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CHILDREN'S CHARACTER THROUGH THE NATURE SCHOOL CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Character education has become a central issue due to the moral crisis among the younger generation, making the integration of values into school culture essential. This study aims to analyze the forms and characteristics of the culture at Sekolah Alam Baturraden (SA Baturraden) and the process of character formation fostered by that culture. The study population comprised the entire Sekolah Alam Baturraden community, with a sample consisting of the principal, facilitators/teachers, students, and parents selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected via participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The analysis employed the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification complemented by triangulation. The findings indicate that the nature-based school culture is shaped by four pillars: daily routines, teacher role-modeling, nature-based projects, and shared rules; these pillars synergistically foster character development through habituation, modeling, and social reinforcement. Consequently, the school needs to strengthen the consistency of habituation, role-modeling, self-control guidance, and parental partnerships.

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INTRODUCTION

Character education now occupies a central position in Indonesia's educational landscape, driven by growing concerns regarding the moral crisis affecting the younger generation. The Character Education Strengthening (PPK) policy asserts that character formation is a shared responsibility between families and schools, realized through the curriculum, habituation activities, and teachers setting a good example. However, policy alone is insufficient; implementation on the ground demonstrates that the success of character education relies heavily on the extent to which these values are comprehensively integrated into the school culture.

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Recent studies indicate that the effectiveness of character education relies heavily on its integration into the overall school culture, rather than serving merely as an add-on program. Mahatma et al., (2026) identified four key strategies for character development employed by elementary school teachers: integration into the instructional process, reinforcement through school culture, engagement in extracurricular activities, and community participation. In a systematic review, Pujiastuti et al., (2026) found that effective character education models integrate four core components: value-based learning through daily routines, teacher role-modeling and collaboration, a conducive school environment and culture, and holistic curriculum integration.

Vitriani and Sukiman (2026), add that the hidden curriculum implemented through the habitual practice of religious activities, teacher role-modeling, a culture of discipline, and social interactions integrated into the school culture contributes significantly to the formation of character traits such as discipline, responsibility, social awareness, and creativity. Javadian and Hosseini (2020) also quantitatively demonstrated that the hidden curriculum has a significant positive relationship with the creativity and social skills of elementary school students. Thus, school culture serves as an ecosystem that allows character values to be not merely taught cognitively, but internalized through repeated and meaningful daily experiences.

Nature schools serve as an alternative educational model that inherently offers a distinct approach to character building by integrating the natural environment as both a primary learning space and a living laboratory for cultivating character values. Maretta et al., (2026) define nature schools as alternative institutions that blend the national curriculum with outdoor, experiential, character-based, and community-oriented learning. Their study identified six interconnected dimensions within the nature school ecosystem: green educational philosophy, experiential learning, ecological character building, institutional support, community engagement, and perceived behavioral outcomes.

These findings indicate that ecological responsibility is not the product of a single lesson but emerges through mutually reinforcing institutional, pedagogical, and social practices. This aligns with Yusuf and Fajari (2025), who revealed that the character of students in nature-based schools encompasses curiosity, initiative, perseverance, adaptability, leadership, and social and cultural awareness. In a qualitative case study of two nature schools in Jambi, Sholeh et al., (2026) found that the "Learning with Nature" program effectively developed the four character dimensions within Ki Hadjar Dewantara's framework—**olah hati** (cultivating the heart/spirit), **olah pikir** (cultivating the mind/intellect), **olah rasa** (cultivating sensibility/empathy), and **olah raga** (cultivating the body/physicality)—supported by teachers acting as role models, a character curriculum comprising 70% content on noble character (**akhlaqul karimah**), and active partnerships among schools, families, and the community. These findings confirm that nature schools are not merely a marginal educational alternative; rather, they offer an approach that empirically contributes to shaping students' character through a structured and sustainable school culture.

Nevertheless, the implementation of character education through a nature-based school culture is not without challenges and risks that require anticipation (Yu & Reiss, 2025). Marlina et al., (2026) identify the primary challenges in implementing ecology-based education in Indonesian elementary schools as including a weak culture of discipline, limited teacher understanding of the holistic concepts of environmental education, and the absence of curriculum policies that explicitly prioritize nature-based education. Without consistent policy support, enhanced teacher competence, and strategic partnerships with various stakeholders, efforts to build character through a nature-based school culture risk becoming merely ceremonial activities that lose their transformative power.

