

STRENGTHENING CHARACTER EDUCATION BASED ON LOCAL WISDOM IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN THE SOWAN NGALAS TRADITION

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ABSTRACT

Strengthening character education in elementary schools is important, but it still requires a contextual approach to be more meaningful for students. This study aims to analyze the strengthening of local wisdom-based character education in elementary schools through participation in the Sowan Ngalas tradition. This type of research is a qualitative ethnographic method. The informants consisted of 3 traditional figures, 3 teachers, and 6 students at SDN 1 Pesangkalan. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. Data were analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The data were validated through the triangulation of sources and techniques. The results of the study indicate that the Sowan Ngalas tradition plays an important role in strengthening local wisdom-based character education in elementary schools. Through direct participation in a series of cultural practices, students gain authentic experiences that support the internalization of character values more meaningfully. Religious values grow through collective prayer and the procession of jamanan heirlooms, nationalism develops through heirloom parades and village historical narratives, cooperation is built through collective work in the mountain parade, integrity is strengthened through reflection of moral values in shadow puppet performances, and independence is formed through responsibility for maintaining cleanliness and concern for the environment after the activity. These findings confirm that hands-on experiences based on local wisdom provide meaningful, reflective, and contextual character learning for students. Collaboration between schools, communities, and traditional leaders needs to be increased to maintain the sustainability of traditions while strengthening character education from an early age.



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Character education in elementary schools needs to be strengthened because at this stage, children's attitudes, morals, and social identities begin to form solidly and sustainably. Character building can be achieved through the integration of school activities with contextual learning that provides real-life experiences, thereby deepening students' understanding of character values (Karsiwan et al., 2023; Mundzir, 2024; Wiyono & Atmaja, 2025; Luthfi et al., 2025). Furthermore, the implementation of culturally responsive teaching based on local wisdom can increase learning motivation, deepen understanding of the material, and strengthen the internalization of character values in students (Gay, 2018; Rinantas, 2021; Mutiara et al., 2025; Hersiyani & Sriyanto, 2025).

However, character education in elementary schools still faces challenges due to the strong currents of globalization, digital culture, and the dominance of popular culture, which are shifting local values in students' lives. Consequently, the implementation of character education tends to be symbolic and normative because it is not yet connected to real cultural experiences, resulting in suboptimal internalization of values in students' social and ethical behavior (Sugiyo & Purwastuti, 2017; Iswatiningsih, 2019; Rahmawati, 2024; Dewanto et al., 2023; Hafizah, 2025). Therefore, utilizing local culture is an important strategy for providing more contextual and meaningful learning, although its application in formal education is still limited and needs to be optimized (Ramadhani et al., 2019; Hasibuan et al., 2024; Novitasari & Walid, 2024; Jaikrasen & Ketsing, 2025; Nagiya & Zebua, 2025; Helda et al., 2025; Lapasere et al., 2025; Nurramadhani et al., 2025).

Based on interviews at an elementary school in Pagedongan District, the implementation of character education is still suboptimal due to the lack of linking learning to local traditions, resulting in cultural values being symbolic and poorly internalized. Teachers also revealed that students find it easier to imitate popular culture than to internalize local traditional values, reinforced by the lack of teaching materials and projects that integrate local wisdom. This condition indicates the need for contextual learning strategies based on local culture as a more tangible learning resource. One implementation is through the Sowan Ngalas tradition in Pesangkalan Village, Pagedongan, Banjarnegara, which includes a procession of jamanan heirlooms at Curug Pletuk, a mountain procession, a procession of heirlooms, and a shadow puppet performance as a form of respect for ancestors and spiritual values. This series of processions serves as a pedagogical practice that allows students to internalize character values through direct experience and cultural reflection so that values are not only understood conceptually but also experienced in everyday life. This is in line with Harefa et al. (2024) and Yusuf & Kamariyah (2024), a contextual approach based on local culture can shape students' character, social awareness, and moral values.

