

INTEGRATING LOCAL WISDOM IN CHARACTER EDUCATION: A PROJECT-BASED APPROACH IN THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM

Muhammad Novan Prasetya^{*1}, Anis Munfarikhatin²

^{*1,2}Musamus Merauke University

***Correspondence Author: muhnovanprasetya@unmus.ac.id**

Abstract

This study aims to develop teaching modules within the Merdeka Curriculum that integrate the character values of patriotism with local wisdom in Merauke. In the rapid globalization era, it is crucial to strengthen students' love for their country through education relevant to their cultural context. The developed teaching modules incorporate local wisdom values such as mutual cooperation (gotong royong), diversity, and respect for nature to instill a sense of nationalism and a strong cultural identity. The research methodology includes needs analysis, module design, trials, and evaluation. The results show that the developed teaching modules effectively enhance students' understanding of patriotism and appreciation for local culture. The implementation of these modules is expected to be an initial step toward supporting holistic and contextual character education in South Papua, as well as a model that can be adapted in other regions with different local wisdom.

Keywords: Teaching Module, Merdeka Curriculum, Character Education, Patriotism

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of time increasingly challenges the preservation of national values. Amid the rapid stream of modernization, patriotism and respect for local culture serve as crucial foundations for building a generation with a strong national identity. Education plays a strategic role in this effort, particularly through curriculum development relevant to local needs. The Merdeka Curriculum, as a new approach in Indonesia's education system, provides opportunities to integrate character values with local wisdom, ensuring that education not only fosters academic competence but also builds a sense of nationalism (Nurfatima, Hasna & Rostika, 2022).

As Frolova (2023) argues, fostering a positive attitude towards one's country and respect for its history is fundamental to cultivating patriotism. This aligns with Handayani et al. (2023), who highlight the role of local cultural values in developing a strong sense of national identity. Furthermore, Hastuti et al. (2022) note that integrating indigenous knowledge into education is crucial for preserving cultural heritage, reinforcing the idea that local wisdom plays an integral role in shaping national identity.

Merauke, located in South Papua, offers a rich cultural heritage that can serve as a foundation for instilling patriotism among students (Carti, Pujiyati, & Senjaya, 2023). The local wisdom embedded in values such as mutual cooperation, respect for diversity, and reverence for nature is crucial for fostering nationalism. These values align with Indonesia's national motto, "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" ("Unity in Diversity"), emphasizing the importance of embracing cultural differences while maintaining a unified national identity (Nurhayati et al., 2021).

The concept of "gotong royong" (mutual cooperation) is deeply ingrained in Merauke's communities, promoting collective action and solidarity to strengthen national unity. Research shows that collectivist cultures, which prioritize group goals, often exhibit stronger national sentiments (Oishi & Komiya, 2017). Integrating this principle in education enhances students' understanding of their national role, fostering patriotism.

Respect for nature, rooted in indigenous cultures, can also instill environmental responsibility in students, aligning with global sustainability movements (Handique, 2022). By incorporating local wisdom into curricula, students develop a sense of responsibility not just locally, but also nationally (Wilson & Inkster, 2018). Incorporating these values into education fosters a strong sense of identity and pride, promoting both unity and environmental sustainability in line with broader national goals.

Teaching modules designed based on local wisdom have the potential to enhance students' understanding of the importance of culture and traditions as part of their identity while fostering pride in their nation and homeland. By integrating local cultural elements into educational frameworks, students are not only exposed to their heritage but also encouraged to appreciate the traditions that shape their identities.

This approach aligns with the principles of multicultural education, which advocate for the recognition and inclusion of diverse cultural perspectives within the curriculum (Elemam, 2023; Ha, 2023). Moreover, the incorporation of local wisdom into teaching modules can serve as a catalyst for cultural awareness and competence among students, as evidenced by studies highlighting the positive impact of culturally relevant pedagogy (Mukhalalati et al., 2020; Taff et al., 2020; Minenok, 2024). By participating in activities that celebrate local culture, students develop a sense of belonging and responsibility toward their community, which in turn fosters national pride (Sulistyarini et al., 2023).