Another equally significant risk is the gap between teachers and students regarding the interpretation of the "nature school" culture. Eko et al., (2020)emphasize that the teacher's role as a moral exemplar and facilitator of values is a key factor in successful character building; when this role-modeling is weak, the nature school culture loses its formative power. Vitriani and Sukiman (2026) also highlight that the effectiveness of the hidden curriculum in character building varies considerably depending on contextual factors such as teacher consistency, school culture, and family support. Successful character building through a nature school culture is inseparable from the teacher's readiness to serve as a role model, systematic policy support, and the commitment of the entire school community to the values being instilled (Minsih et al., 2026).

Previous studies have examined character education in elementary schools from various perspectives, yet significant gaps remain. Maretta et al., (2026) analyzed how nature-based schools foster ecological responsibility from a socio-institutional perspective; however, their primary focus was on the environmental dimension rather than holistic character

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formation, and claims regarding behavioral change relied on stakeholder perceptions. Pujiastuti et al., (2026) conducted a systematic review of routine school practices as a model for character reinforcement, but their study was a literature synthesis that did not deeply explore how a specific school culture in this case, that of nature-based schools functions as an ecosystem for character formation.

Sholeh et al., (2026) analyzed the "Learning with Nature" program at two nature schools in Jambi but did not address how the norms, traditions, and structured daily practices within these schools holistically shape student character. Werang et al., (2025) found that *Asta Brata* leadership practices positively influence school culture and student character, yet their study focused on the dimension of principal leadership. Meanwhile, research on nature schools in the Purwokerto region remains limited to managerial aspects and has not yet addressed how school culture defined as the system of norms, traditions, and structured daily practices functions as an ecosystem for holistic character formation.

This study is grounded in the recognized importance of character education, empirical evidence revealing a gap between ideals and actual practice, risks requiring mitigation, and existing research gaps. It proposes a solution through a framework conceptualizing "nature-based school culture as an ecosystem for character formation." This framework rests on the understanding that a child's character is not shaped by a single program, but rather through a configuration of mutually reinforcing values, norms, and practices within daily life. Operationally, the nature-based school culture in question encompasses four interconnected pillars.

First, the cultivation of daily habits that foster care, discipline, and responsibility. Second, the role of teachers as consistent moral exemplars. Third, nature-based project activities that develop cooperation, independence, and self-control. Fourth, a system of rules collaboratively established and agreed upon by the entire school community. Based on this framework, the research problem addresses the character-building processes and the specific character traits fostered in students through the school culture at Sekolah Alam Purwokerto. Documenting and analyzing the nature-based school culture practices at Sekolah Alam Purwokerto is expected to offer both a theoretical contribution by enriching the discourse on school culture-based character education and a practical contribution, providing a model that other schools can adapt to develop a school culture that systematically and sustainably builds student character.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design Rashid et al., (2019). A qualitative approach was selected because the primary objective is to gain an in-depth understanding of how the "nature school" culture at Sekolah Alam Purwokerto functions as an ecosystem for character formation, rather than to test hypotheses or generalize findings to a broader population. Field research was conducted from June 1 to August 25, 2026. This study enables an intensive exploration of the phenomenon within its natural context, focusing on the interplay of school norms, traditions, and daily practices in shaping student character. Fajari et al., (2023) utilized a similar design to analyze school culture-based character education among elementary students, emphasizing a detailed description of how school culture contributes to student character. Sholeh et al., (2026) also adopted a qualitative case study approach to analyze how nature-based programs at two nature schools in Jambi holistically reinforce character education. The case study in this research is instrumental in nature; the case of Sekolah Alam Baturraden serves as a vehicle for understanding a broader issue namely, the culture of a nature-based school as a mechanism for character formation. This approach enables the researcher not only to describe practices at a single school but also to develop a conceptual understanding of how school culture functions as an ecosystem for character formation that can be adapted to other contexts.

The sample for this study consisted of the school principal, facilitators (teachers for lower and upper grades), students, and parents at Sekolah Alam Baturraden. Participants were selected using purposive sampling a method involving the selection of individuals based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (Magnone & Yezierski, 2024). These criteria included: (1) direct involvement in the "nature school" (school-in-nature) cultural practices; (2) a deep understanding of student character development; and (3) a willingness to participate in the study. Purposive sampling was employed because qualitative research aims to achieve depth of information rather than statistical generalization; thus, participants were

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deliberately chosen based on their specific experiences and knowledge (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025). Comparable studies include (Fitayah et al., 2026; Halim et al., 2026; Rachmadyanti et al., 2024).