Extensive research has been conducted on strengthening local wisdom-based character education in various learning contexts. Aura et al. (2023) and Badeni & Saparahayuningsih (2023) confirmed that integrating local values into learning can improve students' social behavior, environmental awareness, responsibility, and religiosity. Furthermore, Devina et al. (2023) and Abdalla & Moussa (2024) demonstrated that the effectiveness of character strengthening is strongly influenced by a culturally responsive learning approach. In the implementation phase, Eccca (2025) and Mulyani et al. (2024) found that the use of local wisdom-based modules and the integration of social-emotional learning can prevent negative behaviors while improving students' social-emotional competencies. Meanwhile, Farleni et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of school culture and experiential learning in linking cultural values with real-life experiences to strengthen national character and social responsibility.

These previous studies emphasize the importance of local wisdom-based character education and learning strategies that support the internalization of moral values. However, most studies are conceptual, literature reviews, or focused on teaching modules and integration with formal learning. However, most of this research still focuses on classroom learning, the use of modules, or theoretical studies. Consequently, there is little discussion of how local traditions within communities are directly used as learning resources in schools. Furthermore, the process by which students truly understand and internalize character values through direct

experience is also rarely researched. The novelty of this research is examining the Sowan Ngalas Tradition as a local cultural practice through an ethnographic approach and analyzing its use as a strategy to strengthen character education in elementary schools based on the character indicators according to Iswatiningsih (2019) namely religious, nationalist, mutual cooperation, integrity, and independent.

Based on this description, the research problem is formulated as follows: How can local wisdom-based character education be strengthened in elementary schools through participation in the Sowan Ngalas tradition? This study aims to analyze in-depth the use of the Sowan Ngalas tradition in strengthening students' religious, nationalist, mutual cooperation, integrity, and independent character through contextual and participatory cultural practices. Theoretically, this research is expected to contribute to the development of character education studies based on local wisdom through an ethnographic approach. Practically, this research can serve as a reference for schools and teachers in integrating local traditions into school culture and learning, while also supporting the preservation of regional cultural values as part of early character formation. focused

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with an ethnographic approach. This approach was chosen because it aimed to deeply understand the meanings, processes, and practices of culture in a natural context (Creswell, 2018; Chand, 2025). The ethnographic design was used because the study focused on student participation in the Sowan Ngalas Tradition as a local cultural practice that is alive and passed down within a specific community, and how this tradition is internalized within the context of character education in elementary schools. Furthermore, Nasution & Albina (2025) explain that ethnographic research in an educational context aims to describe and analyze cultural practices that influence the learning process and character formation of students. Therefore, this design is relevant for uncovering the meaning and process of internalizing character values in the Sowan Ngalas tradition.

The research was conducted from June to July 2025 in Pesangkalan Village, Pagedongan District, Banjarnegara Regency, which is located in a community that still practices the Sowan Ngalas tradition. Informants included 3 traditional leaders (TL1-TL3) involved in the implementation of the tradition, 3 teachers (T1-T3), and 6 students (S1-S6) of SDN 1 Pesangkalan. The selection of informants was carried out by purposive sampling by considering direct involvement and understanding of the cultural practices studied. In its implementation, this research paid attention to qualitative research ethics, namely obtaining official permission from the school and related parties, requesting approval from informants, maintaining the confidentiality of respondents' identities, and ensuring that the data collection process did not interfere with teaching and learning activities.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation studies. Participatory observation was used to directly observe the implementation of the Sowan Ngalas tradition and its integration into school activities using semi-structured interview guidelines. In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers, students, and community leaders to explore the meaning, values, and processes of character internalization. To strengthen the findings of the observations and interviews, documentation studies were conducted on learning materials, school programs, activity photos, and relevant archives.

