

Exploring Banyumas Local Wisdom as a Contextual Basis for Character Education: Insights from Elementary School Teachers in Indonesia

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Abstract. Local wisdom carries historically and culturally tested values, yet its potential as a foundation for character education in elementary schools often remains unrealized in practice. Banyumas local wisdom, with its distinctive and egalitarian character, represents an underexplored cultural resource in the context of character education. Within the Merdeka Curriculum, which explicitly accommodates local wisdom integration, empirical studies on how Banyumas local wisdom can serve as a contextual basis for character education in elementary schools remain scarce. This study aims to explore Banyumas local wisdom as a contextual basis for character education in elementary schools. Using a descriptive qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews with 15 grade IV–VI teachers in Banyumas Regency, data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The findings reveal that Banyumas local wisdom carries authentic values closely connected to students' everyday lives. The values of *cablaka*, collective participation, and egalitarianism prove relevant to elementary students' character formation. Although the Merdeka Curriculum has provided space for integration, local wisdom remains suboptimally utilized due to the absence of structured guidelines. These findings demonstrate that Banyumas local wisdom holds a strong value foundation for character education and urgently warrants development as a structured basis for character learning.

Keywords: banyumas; *cablaka*; character education; elementary school; local wisdom

INTRODUCTION

Character education has been receiving growing attention in Indonesian elementary education, particularly amid moral and social challenges accelerated by globalization and increasing digital exposure (Choliza & Fauzia, 2024). At the elementary level, students are in a formative period in which values and habits are most receptively internalized, making this stage of schooling a crucial entry point for cultivating ethical foundations (Suciati et al., 2023). Nevertheless, character education in many Indonesian schools is still implemented in a normative and abstract manner, often disconnected from the cultural realities surrounding the learners (Tohri et al., 2022).

Many studies show that one effective way to bridge this gap is by using local wisdom as the foundation of character education, since integrating local wisdom can produce learners whose characters are aligned with the values of their local society (Parhan & Dwiputra, 2023). For example, Ibnu & Tahar (2021) found that traditional children's games, as a form of locally rooted cultural practice, can serve as effective and meaningful media for character education in inclusive elementary schools. Building on this, Sakti et al. (2024) further demonstrate that

ethnopedagogical approaches enhance children's awareness of local culture and nurture character development by integrating local wisdom values into the learning process.

Within Indonesia's cultural plurality, Banyumas possesses a distinctive local wisdom that sets it apart from the dominant mainstream Javanese tradition, particularly through its egalitarian orientation and direct communication style (Suharto, 2018). One of its most recognized characteristics is *cablaka*, which is widely regarded as the core model of the Banyumas character (Priyadi, 2015). The egalitarian spirit of this community is also reflected in the structure of the Banyumasan language, which does not employ hierarchical speech levels and shapes the way the community interacts in everyday life (Satibi et al., 2024). With such a rich cultural foundation, Banyumas local wisdom represents a meaningful cultural resource that is worth examining within the context of character education.

The Merdeka Curriculum has further opened a more flexible policy space for incorporating such locally grounded values into classroom practice, as it encourages contextual learning and supports the strengthening of the Eight Dimensions of the Graduate Profile (*Delapan Dimensi Profil Lulusan*), the national framework of character and competency development that Indonesian students

are expected to attain across all levels of education (Adha & Marmoah, 2025; Kemendikdasmen, 2025; Suryaningsih et al., 2023). This policy direction places teachers in a central position, since the curriculum gives them broader room to design learning experiences that draw on the cultural environment of their students. Within this context, exploring how Banyumas local wisdom can be situated as a value source for character education becomes both timely and pedagogically relevant.

While research on Banyumas local wisdom in relation to character education has actually grown considerably in recent years, most of these studies have approached the topic from textual, cultural, or developmental angles rather than from the standpoint of those who enact the curriculum. Several works have examined Banyumas folklore as a medium of moral and ecological values (Sultoni et al., 2023), the symbolic meanings of *cablaka* and egalitarianism in traditional performance (Priyadi, 2015; Suharto, 2018), and the integration of Banyumasan language to instill *cablaka* character in early childhood settings (Satibi et al., 2024). These contributions have meaningfully expanded the conceptual foundation of Banyumas local wisdom as a values resource, yet they tend to stop at the cultural object rather than entering the realities of formal elementary classroom practice.

What remains underexplored is the perspective of elementary school teachers, who stand at the intersection between Banyumas cultural values and students' everyday learning, and whose understanding shapes how local wisdom can meaningfully take form within character education (Puad & Ashton, 2023). Teachers' perspectives offer an essential lens for examining how Banyumas local wisdom can serve as a contextual basis for character education at the elementary level (Suryaningsih et al., 2023). Without this lens, discussions of Banyumas local wisdom as a value source for character education tend to remain at the cultural and conceptual level, rather than being grounded in the realities of elementary classroom contexts (Tohri et al., 2022).

