

EDUCATION AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR CHARACTER FORMATION AND SOCIAL AWARENESS OF STUDENTS IN LAMPUNG ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Qoriana Nur Iffah¹, Dona Aulianda², Dinda Ramadhani³, Fika Rahmanda Putri⁴

¹ University of Jember, Indonesia

²³⁴ Raden Intan State Islamic University, Indonesia

Correspondence Email: rdinda457@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the role of education as an instrument for character building and the development of social awareness among elementary school students in Lampung Province. Elementary education holds a strategic position in shaping students' attitudes, behaviors, and social competencies through contextual and continuous learning processes. This research employed a qualitative approach using a multisite study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis involving principals, teachers, students, as well as supporting informants from parents and local communities. Data analysis was conducted interactively through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, with data credibility ensured through triangulation and member checking. The findings indicate that character formation and social awareness development occur through the integration of character values in classroom learning, school culture, and social interactions within the surrounding environment. The integration of Lampung local wisdom, particularly the values of *Piil Pesenggiri*, enhances the relevance and meaningfulness of character education for students. However, the implementation of character education still faces challenges, including the dominance of academic-oriented learning and limited teacher capacity in integrating character values effectively. This study emphasizes the importance of an integrated, contextual, and collaborative approach to character education involving schools, families, and local communities.

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INTRODUCTION

Elementary education plays a strategic role as the foundation for shaping children's behavior, attitudes, and social competence, as it is during this phase that students begin to develop patterns of social values and habits that will influence their future personality development (Hidayat et al., 2022). Amidst the increasingly rapid flow of modernization and globalization, elementary schools are not only required to develop cognitive abilities and academic competence, but also serve as the primary arena for character formation and social awareness for the younger generation, enabling them to adapt ethically and socially in community life (Amaliyah et al., 2023; Ciciria et al., 2025).

In the context of Lampung Province, the heterogeneous socio-economic dynamics of the community and the diversity of local cultures demand an educational approach that is sensitive to local wisdom values while also responsive to the demands of modern developments (Afriyadi et al., 2024). Lampung's local cultural values, as reflected in *Piil Pesenggiri*, have great potential as a source of contextual and meaningful character education for elementary school students if systematically integrated into the learning process (Azmi & Zainil, 2025). However, various studies indicate that the practice of character education in elementary schools still faces challenges in the form of suboptimal integration of local values in learning and a dominant academic orientation that neglects the social and cultural dimensions of education (Pentianasari et al., 2022; Rusminto et al., 2022).

This situation raises critical questions about the extent to which educational practices in elementary schools can serve as effective instruments in shaping character and enhancing students' social awareness, aligned with Lampung's local wisdom. This question is crucial given that the success of elementary education is measured not only by academic achievement but also by the school's ability to develop students with character, social sensitivity, and the ability to participate constructively in the social and cultural life of their community (Hidayat et al., 2022; Lena et al., 2024).

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This situation raises critical questions about the extent to which educational practices in elementary schools can function as effective instruments in shaping character and increasing social awareness in students in line with Lampung's local wisdom (Utaminingsih et al., 2023). This question is crucial considering that the success of elementary education is not only measured by academic achievement, but also by the school's ability to shape students with character, social sensitivity, and the ability to participate constructively in the social and cultural life of their community (Kalsum, 2024; Utaminingsih et al., 2023).

Based on these theoretical frameworks, the focus of the research problem becomes sharper, namely how elementary schools in Lampung Province design and implement curriculum, learning strategies, and managerial practices that are able to internalize local wisdom values such as *Piil*

Pesenggiri and social learning principles so as to produce character changes and increase social awareness of students in a sustainable manner (Afriyadi et al., 2024; Hidayat et al., 2022; Lena et al., 2024). In addition, it is important to examine the extent to which the family environment and local community contribute as strategic partners of schools in the character education process, as well as structural factors such as the availability of facilities and infrastructure, teacher capabilities, and school policies that act as obstacles or drivers for the successful implementation of character education in elementary schools (Ciciria et al., 2025; Kalsum, 2024).