Data was analyzed using the interactive analysis model of Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2018) which includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction was carried out by selecting and focusing on information relevant to the local wisdom-based character education indicators according to Iswatiningsih (2019) namely religious, nationalist, mutual cooperation, integrity, and independent. Data presentation was carried out in the form of descriptive narratives and thematic matrices to facilitate the interpretation of cultural patterns and character values. The final stage was drawing conclusions, which was carried out continuously throughout the research process by verifying the data obtained in the field.

Data validity was maintained through source and technical triangulation techniques. Source triangulation

was carried out by comparing information from teachers, students, and community leaders to ensure data consistency. Technical triangulation was carried out by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation related to the implementation of the Sowan Ngalas tradition in the context of character education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Results

Based on experiential learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of direct experience in shaping the understanding and internalization of character values (Kolb, 2015), and the concept of character education that emphasizes real-life practices in everyday life (Lickona, 2018), the use of the Sowan Ngalas Tradition as a strategy to strengthen character education in elementary schools is supported by school policy. Interviews indicate that the principal grants permission and support to teachers to involve students in direct exploration activities through a series of traditional processions. This activity is viewed as contextual learning based on local wisdom, aligned with the character education strengthening program. School documentation also shows the existence of permission letters, cultural visit agendas, and the integration of post-activity reflections into classroom learning, enabling tradition to be utilized as a directed and systematic learning resource.

Furthermore, traditional leaders explained that the Sowan Ngalas tradition is a series of traditional activities containing spiritual and social values, including communal prayer, a procession of heirlooms (pusaka), the washing of heirlooms (jaman) at Curug Pletuk, a procession of agricultural produce mountains (gunungan), and a shadow puppet performance. The results of the study indicate that character values develop through students' direct involvement in each of these activities. The analysis of the findings was carried out based on five character indicators according to Iswatiningsih (2019), namely religious, nationalist, mutual cooperation, integrity, and independent, using data triangulation from observations, interviews, and documentation.

Religious Character

Observations of the collective prayer procession before the procession and the purification of heirlooms at Curug Pletuk revealed a solemn atmosphere steeped in spiritual values. Students joined in prayers with traditional leaders as a form of prayer for safety and an expression of gratitude for the continuity of human life and the community's agricultural produce. During the purification of heirlooms at the waterfall, students adapted to the sacred atmosphere, refrained from speaking loudly, and remained in line, reflecting a collective awareness of respecting the spiritual values underlying the tradition. Interviews with teachers corroborated these findings. "Jaman is not just washing heirlooms, but a symbol of self-purification and gratitude to God. Therefore, the students' experience is not only physical but also absorbs religious meaning through direct involvement (Interview with T1, 13/07/2025).

Furthermore, traditional leaders emphasized the spiritual dimension of the tradition. One traditional leader stated, "*This tradition always begins with prayer so that the younger generation understands that every traditional activity is based on spiritual values. The sacred ceremony at Curug Pletuk not only cleanses the heirloom but also teaches the importance of purifying the heart and being grateful to God*" (interview with TL1, 12/07/2025). This affirmation demonstrates that religious values are passed down verbally and symbolically through shared cultural practices.

One student expressed, "*I feel calmer when I participate in communal prayers, and I understand that traditions always remember God*" (interview with S1, 15/07/2025). Furthermore, another student stated, "When I participated in the sacred ceremony at Curug Pletuk, I came to understand more deeply that traditions are not just ordinary activities but also have a meaning that requires gratitude and maintaining a positive attitude" (interview with S2, 15/07/2025). These expressions are reflected in a reflection book as a personal experience and awareness of gratitude.

Nationalist Character

The heirloom procession provides an opportunity for students to engage directly with local cultural heritage. They participate in the heirloom procession, listen to teachers explain the history and symbolic meaning of the heirlooms, and listen to narratives from traditional figures as they march. This activity allows students to experience firsthand respect for their ancestors and understand the village's cultural identity. One teacher said, *"Through this activity, children learn to love their local culture and feel proud to be part of the community and nation"* (Interview with T2, 13/07/2025). A student added, *"I just learned that heirlooms are important to the history of our village"* (Interview with S3, 15/07/2025).

