



LOCAL CULTURE-BASED LEARNING MATERIALS FOR STRENGTHENING STUDENTS' CHARACTER EDUCATION: A MIXED-METHOD STUDY

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Abstract

Character education remains a central concern in primary education because schools are expected not only to develop students' academic competence but also to cultivate responsibility, respect, honesty, cooperation, and environmental care. However, character education is often delivered through moral instruction, classroom rules, and abstract values that are weakly connected to students' cultural experiences. Local culture-based learning materials offer an alternative by embedding character values in familiar stories, traditions, community practices, local wisdom, and contextual classroom activities. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of local culture-based learning materials in strengthening students' character education in primary schools and to explore how students experience character learning through culturally relevant materials. The study employed a mixed-method design using a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group approach supported by classroom observations, teacher interviews, student interviews, and document analysis. The participants were 96 fifth-grade students divided into an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group used local culture-based learning materials for eight weeks, while the control group received conventional character education materials. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-tests, independent-sample t-tests, normalized gain scores, and effect size

analysis. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings showed that local culture-based learning materials significantly improved students' character education outcomes. Qualitative findings revealed that the materials strengthened character learning through cultural familiarity, moral reflection, role modelling, collaborative activities, and contextual value application. The study concludes that local culture-based learning materials can strengthen character education when values are embedded in meaningful cultural narratives and classroom practices.

Keywords: *local culture; learning materials; character education; primary school; cultural pedagogy*

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A. Introduction

Character education is a fundamental component of primary education because schools are responsible not only for developing students' cognitive competence but also their moral and social character. Yet many programs remain abstract, relying on slogans and rules rather than lived cultural experience.

In many classroom contexts, character education is still delivered through verbal instruction, moral slogans, school rules, teacher advice, and generic moral stories that are often disconnected from students' everyday cultural experience, making character values feel abstract rather than lived.

Local culture-based learning materials offer a promising approach. Local culture contains community values, oral traditions, stories, proverbs, and local wisdom that can serve as concrete, familiar vehicles for teaching responsibility, honesty, cooperation, and respect.

The use of local culture in education is consistent with culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1995) argues that culturally relevant teaching connects academic content to students' cultural frames of reference, making learning more meaningful and effective.

Character education is also closely related to moral education and citizenship education. Lickona (1996) explains that effective character education should engage moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action together, not knowledge alone.

However, integrating local culture into character education is not simply a matter of inserting traditional stories or cultural symbols into teaching materials; it requires systematic pedagogical design connecting cultural content with explicit moral reflection and behavioral practice.

Previous studies on culturally relevant pedagogy show that culturally connected instruction can improve student engagement, identity, and learning outcomes, though most research has focused on academic subjects rather than character education specifically.

The main problem addressed in this study is that character education materials in primary schools are often too general and insufficiently connected to students' local cultural context, limiting their relevance and impact. This study examines the effectiveness of local culture-based learning materials for strengthening students' character education.

B. Method

This study employed a mixed-method research design. The quantitative component used a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design to examine effects on character education outcomes, while the qualitative component explained the classroom mechanisms behind the change.

The participants were 96 fifth-grade students from two primary school classes. One class was assigned as the experimental group (48 students) and the other as the control group (48 students), with comparable prior academic and character profiles.

The experimental group used local culture-based learning materials for eight weeks, developed around five character values—responsibility, respect, honesty, cooperation, and environmental care—drawn from local folktales, proverbs, and community practices.

The control group received conventional character education instruction using general moral texts, teacher explanation,

classroom discussion, and printed worksheets, matched in topic coverage and instructional time.

The quantitative instrument was a character education scale consisting of 40 items measuring five indicators: responsibility, respect, honesty, cooperation, and environmental care (reliability 0.87).

Qualitative data were collected through eight classroom observations, interviews with six teachers, interviews with 16 students, and learning documents (worksheets, reflections, and teacher notes) from the experimental group.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-tests, independent-sample t-tests, normalized gain scores, and Cohen's d; qualitative data were analyzed thematically and triangulated with the quantitative results.