Building on this gap, the present study aims to explore Banyumas local wisdom as a contextual basis for character education in elementary schools, drawing on the insights of grade IV to VI teachers in Banyumas Regency. By foregrounding teachers' understanding and lived experience, this research seeks to contribute to the academic discourse on culturally grounded character

education and to enrich the empirical foundation for situating Banyumas local wisdom within elementary school character learning.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore Banyumas local wisdom as a contextual basis for character education in elementary schools, drawing on the insights of teachers as the primary informants (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The research was conducted in Banyumas Regency, Central Java, Indonesia, with 15 elementary school teachers selected through purposive sampling. Participants were chosen based on the following criteria: actively teaching grade IV, V, or VI in a Banyumas elementary school, having at least three years of teaching experience, and being willing to share their classroom experience related to character education and Banyumas local wisdom. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided their consent prior to participation.

Data were collected in February 2026 through semi structured interviews, each lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). An interview guide was developed based on the research aim and reviewed by an expert in character education before being used in the field. The guide covered four areas: teachers' familiarity with Banyumas local wisdom, the Banyumas values they consider most relevant for elementary students' character formation, their experience integrating these values into character education practice, and their views on the opportunities and challenges of this integration within the Merdeka Curriculum. With participants' permission, all interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, and field notes were taken to capture contextual information.

The transcripts were analyzed using the six-phase thematic analysis framework proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006), which includes familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final analytic narrative. To strengthen the credibility of the findings, direct quotations from participants were used in presenting the results, grounding the interpretations in the participants' own accounts and supporting the confirmability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sandelowski, 1994).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results and Discussion

The thematic analysis of the interview data revealed three main themes that illustrate how Banyumas local wisdom can serve as a contextual basis for character education in elementary schools. These themes capture how Banyumas local wisdom is recognized as a familiar value source in students' everyday lives, the specific values within it that emerge as most relevant for character formation, and the conditions that shape its integration into daily classroom practice.

Banyumas Local Wisdom as a Familiar Value Source in Students' Everyday Lives

The first theme reveals that Banyumas local wisdom is positioned as an authentic and accessible value source already woven into the fabric of students' everyday lives. Most of the fifteen teachers described Banyumas local wisdom not as a distant or formal cultural heritage, but as something embedded in the everyday environment of children. Their accounts referred to various cultural elements that students regularly encounter, such as traditional arts, folktales, local expressions, and traditional games, all of which carry values that can support character formation. Because these references are already part of the children's surrounding environment, the values embedded in them are easily recognizable and feel natural when introduced into the classroom. As one teacher explained: "I think it is easier to teach character values when they are connected to the children's daily lives. Many of the values we teach at school are already practiced at home and in the community. The children see how their parents talk to older people, how neighbors help each other, and how people behave in social activities. Because they experience these things directly, they understand the values more easily." (T7).

Many other teachers expressed similar views, noting that Banyumas cultural references are encountered daily by their students both at home and in the community. This finding resonates with Moll et al. (1992) concept of *funds of knowledge*, which argues that students bring into the classroom a body of culturally and historically accumulated knowledge from their households and communities that can become a powerful pedagogical resource when teachers learn to recognize and use it. Banyumas local wisdom in this study appears to function precisely as such a resource: it is already present in the lives of the students, and its educational value emerges when

teachers consciously draw on it. The finding also extends earlier work indicating that integrating local wisdom into character education can shape learners whose characters are aligned with the values of their local society (Parhan & Dwiputra, 2023). In a complementary vein, Sakti et al. (2024) demonstrate that ethnopedagogical approaches enhance children's awareness of local culture and nurture character development by integrating local wisdom values into the learning process, which echoes the kind of cultural closeness that emerged in this study.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the educational value of Banyumas local wisdom lies not only in its cultural significance but also in its familiarity to students. Because the values embedded in local traditions, social interactions, and community practices are already experienced in children's everyday lives, they provide a meaningful context for character learning. Rather than introducing character values as abstract concepts, teachers can connect learning to experiences that students already recognize and understand. In this way, Banyumas local wisdom functions as a contextual foundation for character education, making character learning more relevant, authentic, and closely connected to students lived experiences.

Core Character Values Embedded in Banyumas Local Wisdom

The second theme highlights the specific Banyumas values that consistently emerged as most relevant for character formation at the elementary level. *Cablaka* was mentioned in nearly every interview as a way of being honest and open in expressing thoughts and feelings. Collective participation also appeared in most accounts, frequently linked to local routines such as *kerja bakti*, communal celebrations, and group activities at school. The egalitarian orientation was highlighted by most teachers and was commonly described as treating others equally regardless of social status, avoiding discrimination among peers, and encouraging all students to participate and express their opinions without feeling inferior or superior to others. One teacher captured the meaning of *cablaka* in a way that reflects how many participants articulated it: "One value that often comes to mind is cablaka. In Banyumas, people are used to speaking openly and saying things as they are. I think that is important for children too. I always tell my students that if they make a mistake, they should be honest about it rather than hide it. Of course,

being honest does not mean hurting other people's feelings. They still need to learn how to speak politely and respectfully.” (T5).