Traditional figures emphasized the importance of youth involvement, saying, *"The heirloom procession is not just a traditional event, but a way for the younger generation to understand and appreciate ancestral heritage and maintain the village's cultural identity"* (Interview with TL2, 12/07/2025). School documentation supports the findings of interviews and observations, showing that the heritage procession was recorded in the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project, with a theme of local wisdom, complete with written student reflections emphasizing respect for the village's cultural heritage and history. Thus, this procession was not only a participatory experience but also a means of internalizing nationalist character values through social interaction and cultural interpretation.



Figure 1. Jamasan Pusaka Carnival towards Curug Pletuk Waterfall

Mutual Cooperation Character

The preparation and implementation of the mountain procession demonstrated the active involvement of students, teachers, and the community in arranging crops, maintaining neat rows, and ensuring the procession ran smoothly. This activity provided a tangible demonstration that the success of traditional ceremonies depends on collaboration, not just individual effort. One teacher explained, *"We divide up small tasks so students learn to work together. They learn that this traditional ceremony cannot be done alone"* (Interview with T1, 13/07/2025), and a student added, *"If a friend is left behind, we wait together"* (Interview with S4, 15/07/2025). This demonstrated the growth of solidarity and concern for others. The principal emphasized that the experience of mutual cooperation is difficult to achieve in the classroom alone, as the value of togetherness is more palpable through hands-on practice.

The social significance of the gunungan procession was also emphasized by a traditional figure: *"The gunungan symbolizes the harvest gathered together. If we don't help each other, the procession won't run smoothly. Children learn that this tradition thrives on togetherness"* (Interview with TL3, 12/07/2025). School documentation supports this finding, demonstrating the division of groups with specific responsibilities and harmonious interactions between students, teachers, and the village community, including written student reflections emphasizing the importance of cooperation. Thus, the gunungan procession serves as a concrete space for internalizing the value of mutual cooperation through participatory experiences, social interactions, and shared meaning within the context of local culture.



Figure 2. Gunungan Parade

Integrity Character

During the shadow puppet performance in the Sowan Ngalas tradition, students were actively and reflectively engaged, not only watching but also discussing the behavior of the wayang characters, evaluating good and bad actions, and relating them to everyday life. One student said, *"I learned that every word and deed must be kind and honest. Lying can harm others"* (Interview with S5, 15/07/2025), demonstrating an awareness of personal responsibility. The teacher emphasized, *"We ask students to discuss wayang characters to understand good and bad behavior in everyday life"* (Interview with T3, 13/07/2025), so that the symbolic experience of wayang related to moral values could be connected to everyday reality.

Traditional leaders also emphasized the legacy of integrity: *"Wayang teaches children that what they say must be in accordance with what they do and that every action has rules." This is part of our culture that instills responsibility and honesty"* (Interview with TL2, 12/07/2025). Student learning notes and reflections also supported the findings and demonstrated a deeper understanding of honesty, behavioral consistency, and social responsibility. The shadow puppet performance provided a concrete medium for students to learn about integrity through direct experience within a local cultural context.



Figure 3. Wayang Kulit Performance
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Independent Character

The post-Sowan Ngalas procession activities demonstrated students' active involvement in maintaining the cleanliness of the procession site, picking up trash, and tidying up the area around Curug Pletuk. Students were able to take initiative, organize themselves, and complete tasks without always relying on teacher direction, demonstrating an awareness of personal responsibility and the importance of environmental protection as part of a cultural practice within the community. The teacher emphasized the pedagogical significance of this activity, stating, "We want students to realize that protecting nature is part of tradition, so they learn to be responsible and independent" (Interview with T2, 13/07/2025). Students also recognized this, with one stating, "The place must remain clean so it can be used again next year" (Interview with S6, 15/07/2025).