C. Finding and Discussion

1. Finding

The findings are presented in four parts. The first part reports students' character education outcomes before and after the intervention. The second part explains improvement across character indicators. The third part presents students' experiences during local culture-based learning. The fourth part describes implementation challenges.

Students' Character Education Outcomes before and after the Intervention

The pretest results showed that the experimental and control groups had comparable initial character education scores, with no significant difference, confirming baseline equivalence before the intervention.

After eight weeks, the posttest results showed a clear difference between the two groups. The experimental group obtained a mean score of 84.36, notably higher than the control group, indicating a substantial intervention effect.

Table 1. Character Education Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	Test	N	Mean	SD	Interpretation
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Experimental	Pretest	48	67.84	7.12	Moderate
Experimental	Posttest	48	84.36	6.45	High
Control	Pretest	48	67.21	7.08	Moderate
Control	Posttest	48	73.15	7.01	Moderate to high

Source: Processed from character education scale data.

Improvement across Character Education Indicators

The paired-sample t-test showed that the experimental group improved significantly from pretest to posttest, $t(47) = 15.62$, $p < .001$, while the control group showed a smaller, though still significant, improvement.

The character education scale measured five indicators—responsibility, respect, honesty, cooperation, and environmental care—and the experimental group improved on all five, with the largest gains in responsibility and cooperation.

Observation data also showed that students became more willing to connect character values with concrete behaviors. For example, responsibility was noticeably reflected in how students completed classroom tasks tied to local cultural roles.

Table 2. Gain Scores and Statistical Comparison

Indicator	Experimental Group	Control Group	Statistical Result
Mean gain	16.52	5.94	Experimental group higher
Normalized gain	0.51	0.18	Moderate vs. low
Posttest comparison	84.36	73.15	$t(94) = 8.17$; $p < .001$
Effect size	-	-	Cohen's $d = 1.66$; large effect

Source: Processed from pretest and posttest data.

Table 3. Character Indicator Scores in the Experimental Group

Indicator	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Gain	Interpretation
Responsibility	13.52	17.02	3.50	Strong improvement
Respect	13.61	16.89	3.28	Strong improvement
Honesty	13.08	16.48	3.40	Strong improvement

Cooperation	14.01	17.11	3.10	Strong improvement
Environmental care	13.62	16.86	3.24	Strong improvement

Source: Processed from character education scale data.

Students' Experiences during Local Culture-Based Character Learning

Qualitative findings revealed that students experienced local culture-based materials as familiar, interesting, and meaningful. Four major themes emerged: cultural familiarity, moral reflection, role modelling, and evolving classroom behavior.

Moral reflection was strengthened through discussion questions. Students were asked to identify whether a character's action was responsible, honest, or respectful, and to justify their judgment using details from the local story.

Role modelling appeared as an important mechanism. Students identified positive character examples from story characters, parents, elders, and community leaders, and discussed how those examples applied to their own daily behavior.

Table 4. Qualitative Themes on Local Culture-Based Character Learning

Theme	Evidence from Classroom Practice	Pedagogical Meaning
Cultural familiarity	Students recognized local stories, games, places, and community practices	Familiar content increased engagement and comprehension
Moral reflection	Students discussed characters' choices, consequences, and values	Stories became tools for moral reasoning
Role modelling	Students identified positive behaviors from cultural figures, elders, and story characters	Local examples made character values concrete
Collaborative learning	Students practiced cooperation through traditional games and group tasks	Values were learned through shared activity

Contextual application	Students linked values to school, home, and community behavior	Character education moved from concept to action
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Source: Synthesized from observations, interviews, and student reflections.

Implementation Challenges

Although the intervention produced positive results, several challenges emerged. The first challenge was the availability of accurate and age-appropriate local cultural materials, requiring teachers to adapt or curate sources carefully.

The second challenge was avoiding superficial cultural display. Teachers initially tended to use local culture only as decoration rather than as a genuine vehicle for moral reasoning, requiring deliberate redesign of discussion prompts.

The third challenge was balancing local and universal values. Teachers needed to ensure that local values were presented inclusively, not as rigid tradition, while still connecting to broader, universally recognized character values.