The research gap that is apparent to date lies in the limited number of multi-site empirical studies in Lampung Province that comprehensively examine the integration of local wisdom with character learning practices at the elementary school level. Most previous research tends to focus on conceptual studies or the implementation of partial and short-term character education programs, without accompanying evaluation of their medium-term impact on character formation and students' social awareness (Amaliyah et al., 2023; Kalsum, 2024; Lena et al., 2024). Therefore, research that combines analysis of education policy, classroom learning practices, and the role of community ecosystems through an in-depth qualitative approach or mixed methods with a multi-site design has the potential for original contributions both theoretically and practically in the development of character education studies based on local contexts (Azmi & Zainil, 2025; Ciciria et al., 2025; Kalsum, 2024).

The novelty offered in this research lies in three main aspects. First, a holistic mapping of the mechanisms for internalizing Lampung's local wisdom values into the curriculum and learning practices of elementary schools in a systemic manner. Second, an analysis of the role of the school-family-community network as a mutually interconnected and sustainable character education ecosystem. Third, the formulation of recommendations for an empirically evidence-based character education intervention model that is adaptive to the social and cultural context of Lampung and has the potential to be adopted by regional education policymakers (Afriyadi et al., 2024; Kalsum, 2024).

Practically, this research has significance because the findings can form the basis for developing more concrete local content curriculum policies, designing teacher training programs based on cultural values, and collaborative strategies between schools and communities to strengthen character education in elementary schools (Lena et al., 2024; Palinkas et al., 2015). Academically, this study contributes to the enrichment of character education literature by positioning local wisdom as an active and contextual source of values, not merely as passive cultural material. Thus, elementary education in Lampung can be understood not only as a vehicle for knowledge transfer, but also as a strategic arena for character formation and social awareness of students rooted in local cultural identity and relevant to the demands of community life in the 21st century (Azmi & Zainil, 2025; Ciciria et al., 2025).

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a multi-site study design to examine in depth the role of education as an instrument for character formation and social awareness of students in elementary schools in Lampung Province. The choice of a qualitative approach is based on the research background that emphasizes the need for a contextual understanding of the process of internalizing values, particularly character values and local wisdom, which cannot be reduced to quantitative measurements alone but rather requires interpretation of the meanings, practices, and social experiences of educational actors (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Kalsum, 2024).

The research location was determined at several public elementary schools in Lampung that represent social and cultural diversity. The research subjects included school principals, class teachers, and students, with parents and community leaders as supporting informants (Miles et al., 2014). The determination of informants was done purposively with consideration of direct involvement in the learning process and character development, so that the data obtained can describe the practice of character education and social awareness in depth and contextually (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Lena et al., 2024; Palinkas et al., 2015).

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, observations of learning and school life, and documentation studies of the curriculum, learning materials, and character-building programs. The use of various data collection techniques aimed to capture the complexity of character education practices and strengthen understanding of the process of internalizing values in the real-life context of elementary school life (Utaminingsih et al., 2023).

Data analysis was conducted interactively through continuous stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. This analysis process continued from the beginning of data collection to the end of the study, allowing researchers to conduct reflective and in-depth interpretations of field findings. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques, as well as member checking with informants to ensure the credibility and validity of the research findings (Miles et al., 2014; Palinkas et al., 2015). With these methods, this study is expected to produce a complete picture of the educational mechanisms in Lampung elementary schools in shaping the character and social awareness of students, while simultaneously formulating contextual recommendations relevant to regional educational needs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that elementary school education plays a strategic role as a primary instrument in shaping students' character and social awareness, particularly when the educational process is conducted contextually and rooted in local Lampung socio-cultural values. This finding confirms that elementary education cannot be understood solely as a process of transferring academic knowledge, but rather as a space for the socialization of values that shape students' ways of thinking, behaving, and interacting from an early age (Kalsum, 2024). This perspective places elementary education within a broader epistemological framework, where schooling functions not merely as a cognitive institution but as a socio-cultural arena that mediates value transmission and identity formation. In this regard, the school becomes a microcosm of society, where students begin to internalize norms, ethics, and social expectations that will later guide their participation in wider social structures.