The perspective of traditional leaders emphasized the relationship between culture and environmental awareness: "Teaching children to care for the environment is part of preserving tradition. Nature and tradition are interconnected, so if children care for the environment, they also respect our culture" (Interview with TL1, 12/07/2025). Documentation in the form of written student reflections and activity logs supported the results of observations and interviews, demonstrating that the participatory experience fostered ecological awareness and independence. Students wrote about their personal experiences about the importance of caring for nature and practicing self-responsibility, making post-procession activities a concrete means of fostering independence and environmental awareness within the context of local cultural values.

2. Discussion

The following table presents the relationship between character indicators, forms of student participation, experiences gained, and relevance to the local cultural context to provide a clearer picture of the implementation of the Sowan Ngalas tradition in strengthening character education in elementary schools.

Table 1. Strengthening Local Wisdom-Based Character Education Through Participation in the Sowan Ngalas Tradition

Character Indicators	Forms of Student Practice/Participation	Experiences and Meanings Gained	Relevance to the Local Cultural Context	Sources and Concepts of Reinforcement
Religious	Collective prayer before the procession and the <i>jamasan pusaka</i> (ritual cleansing of sacred heirlooms)	Understanding the meaning of gratitude, respect for God, and the relationship between humans and nature; gaining emotional and reflective experiences	Internalizing religious values through sacred and meaningful ritual practices	<i>Experiential Learning</i> (Kolb, 2015; Harefa et al, 2024)
Nationalist	Participating in the heirloom procession (<i>kirab pusaka</i>) and listening to historical narratives and the symbolism of the heirlooms	Appreciating cultural heritage, understanding village identity, and fostering pride in being part of the community	Providing authentic experiences of patriotism and respect for local cultural heritage	<i>Culturally Responsive Teaching</i> (Gay, 2018)
Mutual Cooperation	Collective preparation and implementation of	Learning to share roles, help one another,	Cultivating togetherness and collaboration	<i>Culturally Responsive Teaching</i> (Gay (2018;

Character Indicators	Forms of Student Practice/Participation	Experiences and Meanings Gained	Relevance to the Local Cultural Context	Sources and Concepts of Reinforcement
	the <i>kirab gunungan</i> procession	collaborate across ages and backgrounds; fostering solidarity	through concrete cultural practices	Abdalla & Moussa (2024) <i>Socio-Cultural Learning</i> (Tzuriel, 2021)
Integrity	Discussion and reflection on wayang characters during the <i>wayang kulit</i> performance	Understanding honesty, behavioral consistency, and responsibility toward social norms	Connecting cultural symbols with real moral values in everyday life	<i>Experiential Learning</i> (Kolb, 2015) <i>Socio-Cultural Learning Theory</i> (Rahmatirad, 2020; Tzuriel, 2021)
Independent	Maintaining cleanliness and organizing the procession site after the activity	Taking initiative, self-management, personal responsibility, and developing ecological awareness	Strengthening independence and environmental awareness within the local cultural context	<i>Experiential Learning</i> (Kolb, 2015; Harefa 2024)

Table 1 shows that the Sowan Ngalas tradition not only serves as a cultural introduction but also serves as a direct experience for students to understand and internalize character values. Through active involvement, personal reflection, and social interaction, students gain a deeper understanding of the character values of religiousness, nationalism, mutual cooperation, integrity, and independence, while experiencing the meaning of these values in a real and meaningful local cultural context.

Religious Character

Regarding the religious character indicator, students participated in communal prayer before the procession and the procession of washing heirlooms. This participation was not merely physical but also accompanied by an understanding of the meaning of gratitude, reverence for God, and an awareness of the relationship between humans and nature. This finding aligns with (Farleni et al. (2023), who stated that school culture can be a medium for strengthening religious character through active student involvement. It also aligns with Heridianto et al. (2026), who demonstrated how integrating Islamic values into local wisdom can foster religious tolerance and moderation. However, the current study differs from previous research. The Sowan Ngalas tradition provides a concrete and specific local cultural context, where ritual experiences, spiritual symbols, and social interactions coexist. Internalization of religious values occurs in real, emotional, and meaningful situations, not simply in school learning activities.