Data collection was conducted using two primary instruments: participant observation and in-depth interviews. These instruments were employed complementarily to obtain rich, mutually reinforcing data regarding the nature school culture and student character development. Participant observation took place during learning sessions and daily school activities—including classroom lessons, nature-based projects, communal meals, classroom chores, and social interactions among students. Participant observation enabled the researcher to engage directly with the observed context, thereby capturing dynamics of the school culture that might not always be revealed through interviews or questionnaires. Halim et al., (2026) utilized participant observation to examine character education practices in two schools, allowing the researchers to understand how character values were implemented in daily school life.

In depth interviews were conducted with school principals, facilitators/teachers, and parents to explore their understanding, experiences, and perspectives regarding the nature-based school culture and character building. The interviews were semi-structured, meaning the researchers prepared interview guidelines while allowing participants the flexibility to elaborate on their answers based on their own experiences. Sholeh et al., (2026) employed in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis to gather data from 12 participants across two nature-based schools, utilizing purposive sampling to select principals, classroom teachers, students, and parents.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model Miles et al., (2020), which comprises three main stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. This model was selected because it is suitable for iterative qualitative research, allowing the researcher to move back and forth between data collection, reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. Data condensation involves the processes of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming raw data from field notes, interview transcripts, and documents. At this stage, the researcher identified initial patterns regarding how the "nature school" culture shapes student character, sorted data relevant to the research problem, and organized it into thematic categories. Halim et al., (2026) applied data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing in their qualitative analysis of character education management in two **madrasahs**. Data display was carried out using descriptive narratives, matrices, and charts, enabling the researcher to observe relationships between categories and identify key themes. A structured data display facilitated the drawing of conclusions supported by robust empirical evidence.

Drawing conclusions and verification were carried out incrementally throughout the analysis process. The researchers verified findings by cross-referencing raw data, employing source and technique triangulation, and discussing findings with participants to ensure the accuracy of interpretations. Triangulation was used to ensure data validity, encompassing source triangulation (comparing data from various participants), technique triangulation (comparing data from questionnaires, observations, and interviews), and time triangulation (collecting data at different times to observe consistency). Sholeh et al., (2026) utilized triangulation to ensure data validity in a case study regarding nature-based programs at two nature schools. Fitayah et al., (2026) also applied source and technique triangulation in their data analysis concerning school-family partnerships in strengthening student character.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Form and Characteristics of the Baturraden Nature School Culture

The nature-based school culture at Sekolah Alam Baturraden is shaped by a configuration of mutually reinforcing values, norms, and daily practices. Based on observations, interviews, and documentation, this culture can be identified through four key pillars: daily routines, teacher role-modeling, nature-based project activities, and a collaboratively established system of rules. These four pillars do not operate in isolation; rather, they are interconnected, forming an ecosystem that allows character values to be not merely taught cognitively but internalized through repeated, meaningful daily experiences.

Daily habits form the cornerstone of the nature-based school culture at Sekolah Alam Baturraden. Students are accustomed to disposing of waste in the proper receptacles sorting it into organic and non-organic categories as well as turning off restroom lights and closing water taps after use. They bring their own reusable water bottles and lunch containers,

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a practice that promotes energy conservation and reduces the use of single-use plastics. Facilitators note that the students are "experts" at properly disposing of and sorting waste and "never bring packaged food," as their parents and guardians are already familiar with and support this concept.

The teacher's role as a role model constitutes a second, equally important pillar. Facilitators at SA Baturraden do not merely teach character values verbally; they also embody them in their daily interactions. Teachers guide students using the language of love, offer polite corrections, and set tangible examples of environmental stewardship. Nature-based project activities form the third pillar that distinguishes this nature school from conventional ones. Students at SA Baturraden engage in a variety of projects, ranging from beekeeping and observing fish farmers to cooking fish, conducting light propagation experiments, and creating ecobricks. Figure 1 illustrates the activities undertaken by students at Sekolah Alam (SA) Baturraden. Facilitators noted that "all the materials used to create these items are repurposed waste products. The students are creative and capable of translating their knowledge into practical applications." A collaboratively established system of rules serves as the fourth pillar. At SA Baturraden, rules and consequences are formulated by the students themselves, fostering a sense of ownership and making compliance easier. Facilitators stated that "the children never struggle to follow directions and rules, whether they come from facilitators or their peers."