This study aims to develop teaching modules within the Merdeka Curriculum that integrate the character value of patriotism with Merauke's local wisdom. By employing methods that involve needs analysis, design, trials, and evaluation, this research aims to produce effective modules to enhance students' understanding and appreciation of both local and national values (Gunawan et al., 2021). Furthermore, the implementation of these modules can serve as an initial step in creating character education that is holistic, contextual, and relevant to the needs of South Papuan communities while serving as a model for other regions to develop similar approaches based on their respective local wisdom.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

1. The Concept of Local Wisdom

Local wisdom should not merely be taught as part of the curriculum but as a way to introduce children to the cultural values surrounding them. This enables them to become the rightful heirs of their own cultural heritage. Such an approach underscores the importance of local wisdom-based education, aligning with the broader goal of preserving Indonesia's cultural heritage for future generations from an early age (Rudiawan & Asmaroini, 2022). This method not only safeguards cultural richness but also fosters children's awareness of their identity and cultural roots. The need for child stimulation requires extensive information

to enrich knowledge and experiences by incorporating local wisdom. This need is considered essential, as local wisdom contains values that are wise, insightful, and inherently positive. Integrating local wisdom into learning aims to foster a deeper appreciation and love for local culture. Local wisdom-based learning connects educational content with the unique characteristics of the surrounding environment, such as traditional foods, local dances, and native languages, making the learning process more contextual and meaningful (Nurasiah et al., 2022).

2. The Value of Pancasila

The values of Pancasila serve as our guiding principles and should be practiced in daily social life. However, according to a report on Kompas.com, the rapid advancement of globalization and technology has led many young people to neglect the core values of Pancasila, which ought to be applied in their everyday lives (Resmana & Dewi, 2022). When deeply studied, the main cause of the challenges in implementing and crystallizing the values of Pancasila in society is the low level of awareness. The education sector needs to strengthen efforts so that Pancasila can contribute to building a better Indonesia, grounded in the values of divinity, humanity, unity, democracy, and justice. The first principle of the Pancasila Student Profile Project is holistic, meaning viewing something as a whole and in its entirety, rather than in a fragmented or partial way. In the context of designing the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project, this holistic framework encourages us to examine a theme thoroughly and comprehensively (Hakim & Dewi, 2021). This research methodology is grounded in the principle that learning products should be contextual, applicable, and relevant to the students' needs and socio-cultural environments (Borg & Gall, 1983). With this approach, the resulting teaching module is expected to be not only pedagogically effective but also capable of holistically building students' character.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study highlight the effectiveness of integrating local wisdom into teaching modules for enhancing students' understanding of patriotic values and cultural appreciation. The significant improvement in student test scores and the positive feedback from teachers underscore the module's impact in fostering both academic and character development. These results align with previous studies that emphasize the role of local wisdom in contextualizing education. For example, Rahayu et al. (2020) noted that culturally integrated learning boosts student motivation and engagement. Similarly, Hastuti et al. (2022) argued that project-based learning activities rooted in local traditions effectively develop 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking and collaboration. However, challenges such as limited resources and varying teacher competencies underline the need for additional support mechanisms. Training programs for teachers could enhance their understanding of local wisdom concepts, ensuring consistent module delivery. Additionally, investments in educational infrastructure, such as digital tools and supplementary resources, are essential for maximizing the module's potential.

The shift in student perceptions regarding the relevance of local culture highlights the module's success in bridging traditional values with contemporary

contexts. However, this underscores an ongoing need to promote the importance of cultural heritage as a vital component of national identity amidst globalization pressures. Local wisdom is a key element in shaping an ideal human capital. A nation with noble character is one whose people act with full awareness, free from primordial ego, and with self-control. Brilliant local wisdom often focuses on efforts to curb desires, adapt to circumstances, and manage the environment. It represents a discourse on the grandeur of moral order. The success of local intellectual development and education cannot be achieved without the active role of an optimistic society (Nurasiah et al., 2022). Engaging various sectors of the community to be proactive and organize educational programs is a highly valuable contribution that deserves attention and appreciation.

Various forms of local wisdom drive the preservation and development of education in public spaces, such as maintaining harmony among different groups through community cooperation, applying the values of Pancasila based on local wisdom to shape behavior and actions, and balancing Pancasila values with local traditions. If local wisdom values are not cultivated, they will gradually fade, leading to the moral degradation of the nation. In this context, moral goodness becomes the life philosophy of society, serving as a guide for navigating the process of life. When the values of local wisdom decline, it becomes a threat to the existential nature of a generation (Wibowo & Anjar, 2017). Therefore, there is a need for a reconstruction of education in higher education institutions to develop values, character, and additional skills to prevent this from happening.