This view aligns with contemporary character education studies that position elementary school as a crucial phase in the formation of students' social and moral values (Syamsuriyanti, 2023). At this stage, children are in a developmental phase where moral reasoning, empathy, and social awareness are highly malleable. Therefore, the quality of educational experiences provided at the elementary level significantly influences the trajectory of students' character development. The implication is clear: neglecting character education at this stage risks producing individuals who may excel cognitively but lack the ethical and social competencies required for responsible citizenship.

In the context of elementary schools in Lampung, the formation of students' character and social awareness occurs through three main domains: classroom learning, familiarization with the school culture, and social interaction with the surrounding environment. These three domains are not isolated; rather, they are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, forming a holistic ecosystem of character education. Classroom learning serves as a structured domain where values are intentionally integrated into pedagogical practices. Teachers play a central role in embedding moral and social values into subject content, transforming abstract concepts into meaningful life lessons. When teachers connect academic material with real-life social issues such as cooperation in group work, honesty in completing assignments, and responsibility in fulfilling tasks students are able to contextualize knowledge within their lived experiences.

Classroom learning serves as a medium for internalizing values when teachers not only convey material cognitively but also link it to social values such as responsibility, honesty, cooperation, and caring. This practice aligns with research findings showing that character education will be more meaningful when integrated into daily learning experiences, rather than taught as a separate, normative topic (Amaliyah et al., 2023; Ciciria et al., 2025). This integration reflects a constructivist approach to

learning, where students actively construct meaning through engagement with both content and context. In this sense, values are not imposed externally but are developed through reflective engagement and social interaction.

School culture is the second crucial area that strengthens character formation. Unlike classroom instruction, which is often formal and structured, school culture operates through informal, implicit, and continuous processes. Habituation through school rules, teacher role models, and daily routines such as cleaning activities, group work, and interactions between students contribute to the development of students' social awareness. These habitual practices serve as a hidden curriculum that subtly shapes students' attitudes and behaviors over time. Through repetition and consistency, values become internalized and eventually form part of students' character.

This awareness is reflected in students' ability to understand their role within a group, appreciate differences, and demonstrate empathy in the social life of the school. These findings reinforce the view that character is not formed solely through verbal instruction, but rather through consistent and repeated social practices within school life (Hidayat et al., 2022; Kalsum, 2024). In other words, what students experience daily has a more profound impact than what they are merely told. This underscores the importance of creating a school environment that embodies the values it seeks to instill.

Furthermore, the integration of Lampung's local wisdom values provides a contextual dimension that enriches the character education process. Local wisdom serves as a culturally relevant framework that bridges abstract moral principles with students' lived realities. Values such as mutual respect, maintaining social harmony, and responsibility for the social environment are not foreign concepts; they are deeply embedded in the socio-cultural fabric of the community. When these values are incorporated into educational practices, students find them more relatable and meaningful.

Local values, such as mutual respect, maintaining social harmony, and responsibility for the social environment, serve as sources of values closely related to students' lives. When these values are presented in learning and school activities, students more easily understand them because they align with the social and cultural experiences they encounter in their daily lives. This demonstrates that local wisdom serves not only as a cultural identity but also as an effective pedagogical instrument in character formation (Afriyadi et al., 2024; Ciciria et al., 2025). This finding is particularly significant in the context of globalization, where there is often a tension between global influences and local identities. Integrating local wisdom into education helps preserve cultural heritage while simultaneously fostering relevant character development.