The prominence of *cablaka* in this study aligns with Priyadi's (2015) characterization of *cablaka* as a defining feature of Banyumas culture and extends the work of Satibi et al. (2024), who examined its role in early childhood education, by demonstrating its continued relevance in the elementary school context. The findings suggest that *cablaka* functions not merely as a distinctive cultural characteristic of Banyumas society but also as a valuable foundation for character education. As a value emphasizing honesty, openness, and direct communication, *cablaka* provides a meaningful context through which elementary students can learn to express their thoughts truthfully while maintaining respect for others.

The emphasis on collective participation became especially visible when teachers described how children easily engage in group activities at school because the habit of working together is already familiar to them in their daily community life: "Usually, the children do not have much difficulty working in groups. They are used to doing things together at home and in the community. My role is mainly to guide them and give them opportunities to cooperate during classroom activities." (T9).

This finding aligns with broader Indonesian scholarship that identifies *gotong royong* as a central cultural resource for character education. Previous studies have shown that *gotong royong* promotes solidarity, empathy, and collective responsibility among students (Awaliya & Utami, 2024) and continues to underpin social interactions in school settings (Karmina et al., 2021). The present study extends this understanding by showing how collective participation, as embedded in Banyumas local wisdom, functions as more than cooperation during classroom activities. Drawing on the teachers' accounts, it appears as a habit cultivated through everyday participation in family, neighborhood, and community life, which positions it as a culturally grounded foundation for character education at the elementary level.

The egalitarian orientation identified in this study is consistent with Suharto's (2018) description of Banyumas identity, in which equality and unpretentious communication constitute enduring cultural characteristics. The findings further suggest that egalitarianism represents an important component of Banyumas

local wisdom that can support character education. By emphasizing equal treatment, respect for differences, and the minimization of social hierarchy, this value provides a culturally grounded and contextually meaningful foundation for fostering inclusiveness, mutual respect, and social responsibility among elementary students.

Overall, the findings suggest that *cablaka*, egalitarianism, and collective participation represent complementary values embedded within Banyumas local wisdom. Rather than merely describing cultural characteristics of the Banyumas community, these values provide a contextual foundation for character education by connecting learning with students' everyday cultural experiences. Their familiarity within family, school, and community life makes them particularly relevant for fostering character development in elementary education.

Challenges in Integrating Banyumas Local Wisdom into Character Education

The third theme highlights the challenges teachers encounter when integrating Banyumas local wisdom into character education. Most teachers acknowledged that the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly through the strengthening of the Eight Dimensions of the Graduate Profile (*Delapan Dimensi Profil Lulusan*), has provided more flexible policy space for incorporating local wisdom into character education (Adha & Marmoah, 2025; Kemendikdasmen, 2025). However, almost all participants also reported that this policy space has not been fully realized at the classroom level, since structured guidelines that explicitly connect Banyumas local wisdom to character education practice remain limited. One teacher described this tension clearly: “The Merdeka Curriculum gives us a lot of flexibility, which is helpful. But when it comes to using Banyumas culture in character education, there is not much guidance that we can follow. Most of the time, I rely on what I know from my own experiences growing up in Banyumas. Sometimes I am not sure whether I am doing it in the best way, so having more concrete examples or guidance would be useful.” (T11).

The findings indicate that the difficulty lies not in the availability of cultural resources or in teachers' recognition of their educational value, but in the translation of these values into systematic classroom practices. Although Banyumas local wisdom is widely regarded as relevant to character development, teachers reported limited guidance for translating its values

into learning activities, classroom routines, and assessment practices. This interpretation is consistent with Puad & Ashton's (2023) argument that teachers function as active curriculum agents whose effectiveness depends not only on professional understanding but also on the pedagogical support available to them. Similar challenges have been identified in other contexts, where local wisdom is acknowledged as an important educational resource yet remains insufficiently operationalized in classroom practice (Suryaningsih et al., 2023; Tohri et al., 2022). The present study extends this discussion by demonstrating that, within the Banyumas context, the central issue is not identifying culturally relevant values for character education, but translating values such as *cablaka*, egalitarianism, and collective participation into meaningful learning experiences that systematically support character development.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Banyumas local wisdom constitutes a meaningful contextual foundation for character education in elementary schools. The findings reveal that the values embedded in Banyumas culture are closely connected to students' everyday experiences, with *cablaka*, collective participation, and egalitarianism emerging as central values for character development. While the Merdeka Curriculum has created greater opportunities for integrating local wisdom through the Eight Dimensions of the Graduate Profile (*Delapan Dimensi Profil Lulusan*), this potential has not yet been fully realized in classroom practice due to limited pedagogical guidance for translating local values into teaching and learning activities.

The study contributes to the literature on local wisdom and character education by showing that culturally embedded values can serve as a meaningful basis for character learning when they are connected to students' lived experiences. At the same time, the findings highlight the need for more structured pedagogical frameworks that can support the systematic integration of Banyumas local wisdom into elementary character education. As a qualitative study involving fifteen teachers from a single regency, the findings should be interpreted within their specific context. Future research is encouraged to involve additional stakeholders, including students and school leaders, and to develop and evaluate pedagogical models that operationalize Banyumas local

wisdom in character learning.

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