Figure 1. Light Propagation Experiment and Ecobrick Making at SA Baturraden
Source: Researcher's Documentation, 2026

The Process of Character Building through at Sekolah Alam Baturraden

Character building at SA Baturraden unfolds through mechanisms of habituation, modeling, and social reinforcement integrated into daily school life. This process does not happen instantly; rather, it relies on repeated practice, consistent role-modeling, and the involvement of the entire school ecosystem. A unique aspect of this process is the deliberate integration of the distinct local cultures of Purwokerto and Banyumas into the curriculum, ensuring that character development is rooted not only in universal values but also in the local wisdom of the surrounding community. This cultural integration renders the character-building process more contextual, authentic, and meaningful for students, as they do not merely learn about abstract values but actively practice them through real-life experiences closely connected to their own lives.

Character building at SA Baturraden takes place through observation and reflection. Students are encouraged to observe their surroundings, ask critical questions, and seek solutions to the problems they encounter. For instance, upon

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observing the differences between clean and unclean homes, students were guided to identify the underlying causes and potential solutions; this process led to the idea of creating trash bins out of woven bamboo. A facilitator explained: "I once guided the students to observe both clean and unclean homes. We then asked them to share their views on why a home was classified as clean or unclean. Ultimately, we sought solutions to the issue, resulting in the idea of making woven bamboo trash bins to raise awareness among residents whose homes were deemed unclean."

Local cultural activities in Banyumas are enriched by the introduction of the **Cowongan** tradition a rain-invoking ritual born of the spiritual wisdom of Banyumas farmers, which fosters a harmonious relationship between humans, God, nature, and one another. Such reflection directly reinforces the spiritual dimension within the "head, heart, hands, and spirit" framework; consequently, students learn not only about environmental stewardship but also about the spiritual values embedded in the local wisdom of the Banyumas community. This process simultaneously cultivates systematic thinking (head), compassion (heart), concrete action (hands), and a sense of awe toward nature (spirit).

This cycle is enriched by the local cultures of Purwokerto and Banyumas, which serve as both the medium and context for the internalization of values. During the transformation stage, students are introduced to local values such as **blakasuta** (frankness or honesty), a defining trait of the wayang character Bawor, who embodies honesty and candor. These values are put into practice during the transaction stage through daily interactions using the Banyumas regional dialect (**Ngapak**) which conveys politeness and familiarity—as well as through traditional games that foster sportsmanship, cooperation, and humility. By the trans-internalization stage, these values have become integral to the students' identities, reflected in daily behaviors that mirror the **blakasuta** character and the spirit of **gotong royong** (mutual cooperation) typical of the Banyumas community. However, the success of this process is also influenced by external factors, such as the "laundry mentality" among parents—a transactional delegation of moral education from home to school which can create cognitive dissonance in students and hinder the consistent embodiment of these values.

These four dimensions are enriched by the integration of Purwokerto's distinctive local culture into the learning process. **Olah Hati** (cultivation of the heart/spirit) is strengthened by introducing spiritual values found in local traditions such as **Cowongan** which instill a sense of gratitude and harmony with nature. **Olah Pikir** (intellectual development) is fostered through the study of Banyumas folklore, which embodies values of courage, perseverance, justice, and wisdom. **Olah Rasa** (cultivation of sensibility/emotion) is nurtured through traditional performing arts such as **Lengger** (embodying philosophies of honesty and harmony), **Ebeg**, **Calung**, and **Begalan** as well as through *dolanan kuna* (traditional games) that teach cooperation and sportsmanship. **Olah Raga** (physical development) is realized through physical activities integrated with local traditions, such as *Lengger* dancing and playing traditional musical instruments. This integration of Banyumas performing arts and traditional games has proven effective in cultivating character values such as **gotong royong** (communal cooperation), discipline, teamwork, and a love for local culture.