This discussion also demonstrates that the role of teachers is crucial to the success of character education and social awareness. Teachers are not merely facilitators of knowledge but are also moral agents and role models. Their behavior, attitudes, and interactions with students significantly influence how values are perceived and internalized. Teachers serve as social models whose behavior and attitudes are observed and imitated by students. This aligns with the principles of social learning theory, which emphasize the importance of observation and imitation in behavioral development.

Teachers' exemplary behavior in communicating, resolving conflicts, and demonstrating fairness and empathy are key factors in the internalization of values. These findings align with the social learning perspective, which asserts that the process of developing children's social behavior is strongly influenced by significant figures in their environment, particularly elementary school teachers (Hidayat et al., 2022; Palinkas et al., 2015). Therefore, enhancing teacher professionalism must include not only pedagogical competence but also moral integrity and emotional intelligence.

On the other hand, parental and local community involvement emerged as supporting factors that strengthen the character education ecosystem. Education does not occur in isolation within school walls; it is part of a broader social system. When the values instilled in schools align with those practiced in families and communities, students receive consistent messages that reinforce their learning. This consistency is crucial for the sustainability of character development.

When the values instilled in schools align with social practices in the family and community, students' character formation occurs more consistently and sustainably. Conversely, a disconnect between school values and the social environment has the potential to weaken the process of value internalization. This finding underscores the importance of an ecosystem approach to character education, in which schools, families, and communities act as a complementary unit (Ciciria et al., 2025; Kalsum, 2024). In this framework, education becomes a shared responsibility, requiring collaboration and synergy among all stakeholders.

However, this discussion also indicates challenges in implementing education as an instrument for character building and social awareness. These challenges are both structural and pedagogical. One of the primary issues is teachers' limited understanding of how to effectively integrate character values into learning. Many educators still perceive character education as an additional component rather than an integral part of the curriculum. Additionally, a dominant academic orientation often prioritizes cognitive achievement over affective and social development.

These challenges include teachers' limited understanding of integrating character values into learning, a dominant academic orientation, and the suboptimal use of local wisdom as a learning resource. This situation suggests that strengthening character education requires support from school policies, teacher capacity development, and curriculum planning that is more contextual and adaptive to the local socio-cultural environment (Kalsum, 2024; Pentianasari et al., 2022). Without systemic support, efforts to implement character education may remain fragmented and inconsistent.

Overall, this discussion confirms that education in Lampung elementary schools has great potential to shape students' character and social awareness when implemented in an integrated, contextual, and collaborative manner. The synergy between classroom learning, school culture, and community involvement creates a robust foundation for character development. Moreover, the integration of local wisdom ensures that education remains relevant and meaningful within its socio-cultural context.

Education rooted in local values and supported by a consistent school culture not only shapes knowledgeable individuals but also social citizens with character, caring, and responsibility. These findings strengthen the argument that elementary education is a crucial phase in national character development, particularly in the context of a pluralistic and dynamic society like Lampung (Azmi & Zainil, 2025; Ciciria et al., 2025). In a broader sense, this study contributes to the discourse on how education can serve as a transformative force, not only in shaping individual character but also in fostering a more ethical and socially cohesive society.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study and discussion, it can be concluded that education in elementary schools plays a fundamental role as a strategic instrument in the formation of character and social awareness of students. Education serves not only as a vehicle for developing academic abilities, but also as a space for the socialization of values that shape the attitudes, behaviors, and social sensitivity of students from an early age. In the context of elementary schools in Lampung Province, the educational process that integrates character values contextually shows great potential in fostering an attitude of responsibility, social awareness, and the ability to interact harmoniously in community life.

The conclusion of this study confirms that the formation of students' character and social awareness occurs effectively when these values are internalized through classroom learning, school culture, and ongoing social interactions. The integration of Lampung local wisdom values into educational practices has been shown to strengthen the relevance and meaning of character values for students, as they align with their social and cultural experiences. Thus, local wisdom serves not only as a cultural identity but also as a source of pedagogical values that support character education in elementary schools.

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