perlu versi pendek dengan ilustrasi" translated as "Acehese hero narratives are overly lengthy and need to be adapted into shorter illustrated versions" (G-12).
	Heroic values: patriotism, courage, and sacrifice	86.0	"Nilai keberanian bisa diterjemahkan menjadi keberanian membela teman" translated as "The value of courage can be interpreted as the willingness to stand up for and defend one's friend" (G-29).
	Illustrated reading materials and storybook media	91.9	"Kami butuh buku cerita bergambar" translated as "we need illustrated books" (G-51).
Pedagogy	Training in contextual storytelling methods	90.7	"Kami ingin belajar cara bercerita pahlawan" translated as "we want to learn how to tell stories about heroes" (G-18, FGD-1).
	Training in designing role-play and dramatization activities	86.0	"Bimbingan teknis skenario <i>role-play</i> yang edukatif" translated as "Technical guidance on developing educational role-play scenarios" (G-33, FGD-2).
	Guidelines for developing thematic lesson plans	84.9	"Contoh RPP yang sudah jadi, bisa diadopsi dan menyesuaikan" translated as "Examples of completed lesson plans that can be adapted and modified to suit specific needs" (G-41).
System Support	Learning media (illustrated hero storybooks)	89.5	Jika ada boneka tangan, anak-anak pasti lebih antusias" translated as "If hand puppets were available, the children would certainly be more enthusiastic" (G-55).
	Guidelines for parent collaboration	79.1	"Orang tua perlu tahu cara mendukung di rumah," translated as "Parents need to know how to provide support at home" (G-63).
	Self-learning training modules	82.6	"Buku panduan yang bisa dipelajari sendiri" translated as "A self-study guidebook that can be used for independent learning" (G-70).

The research findings indicate that the implementation of patriotism character education in early childhood education is still predominantly dominated by conventional methods, such as drawing (87.2%), singing (84.9%), and the use of worksheets (76.7%). This pattern suggests that learning activities remain largely symbolic and reproductive in nature, rather than fostering deeper meaning-making processes. These findings are consistent with studies indicating that character education tends to be less effective when it is limited to surface-level activities without engaging learners in meaningful reflection and understanding (Brown et al., 2023; Winterbottom & Schmidt, 2022). From a character education perspective, repetitive symbolic approaches without meaningful understanding risk reducing values to mere behavioral routines rather than fostering a process of internalization (Berkowitz, 2022). However, in early childhood, character formation requires contextual, meaningful, and emotionally engaging experiences in order for values to be authentically internalized.

Furthermore, the low utilization of Acehese heroic narratives (only 12.8% of teachers report regular use) indicates that the potential of local wisdom has not been optimally integrated into classroom practice. These findings reflect a gap between the availability of culturally grounded value resources and their pedagogical implementation in learning settings. In fact, heroic values such as courage,



sacrifice, and intelligence are highly relevant for fostering character development in early childhood education (Agustini, 2021). The low level of utilization is primarily attributed to limited teaching materials (72.1%) and teachers' lack of knowledge (65.1%). This condition indicates that the main challenge does not lie in the availability of values themselves, but rather in the absence of their transformation into operational and applicable teaching practices. These findings are consistent with studies showing that teachers still face challenges in implementing character education in a contextualized manner (Birhan et al., 2021).

Besides, the high percentage of teachers expressing a need for new instructional models (97.7%) indicates a significant gap between curriculum demands and implementation capacity in the field. This finding not only reflects the need for innovation but also reveals a structural gap between character education policies and actual classroom pedagogical practices. The high level of perceived need further suggests that the socio-cultural context plays a role in shaping teachers' perceptions of the urgency of instructional innovation. Values, norms, and community characteristics influence the degree of acceptance toward new pedagogical approaches (Fuad et al., 2022; Ouyang et al., 2025). In the context of Aceh, which has a strong history of struggle, heroic values do not merely function as teaching content but also as part of a collective identity that has not yet been fully integrated into formal education.

Teachers' preferences for storytelling (95.3%), role-playing (87.2%), and dramatization (83.7%) indicate that, at a conceptual level, they understand the importance of active and contextual learning. However, these methods have not yet been consistently implemented in classroom practice. This gap between preference and practice reflects an expectation–reality gap, a condition in which pedagogical awareness is not matched by implementation readiness. Within the framework of deep learning theory, effective learning requires active engagement through direct experience, reflection, and meaningful connections to real-life contexts (Fullan et al., 2018). Thus, this gap provides a strong justification for the need to develop a learning model that is not only innovative but also practical and contextually grounded.

One of the main contributions of this study is the mapping of teachers' needs into three key domains: content, pedagogy, and system support. This mapping provides a comprehensive conceptual framework for the development of the learning model. In term of content, the primary need lies in the provision of simplified Acehnese heroic narratives that are appropriate for the developmental characteristics of early childhood learners. Previous research by Nicolopoulou et al. (2015) shows that storytelling is an effective strategy in character education through the use of narratives and role-play to enhance preschool children's literacy and social competence; however, it has limitations in that it does not specifically integrate local heroic values.