Managerial functions at SA Baturraden are implemented by incorporating the unique local culture of Purwokerto into every stage, beginning with curriculum planning that integrates local wisdom. Subsequent activities include organizing events that involve the arts community and local tradition bearers, implementing instruction that utilizes the local language and literature, and conducting evaluations that measure character development based on local values. The experience-based learning model at SA Baturraden is enriched by project activities highlighting local traditions and culinary arts such as cooking signature Banyumas dishes and participating in the **Cowongan** tradition, which fosters **gotong royong** (mutual cooperation) and a spirit of togetherness. These findings align with research at SA Baturraden indicating that character formation does not occur instantly but rather through repeated habituation, consistent role-modelling, and the involvement of the entire school ecosystem.

Discussion

The nature school culture at SA Baturraden is shaped by four interconnected pillars that form an ecosystem; this enables character values to be not merely taught cognitively but internalized through repeated, meaningful daily experiences. These findings align with the framework proposed by Maretta et al., (2026) which identifies six dimensions of a nature school ecosystem green education philosophy, experiential learning, ecological character building, institutional support, community engagement, and perceived behavioral outcomes that mutually reinforce one another in fostering ecological responsibility among students.

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The daily habits cultivated at SA Baturraden align with research Vitriani and Sukiman (2026), confirming that the "hidden curriculum" implemented through habitual activities, a culture of discipline, and social interactions integrated into the school culture contributes significantly to character formation, fostering traits such as discipline, responsibility, social awareness, and creativity. The hidden curriculum plays a major role in shaping student attitudes through social interaction, school culture, and established norms. Pujiastuti et al., (2026) also found that effective character education models integrate four core components: value-based learning through daily routines, teacher role-modeling and collaboration, a conducive school environment and culture, and holistic curriculum integration. Routine activities such as morning prayers, flag-raising ceremonies, classroom duty rosters, and the "5S" culture have proven effective in instilling core character values.

Hayati et al., (2022) reinforce these findings by demonstrating that the implementation of character education through school culture occurs across four areas of development habituation, programmed activities, the cultivation of interests and talents, and role modelling resulting in students who are faithful, possess noble character, are independent, practice mutual cooperation, and demonstrate creativity and critical thinking. Fajari et al., (2023) also found that the implementation of school culture-based character education encompasses uniform culture, healthy eating habits, morning greetings, a culture of sharing, playing traditional games, extracurricular activities, field trips, and school ambassador programs. Using an ethnographic approach, Widodo, (2019) found that character strengthening in elementary schools is carried out through four avenues: school culture, the learning process, extracurricular activities, and collaboration with parents and the community.
The role of the teacher as an exemplar serving as the second pillar aligns with the assertion by Lubis et al., (2026) that teachers act as moral role models and value facilitators, which is a key factor in successful character building; experiential learning serves as the primary foundation enabling the integration of values through direct experience, reflection, and socio-spiritual engagement. This is reinforced by findings from Mahatma et al., (2026), who identified that prospective elementary school teachers act as role models who significantly influence students' understanding and application of moral values through four key strategies: integration into the learning process, reinforcement through school culture, involvement in extracurricular activities, and community participation.

In their study on a holistic approach to character education, Ayu et al., (2024) found that structured school governance characterized by clear policies and coherent program design is a primary factor in fostering a school culture conducive to character development. The integration of spiritual values and active community engagement were also identified as critical factors that reinforce character education efforts. This indicates that teachers serving as role models do not operate in isolation but are part of a broader school governance ecosystem.

Nature-based project activities, serving as the third pillar, align with the findings of Maretta et al., (2026) who identified experiential learning as a core dimension of the nature school ecosystem that contributes to the formation of ecological character. Yusuf and Fajari (2025), also found that nature-based schools foster student character through holistic learning that integrates the environment as a primary learning space; the character traits developed include curiosity, initiative, perseverance, adaptability, leadership, and social and cultural awareness. These findings are reinforced by Tohri et al., (2022), who emphasized the importance of implementing character education based on local wisdom in primary schools, as it instills character values relevant to the students' cultural context as demonstrated by the ecobrick project at SA Baturraden shown in Figure 1.

These findings are reinforced by Amiruddin et al., (2021) who quantitatively demonstrated that the nature-based school system exerts a significant influence (categorized as 'Strong') on the development of students' social character. This supports the argument that nature-based project activities are not merely supplementary tasks but rather pedagogical mechanisms empirically proven effective in internalizing character values. In a study of Sekolah Alam Bekasi, Setiani and Putri (2024), also found that nature-based schools utilize the natural environment as a central component of their educational approach, integrating formal academic content with experiential outdoor learning. Toharudin et al., (2025) in a case study at the Ibnu Hajar Islamic Junior High School, found that the nature-based school curriculum is implemented through four pillars—Al-Qur'an and sunnah, academics, leadership, and entrepreneurship featuring the "Sobat Bumi" (Friends of the Earth) program, which upholds principles of zero waste, no runoff, and environmental restoration, alongside theme-based or eco-friendly project-based learning.