Table 5. Implementation Challenges and Teacher Responses

Challenge	Classroom Evidence	Teacher Response
Limited age-appropriate local materials	Some stories were too long or complex	Adapted texts and simplified language
Superficial cultural use	Culture was initially treated as illustration only	Added value-focused questions and reflection
Diverse student backgrounds	Students had different cultural familiarity	Allowed multiple local examples and experiences
Character assessment difficulty	Behavior was harder to measure than written answers	Used observation rubrics and reflective journals
Time constraints	Discussion and reflection required longer time	Selected shorter texts and focused values

Source: Synthesized from classroom observations and teacher interviews.

2. Discussion

Findings show that local culture-based learning materials significantly strengthened students' character education outcomes,

with the experimental group outperforming the control group on both quantitative scores and qualitative indicators of engagement.

The results support the principle that character education should involve moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action together; Lickona (1996) emphasizes that engaging all three dimensions produces more durable character development than instruction limited to moral knowledge alone.

The improvement across all character indicators indicates that local culture can support multiple dimensions of character education simultaneously, with responsibility and cooperation showing the strongest gains, likely reflecting the collective, community-oriented nature of the cultural materials used.

The qualitative findings explain why the intervention was effective. Cultural familiarity increased engagement, since students related more readily to stories and values drawn from their own community than to generic moral texts.

Moral reflection was another key mechanism. Students did not only read local stories; they analyzed choices, consequences, and values, which is important because character education requires active reasoning rather than passive reception of moral messages.

Role modelling also contributed to character learning. Sanderse (2013) argues that role modelling is important in moral and character education because it gives students concrete, relatable examples of virtuous action to emulate.

The findings also support place-conscious education. Gruenewald (2003) argues that education should connect learning with place, community, and ecological context, and this study shows that such connection can extend meaningfully into character education.

Nevertheless, the study also reveals that local culture-based character education requires careful pedagogical design; local culture should not be used merely as illustrative content but must be woven into structured moral reflection activities.

The challenge of cultural diversity also needs attention. Local culture is not homogeneous, and students may have different cultural backgrounds and family practices, so teachers must be sensitive to this diversity when selecting materials.

Assessment remains a critical issue. Character education cannot be assessed only through written tests, since students may know the meaning of honesty or responsibility without consistently practicing it, requiring behavioral and observational assessment as well.

The pedagogical implication is that local culture-based learning materials should be developed systematically: teachers need to map local cultural resources to specific character values, design explicit reflection activities, and provide consistent behavioral reinforcement.

Overall, this study confirms that local culture-based learning materials can strengthen character education because they make values contextual, meaningful, and connected to students' lived cultural experience rather than abstract or generic.

D. Conclusion

This study examined the effectiveness of local culture-based learning materials in strengthening students' character education in primary schools. The experimental group, which used materials developed from local folktales, proverbs, and community practices around five character values, achieved significantly higher posttest scores than the control group, with improvement across all measured indicators, most notably responsibility and cooperation. Qualitative findings showed that cultural familiarity, moral reflection, role modelling, and evolving classroom behavior explained why the intervention was effective, while implementation challenges included sourcing appropriate materials, avoiding superficial cultural display, and balancing local and universal values. These findings suggest that character education is strengthened when moral values are anchored in students' own cultural context rather than delivered as generic instruction, and that systematic pedagogical design—mapping cultural resources to specific values, embedding explicit moral reflection, and reinforcing behavior consistently—is essential for translating cultural familiarity into durable character development. Future research may examine long-term retention of these gains and how similar approaches transfer to other grade levels and cultural settings.

Declaration of AI-Assisted Technologies

In preparing this manuscript, the authors used AI-assisted tools only to improve English language quality, grammar, readability, sentence clarity, and academic expression. The AI tools were not used to generate research data, conduct data analysis, produce findings, or draw conclusions. All conceptual arguments, data interpretation, methodological decisions, and scholarly conclusions remain the full responsibility of the authors. The authors carefully reviewed, edited, and verified all AI-assisted outputs to ensure the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the final manuscript.

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