A similar challenge was also identified in this study, in which teachers in Aceh have yet to have access to a learning model that integrates local heroic narratives, leading them to express a strong need for the development of such a model. In line with this, our findings indicate that teachers in Aceh have a substantial demand for simplified local heroic narratives, highlighting a contextual relevance that has not been adequately addressed by previous studies. Thus, these findings complement the limitations of earlier research, which has primarily relied on general narratives without incorporating local content.

In the pedagogical domain, the need for training in storytelling, role-playing, and dramatization indicates that teacher competency development must be oriented toward practical application. Research by Kraft et al. (2018) underlines that effective teacher training should be practical and sustained; however, this study is limited in that it focuses primarily on primary and secondary education settings and does not specifically address early childhood education or local cultural content. A similar limitation was also confirmed in our study, in which 52.3% of teachers reported a lack of contextual pedagogical training. Our findings extend this evidence by demonstrating that at the early childhood education level, particularly in Aceh, teachers require training that is not only practical and application-oriented but also grounded in local wisdom. These findings are consistent with the study by Rolina et al. (2025) in Yogyakarta, which revealed that kindergarten teachers' mastery motivation is influenced by administrative burdens, limited time, and work demands, indicating that teacher capacity gaps represent a national issue requiring serious attention. This gap is also in line with the findings of Erdiyanti & Syukri (2021) which show that early childhood education teachers in non-provincial regions still lack contextual pedagogical training.



In the system support domain, the need for learning media, parental collaboration guidelines, and self-instructional training modules indicates that instructional change requires a broader ecosystem of support. Epstein et al. (2018) emphasize that the successful implementation of educational innovations depends not only on teachers, but also on policy support, available resources, and the involvement of families and communities. However, this study is limited in its general scope and does not provide specific details regarding the forms of support required in contexts with strong local wisdom traditions. This limitation is also addressed in our study, which finds that teachers in Aceh have a strong need for culturally based learning media (such as illustrated storybooks of Acehese heroes, hand puppets, and simple costumes), which are not yet widely available. Thus, our study confirms the findings of Epstein et al. (2018) within the context of early childhood education in Aceh, while adding specific insights that have been overlooked.

The aforementioned three domains do not operate in isolation but are interrelated as the foundation for designing a holistic and sustainable learning model. The key distinction between this study and previous research lies in the fact that our study not only identifies teachers' needs but also systematically maps them into three interconnected domains while situating them within the local context of Aceh. This mapping directly addresses the research gap identified in the introduction, the absence of studies integrating teacher needs analysis with Acehese heroic value-based local wisdom. These findings provide an empirical foundation for the development of a contextual, practical, and sustainable prototype learning model based on Acehese heroes in the subsequent phase.

Theoretically, this study enriches the discourse on early childhood character education by positioning local wisdom grounded in heroic values as a contextual learning resource. The finding that teachers prefer active approaches over symbolic ones strengthens the relevance of contextual learning theory and deep learning theory within the early childhood education context. Moreover, this study addresses a gap in the literature related to needs analysis as an initial stage in the development of culturally based learning models. Practically, the results of this study provide clear direction for the development of instructional models. Curriculum developers can design learning materials based on simplified and illustrative heroic narratives; training providers can develop practice-oriented programs such as role-play simulations; while policymakers can facilitate the provision of learning media and teacher mentoring programs. Hence, this study is not only diagnostic in nature but also provides a strategic foundation for educational intervention.

This study has several limitations. First, the scope of the research is limited to Aceh Utara; therefore, the generalizability of the findings should be interpreted with caution. Second, the data were based on teachers' perceptions, which may introduce a degree of subjective bias. Third, this study did not test the effectiveness of the proposed learning model, thus further research is required in the development and trial phases. Fourth, the participants were limited to kindergarten teachers of children aged 5–6 years and did not include all levels of early childhood education. Nevertheless, these limitations do not diminish the study's contribution as an empirical foundation for the development of the learning model. Future research is recommended to conduct experimental trials of the model and to expand both the geographical scope and participant range.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that early childhood education teachers' need for the development of a learning model based on Acehese national heroes is very high. Character education practices aimed at fostering patriotism are still predominantly dominated by conventional and symbolic approaches, while the use of local heroic narratives has not been optimally integrated. This condition indicates a gap between the demands of context-based, culturally responsive learning and the actual pedagogical practices in the field.

This study identifies three key domains of need: content, pedagogy, and system support, which collectively serve as an integrated foundation for developing a learning model that is contextual, practical, and sustainable. Theoretically, these findings emphasize the importance of integrating local wisdom into early childhood character education. Practically, they provide strategic directions for curriculum development, teacher training, and educational policy. Further research is needed to develop a model prototype and to examine its effectiveness through classroom implementation.



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