Figure 1. Module socialization at Muhammadiyah Middle School in Merauke
a. Integration of Patriotic Values with Local Wisdom

The findings reveal that the designed teaching module successfully integrates patriotic values with the local wisdom of Merauke. The module incorporates elements such as respect for nature, communal cooperation (gotong royong), and cultural diversity, which are explicitly embedded in learning activities. Assertion that education based on local wisdom fosters students' awareness of their cultural identity while strengthening their national pride (Carti Carti, Wresni Pujiyati, 2023).

The module utilizes a project-based learning approach, consistent with the *Merdeka Curriculum*. For instance, students are engaged in documenting local traditions or developing collaborative projects to promote the culture of Southern Papua. This approach not only enhances students' understanding but also

develops 21st-century skills such as collaboration and critical thinking (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

b. Effectiveness of the Module in Enhancing Students' Understanding

Evaluations indicate an improvement in students' understanding of the importance of patriotic values and their appreciation of local culture. This is reflected in better learning outcomes compared to conventional teaching methods. Research by Rahayu et al. (2020) supports these findings, stating that integrating local wisdom into learning can boost students' interest and motivation (Rahayu, N., Utami, S., & Hidayat, 2020).

Teachers involved in implementing the module also reported increased enthusiasm among students in exploring materials related to local traditions and culture. These results confirm that contextual learning effectively bridges the gap between academic knowledge and students' real-life experiences.

c. Challenges in Module Implementation

Despite its effectiveness, the study identified several challenges, such as the lack of supporting resources in some schools, including supplementary teaching materials and technological facilities. Additionally, teachers' understanding of local wisdom concepts varied, affecting the quality of content delivery. Borg and Gall (1983) emphasize that teacher training is a critical step in ensuring optimal implementation of learning products.

Another challenge was students' differing perceptions regarding the relevance of local culture in the era of globalization. Some students viewed local culture as less significant. This underscores the need to continually promote local cultural values as an integral part of national identity.

d. Potential for Adaptation in Other Regions

The module has potential for adaptation in other regions, provided that the local wisdom of each area is considered (Suyadi, 2021). The adaptation process requires a participatory approach, involving local communities in identifying relevant values to be taught. Emphasizes that community participation in culturally-based education enhances the sustainability of educational programs.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This study successfully developed and implemented a teaching module based on the *Merdeka Curriculum*, integrating patriotic values with local wisdom from Merauke. Designed to support contextual learning, the module utilized local traditions such as *gotong royong* (community cooperation), respect for nature, and cultural diversity as key learning components. The findings showed promising results: students' average scores increased from 65 in the pre-test to 88 in the post-test, reflecting a 35% improvement. Furthermore, 92% of students achieved or exceeded the learning targets set in the module, while 85% of teachers reported that the module made it easier to convey cultural and patriotic values. Additionally, 78% of students expressed a stronger connection to their local culture after engaging with the module.

Despite these encouraging results, the study identified challenges in the implementation process. Limited resources posed a significant barrier, as many schools lacked access to supplementary books, technological tools, and enrichment materials. To address this, operational solutions such as distributing printed or digital modules free of charge and utilizing simple mobile-based

applications were proposed. Another challenge was the varying levels of teachers' understanding of local wisdom concepts, which impacted the quality of instruction. Operational solutions to this issue included specialized, practice-based training programs and the provision of implementation guides containing concrete examples of activities.

To ensure the successful adoption of this module and similar initiatives in other regions, the study recommended specific actions for the government. These included increasing the allocation of *BOS* (School Operational Assistance) funds to support the procurement of learning resources grounded in local wisdom and improving technological infrastructure in underserved areas. Additionally, the study called for continuous teacher training programs that involve local cultural practitioners, aiming to strengthen the contextual relevance of teaching. The establishment of policies promoting the integration of local wisdom into the national curriculum was also recommended, alongside enhanced monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess learning outcomes and their impact on character development.

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant potential of the teaching module in supporting holistic and contextual character education. With adequate policy support, improved facilities, and strategic collaboration among schools, communities, and local governments, this module can be adapted across diverse regions. It offers a meaningful way to strengthen cultural identity while fostering patriotism among Indonesia's younger generation, ensuring that the values of local wisdom and national pride are embedded in the nation's educational system.

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