Furthermore, students' experiences in the ritual procession strengthen their understanding of moral and spiritual values and are consistent with the principle of experiential learning, which emphasizes that an approach based on active participation and real-life experiences provides a deeper understanding than mere theoretical learning or verbal discussion (Kolb, 2015; Harefa et al., 2024). This aligns with socio-cultural learning theory, which emphasizes that learning occurs through social interactions and cultural activities, allowing religious values to be understood contextually (Rahmatirad, 2020; Tzuriel, 2021). Thus, the Sowan Ngalas Tradition enables students to experience, internalize, and understand religious values holistically, integrating ritual practice, personal reflection, and cultural context.

Nationalistic Character

Regarding nationalist character, students' involvement in the heirloom parade and listening to historical

narratives and symbols provided a concrete experience of respect for cultural heritage and village identity. This finding is relevant to Badeni & Saparahayuningsih (2023) and (Rinovian et al. (2025), who emphasized that local wisdom-based character education can foster a sense of patriotism and pride in local culture. It is also relevant to Aura et al. (2023), who demonstrated that direct involvement in cultural practices increases positive social behavior and environmental awareness. A key difference in this study is the direct collaboration between teachers, traditional leaders, and students so that the internalization of nationalism is not merely a theoretical concept but a concrete experience for the students.

This aligns with the principle of culturally responsive teaching, where the local cultural context serves as a means of strengthening character values (Gay, 2018), enabling students to learn nationalism not only through theory but also through real-life experiences connected to cultural identity.

Mutual Cooperation Character

The character of mutual cooperation is reflected in student participation in the preparation and implementation of the mountain parade. This activity emphasizes role-playing, cross-generational cooperation, and solidarity, so students learn that the success of the activity depends on shared contributions. This aligns with Abdalla & Moussa (2024) and Gay (2018), who emphasize the importance of culturally responsive teaching, a learning strategy that emphasizes social and cultural experiences to shape character. The difference is that this study utilizes local traditions as a concrete context, rather than classroom simulations, so the value of mutual cooperation is practiced in actual social interactions. This is reinforced by Vygotsky's socio-cultural learning theory in Tzuriel (2021), which explains that social collaboration strengthens the internalization of mutual cooperation values.

Integrity Character

Regarding the character of integrity, wayang kulit performances provide students with the opportunity to discuss and reflect on the characters' behavior, assess the merits and demerits of their actions, and relate them to their daily lives. This fosters awareness of the importance of honesty, responsibility, and consistency between words and actions. These findings align with research by Mundzir (2024) and Devina et al. (2023), which emphasized the effectiveness of local culture-based character education in fostering integrity through reflective experiences. The difference in this study is that students not only reflect but also gain a real social and cultural context, thus connecting their understanding of integrity directly to their daily lives. Through wayang kulit, students experience concrete representations of morals and social ethics within a local cultural context, making the internalization of character values more concrete and profound.

This aligns with the principles of experiential learning (Kolb, 2015), as honesty can be developed through direct experience, which is then reflected upon to develop moral understanding. Furthermore, the socio-cultural learning theory perspective Tzuriel (2021) also supports the findings, as integrity values are formed through social interactions and involvement in cultural practices that incorporate societal norms and values. Integrity is formed not only in the cognitive realm but also through socio-cultural experiences that enable students to internalize and apply the values of honesty and responsibility in their daily lives.

Independent Character

Independent character is developed through student involvement in maintaining cleanliness and tidying up the post-activity procession site. Students learn to take initiative, organize themselves, and take personal responsibility while linking independence to cultural and environmental preservation. These findings align with Marlina et al. (2023) and Ramadhani et al. (2019), who emphasize that local wisdom-based character education can shape positive ecological behavior. This study expands on previous insights by emphasizing the integration of traditional leaders' perspectives, linking student independence to local cultural preservation, so that the value of independence is not only practical but also culturally meaningful. Furthermore, this direct experience strengthens the internalization of the value of independence through experiential learning, where students learn

to be independent practically in a real social and cultural context.