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The system of rules established collaboratively serving as the fourth pillar aligns with the findings of Pujiastuti et al., (2026) who identified that effective character education models integrate value-based learning through daily routines, teacher role modeling, a conducive environment, and holistic curriculum integration. Prominent models include Lickona's comprehensive approach, the R2SC technique (Routine, Role Model, Spontaneity, Conditioning), and ethnopedagogical frameworks that incorporate local wisdom. This aligns with the findings of Saputra and Budimansyah (2021), in their case study of Sekolah Alam Al-Karim Lampung, which showed that student participation in formulating shared rules fostered greater adherence due to a sense of ownership; a similar dynamic was observed at SA Baturraden, where rules and consequences were devised by the students themselves.

This character-building process can be explained through the Triadic Cycle framework proposed by Yusuf (2026), in a multi-site study of three nature-based schools in East Kalimantan. The framework comprises three stages: (1) transformation (cognitive framing), where character values are introduced and conceptually understood; (2) transaction (dialogue and role modeling), where these values are negotiated and practiced through daily interactions; and (3) trans-internalization (reflective habituation), where the values become internalized and part of the students' identity. The study found that value internalization follows this cycle, with nature positioned as a spiritual laboratory (**Ayat Kauniyah**) within an integrative curriculum. This cycle is enriched by the local cultures of Purwokerto and Banyumas, which serve as both the medium and the context for value internalization.

Sholeh et al., (2026) found that nature-based programs effectively develop the four character dimensions within Ki Hadjar Dewantara's framework **Olah Hati** (cultivating the heart/spirit), **Olah Pikir** (cultivating the mind), **Olah Rasa** (cultivating the feelings/empathy), and **Olah Raga** (cultivating the body/physical well-being) through teacher role-modeling, a character curriculum comprising 70% **Akhlakul Karimah** (noble character) content, and active partnerships among schools, families, and the community. At SA Baturraden, these four dimensions are enriched by local Purwokerto characteristics integrated into the learning process. In'am et al., (2021) emphasize that strengthening character education based on school culture highlights the importance of integrating local values into all aspects of school life; thus, the use of the Banyumas regional language (**Ngapak**) and the introduction of the character Bawor as a symbol of honesty at SA Baturraden represent concrete implementations of this principle.

Several studies converge on the idea that local wisdom serves as a meaningful foundation for character education in nature-based and school-culture settings. Tohri et al. (2022), argue that local-wisdom-based character education makes values more relevant to students' cultural context; In'am et al., (2021) emphasize integrating local values into all aspects of school life; Sholeh et al., (2026) show that nature-based programs develop Ki Hadjar Dewantara's four dimensions through teacher modelling, a character curriculum, and school–family–community partnerships; and Yusuf (2026), positions nature as a spiritual laboratory within an integrative curriculum, with local culture as both medium and context. Together, these references support the proposition that character internalization is strengthened when school culture is anchored in the local socio-cultural ecology.

However, the findings at SA Baturraden differ in the depth and specificity of this local-wisdom integration. While previous studies tend to treat local wisdom as contextual content, a value source, or a supplementary program, SA Baturraden embeds concrete Banyumas Purwokerto cultural elements the Cowongan tradition, Bawor as a symbol of honesty, the Ngapak dialect, traditional performing arts, and traditional games—as active pedagogical media operating across all four pillars and the Triadic Cycle. Local wisdom here is not merely taught; it is the medium through which daily habits, teacher role-modelling, nature-based projects, and collaboratively established rules are enacted, negotiated, and internalized. This makes the local-wisdom factor in SA Baturraden more distinctive: it functions as an integrative cultural operating system for character education, rather than as an external contextual supplement. Consequently, the SA Baturraden findings extend existing literature by showing that the effectiveness of nature-school culture depends not only on the presence of local wisdom, but on how pervasively that wisdom is embedded in the school's routine, symbolic, pedagogical, and governance structures.

Halim et al., (2026) also found that effective character education management in elementary schools is carried out through four key functions planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation utilizing programs such as PAKUBUMI and Panca Bima, which emphasize moral development, the habituation of acts of worship, and an Islamic culture. At SA

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Baturraden, these managerial functions are implemented by integrating the unique local culture of Purwokerto into every stage of the process. Maretta et al., (2026) emphasize that ecological responsibility is not the product of a single lesson but emerges through mutually reinforcing institutional, pedagogical, and social practices. School leaders create enabling conditions, teachers translate environmental values into classroom learning, and parents reinforce these practices within the home environment. Partnerships at SA Baturraden extend to include the arts community and local traditional practitioners as learning partners. The school acts as a bridge for collaboration between the educational sector and traditional artists. Students do not merely learn in the classroom but also engage directly in community activities such as cultural festivals thereby learning the concepts of **gotong royong** (mutual cooperation) and teamwork in a real-world context. The use of the local Banyumas dialect (**Ngapak**) in daily communication is also part of the habituation process a practice mirrored at TK Pembina Universitas Mummadiyah Purwokerto with the slogan "*ora ngapak ora kepenak*" serving as a symbol of pride in local identity.

Indahwati et al., (2024) found in an experimental study that eco-literacy-based learning is effective in fostering an environmentally conscious community among elementary school students, yielding N-Gain scores of 85.8% for attitude change and 85.46% for behavioral change. These findings indicate that the character-building process facilitated by a "nature school" culture impacts not only cognitive aspects but also results in measurable changes in attitudes and behaviors. Martuty et al., (2025), in a study developing an experiential learning model, found that implementing the model significantly enhanced student character development; an average N-Gain score of 0.8 demonstrated the model's effectiveness in character formation. The model successfully created a learning environment that supports the development of values such as cooperation, independence, critical thinking, and creativity. Darmiany et al., (2021) also empirically demonstrated that experiential learning is effective in strengthening students' character values.

The character-building process within the culture of Sekolah Alam Baturraden results from the dynamic interaction of various school ecosystem components working synergistically with the nature-based school culture a culture manifested through four key pillars: daily habits, teacher role-modeling, nature-based project activities, and a collaboratively established system of rules. These findings reinforce the argument that character education cannot be separated from a structured and sustainable school culture; a robust cultural framework and a reflective internalization process work in synergy to cultivate students who are caring, responsible, independent, and capable of collaboration (Mahatma et al., 2026; Pujiastuti et al., 2026; Vitriani & Sukiman, 2026).

This research focuses on three aspects: first, the conceptual framework of "natural school culture" as a character-building ecosystem that integrates four pillars of school culture into a mutually reinforcing whole. Second, the integration of the distinctive local cultures of Purwokerto and Banyumas specifically the **Cowongan** tradition, the **Bawor** character, the **Ngapak** dialect, traditional performing arts, and traditional games—into the learning and character-building processes, an area that has received limited attention in previous research. Third, the detailed documentation of the value internalization process using a "Triadic Cycle" framework enriched by local culture.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the culture at Sekolah Alam Baturraden is shaped by four interconnected pillars: daily habituation, teacher role-modeling, nature-based project activities, and a collaboratively established system of rules. Collectively, these activities create an educational ecosystem where character values are not merely taught cognitively but are internalized through habituation, role-modeling, and social learning integrated into daily school life. This process spans from observing and reflecting on real-world issues in the surrounding environment to taking concrete action and conducting joint evaluations. These findings underscore that character education cannot be separated from a structured and sustainable school culture; a robust culture and a reflective internalization process work synergistically to cultivate students who are caring, responsible, independent, and capable of collaboration. Therefore, it is recommended that Sekolah Alam Baturraden maintain consistent habituation and role-modeling by facilitators, provide more intensive guidance on self-control the area showing the lowest achievement and strengthen partnerships with parents to prevent moral education from being viewed merely as a formality. The established nature-school culture can thus continue to serve as a holistic and sustainable ecosystem for character development. This study contributes a context-specific nature-

school culture model that integrates four pillars with Banyumas–Purwokerto local wisdom. Theoretically, it implies that character education is a systemic, culturally embedded process; practically, schools, teachers, and parents must align habituation, role-modeling, projects, and rules to sustain internalization. Future research should use longitudinal and comparative designs and examine long-term internalization, self-control, and parental involvement.

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