Overall, the research findings indicate that the Sowan Ngalas tradition is interpreted as a vibrant learning space for elementary school students in developing character values. Student involvement in activities such as communal prayer, parades, heirloom washing, and shadow puppet performances allows religious values, nationalism, mutual cooperation, integrity, and independence to develop through direct experience, not just conceptual understanding. This process aligns with the concept of experiential learning, which emphasizes that knowledge is formed through concrete experiences and then reflected upon, so that students not only understand values but also internalize them in real-life situations (Kolb, 2015; Harefa, 2024).

Furthermore, character building through the Sowan Ngalas tradition also demonstrates relevance to culturally responsive teaching, which utilizes local culture as the primary context, close to students' lives (Gay, 2018; Abdalla & Moussa, 2024). This makes character values easier to understand and accept because they are connected to students' identities and social environments. Furthermore, the interaction between students, teachers, and the community in cultural activities reflects the principles of socio-cultural learning theory, which asserts that learning occurs through engagement in meaningful social and cultural practices (Rahmatirad, 2020; Tzuriel, 2021). The integration of these three concepts strengthens character education through real-life, culturally contextualized experiences and direct social interaction, resulting in deeper and more sustainable value formation.

The relevance of this research to previous studies such as Aura et al. (2023), and Abdalla & Moussa (2024) shows similarities in the use of cultural context to shape positive student behavior. The difference lies in the context and mechanism of value internalization. Previous research emphasized the organic practice of daily life in society, and the internalization of character values occurred through the example of local figures, community rules, and routine social practices without the intervention of formal educational institutions. In the current study, combining real-life experiences through student participation in the Sowan Ngalas tradition with formal learning and involving the active role of teachers and principals as well as a planned learning agenda, students experience character learning directly but remain within the framework of formal education. Thus, character values are understood deeply and internalized through real experiences, not just theory in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

The Sowan Ngalas tradition plays a crucial role in strengthening local wisdom-based character education in elementary schools. Through a participatory approach involving direct observation, social interaction, and structured reflection, students gain authentic experiences that enrich their understanding of character values in a more meaningful way. Five character indicators such as religious, nationalist, mutual cooperation, integrity, and independent can be internalized through a series of concrete cultural practices. Religious values develop through communal prayer and the spiritually meaningful procession of pusaka (heirloom) offerings; nationalism develops through the procession of pusaka (heritage) and the narrative of village history; mutual cooperation is fostered through collective work in the gunung procession; integrity is strengthened through reflection on moral values in a shadow puppet performance; and independence is fostered through responsibility for maintaining cleanliness and caring for the environment after the activity. All these processes demonstrate that direct experience within a local cultural context can provide lively, reflective, and relevant character learning in the students' real-life environments.

Consequently, the Sowan Ngalas tradition serves not only as a preserved cultural heritage but also as an effective pedagogical vehicle for integrating character education into practical practice. Collaborative engagement between schools and the community is key to successful value internalization, while also emphasizing that character education will be more meaningful when developed through contextual, participatory, and sustainable local wisdom. Teachers are advised to more actively integrate local traditions into contextual learning, facilitate reflection, and link cultural practices to character values. Schools can create documentation and reflection

guidelines for cultural activities so that character experiences can be systematically tracked and evaluated. Stakeholders in the community and local government can support tradition-based educational activities by providing resources, facilities, and regulations that encourage student participation.

This study has limitations due to its qualitative and ethnographic nature, with data collected from only one village and one Sowan Ngalas tradition. Therefore, the findings are contextual, and student participation, as well as the views of teachers and community leaders, are subjective despite data triangulation. Therefore, future research is recommended to use a quantitative or mixed-method approach to measure the impact of character internalization more broadly, conduct comparative studies between schools or regions with different local traditions, and examine the long-term sustainability of student character internalization after participating in local tradition-based activities.

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