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The Synergy of Local Wisdom and National Education Policy: A Literature Review on Character Building in Indonesian Early Childhood Education

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Abstrak

Tinjauan literatur integratif ini mengeksplorasi sinergi antara kearifan lokal dan kebijakan pendidikan nasional dalam membentuk pendidikan karakter pada Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini (PAUD) di Indonesia. Berdasarkan 19 artikel tinjauan sejawat yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2015 dan 2026, studi ini mengkaji bagaimana praktik budaya asli, seperti permainan tradisional, cerita rakyat, dan kesenian, berfungsi sebagai sarana pedagogis untuk mewujudkan dimensi karakter yang diuraikan dalam Profil Pelajar Pancasila dan Kurikulum Merdeka. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran berbasis proyek dan pendekatan etnopedagogis berhasil menjembatani kebijakan dari atas ke bawah dengan realitas budaya akar rumput. Namun, hambatan signifikan masih ada, termasuk kurangnya kompetensi guru dalam pedagogi responsif budaya, minimnya bahan ajar berbasis lokal, dan ketegangan epistemologis antara standar perkembangan universal dengan nilai-nilai lokal yang beragam. Tinjauan ini menyimpulkan dengan merekomendasikan penguatan kemitraan sekolah-masyarakat, pengembangan metrik penilaian yang sensitif terhadap budaya, dan paradigma dekolonial yang menghargai pluralitas budaya Indonesia sebagai aset pendidikan utamanya.

Kata kunci: Kearifan Lokal, Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, Pendidikan Karakter, Kebijakan Pendidikan, Kurikulum Merdeka, Indonesia.

Abstract

This integrative literature review explores the synergy between local wisdom (kearifan lokal) and national education policy in shaping character building within Indonesian Early Childhood Education (ECE). Drawing upon 19 peer-reviewed articles published between 2015 and 2026, the study examines how indigenous cultural practices, such as traditional games, folklore, and arts, serve as pedagogical vehicles for realizing the character dimensions outlined in the Profil Pelajar Pancasila and the Kurikulum Merdeka. The findings reveal that project-based learning and ethnopedagogical approaches successfully bridge top-down policy with grassroots cultural realities. However, significant barriers remain, including insufficient teacher competency in culturally responsive pedagogy, a lack of localized teaching materials, and epistemological tensions between universalized developmental standards and diverse indigenous values. The review concludes by advocating for strengthened school-community partnerships, the development of culturally sensitive assessment metrics, and a decolonized paradigm that honors Indonesia's cultural plurality as its primary educational asset.

Keywords: Local Wisdom, Early Childhood Education, Character Building, Education Policy, Kurikulum Merdeka, Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) occupies a uniquely critical position in human development, as the period from birth to age six is widely recognized as the most formative

window for cognitive, social-emotional, and moral growth (Suratmi & Hartono, 2024). During this stage, children are not merely absorbing academic content, they are internalizing values, building habits of mind, and constructing a sense of identity that will persist throughout their lives (Sakti et al., 2024). The Indonesian government has formally acknowledged this reality through the National Standard Level of Child Development (STPPA) No. 137 of 2014, which establishes developmental benchmarks for children aged 0–6 years, encompassing religious-moral values, Pancasila values, cognitive, language, and socio-emotional dimensions (Adriany, 2026; Yusuf et al., 2025). Yet despite these policy commitments, scholars have noted that Indonesian ECE practice has historically overemphasized intellectual achievement at the expense of character formation, a tension that becomes especially acute in a nation as culturally pluralistic as Indonesia (Adriany, 2019). With more than 300 ethnic groups and the national motto of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), Indonesia's educational landscape is inseparable from the question of how community-based values and local cultural wisdom can be meaningfully preserved within a unified national system (Newberry, 2017).

Indonesia's extraordinary cultural diversity has long served as a foundational source of moral, spiritual, and communal values. Local wisdom (*kearifan lokal*) refers to the body of indigenous knowledge, ethical principles, cultural traditions, and social norms passed down across generations within specific ethnic and regional communities (Fathurrochman et al., 2025). These are not merely folkloric artifacts; they are living pedagogical resources that encode values such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), tolerance, social justice, and respect for elders, values that align closely with the aspirations of national character education (Leonia et al., 2025). Examples abound across the archipelago: in Cirebon, the kinship system derived from the sayings of SGJ instills values of piety, discipline, and decency (Ernawati et al., 2018); in Yogyakarta, ethnopedagogical approaches revitalize indigenous principles as the basis for character shaping in preschool settings; and in West Java, the "Rebo Nyunda" cultural revitalization program uses language and tradition to instill cultural roots in young children (Sakti et al., 2024; Yulindrasari & Djoehaeni, 2019). The Law on the National Education System (UU No. 20 of 2003) formally mandates that Indonesia's diverse cultural realities, including local wisdoms and regional potential, be respected within the national education framework, providing the legal foundation for these practices. This legal and cultural backdrop makes Indonesia a uniquely important context in which to examine the relationship between grassroots local wisdom and top-down national education policy.

In recent years, Indonesia's national education policy has undergone significant transformation, with two frameworks standing at the forefront of reform. The Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent/Emancipated Curriculum), introduced as a successor to the 2013 Curriculum, grants schools considerably greater flexibility to design locally relevant learning experiences, explicitly creating space for the integration of local wisdom into teaching and learning processes (Fathurrochman et al., 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2025). Alongside this, the Profil Pelajar Pancasila (Pancasila Student Profile) articulates six core character dimensions, including faith, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, independence, and global diversity, that together constitute the ideal graduate of Indonesia's education system (Leonia et al., 2025; Suratmi & Hartono, 2024). The Merdeka Curriculum accommodates cultural and religious value integration through thematic units such as "I Love Indonesia" and project-based learning frameworks, providing teachers with the structural freedom to contextualize instruction according to children's lived environments (Masdul et al., 2024). Earlier, the Character Education Strengthening Movement (PPK), launched in 2015, and the government-organized cultural festivals by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology had already signaled Indonesia's growing commitment to weaving local cultural values into school curricula (Rasidi & Istiningsih, 2025). This policy trajectory reflects a broader national recognition that effective character education cannot be achieved through decontextualized, universalized standards alone, it must be rooted in the cultural soil from which each child grows.

Despite these encouraging policy developments, a significant and persistent gap exists between the ideals enshrined in national frameworks and the realities of ECE implementation at the institutional level. Scholars have documented that the dominant paradigm in Indonesian ECE has long been shaped by Western developmentalist assumptions, particularly Piagetian cognitive stage theory, embedded in universalized child development standards that do not adequately account for Indonesia's diverse sociocultural contexts (Adriany, 2026). At the same time, teachers in rural and underserved communities frequently lack adequate training, guidelines, and infrastructure to implement local wisdom-based curricula effectively (Istianti et al., 2025; Rambe & Pasaribu, 2025). For Indigenous communities, the challenge is even more acute: the national education system has often failed to recognize their specific cultural needs, resulting in cultural alienation and loss of identity among young children (Firdausy et al., 2024). There is also a broader structural tension: while Kurikulum Merdeka theoretically enhances teacher agency, research shows that teachers' capacity to translate this flexibility into meaningful local wisdom integration varies widely, depending on institutional support,

community involvement, and the engagement of parents and traditional leaders (Pratiwi et al., 2025; Rambe & Pasaribu, 2025). Furthermore, within Indonesia's decentralized governance system, the dynamic between national policy mandates and local authority innovations remains underexplored, particularly concerning how local governments like DKI Jakarta adapt national ECE frameworks to meet specific community needs (Hakim, 2024). These layered tensions, between global and local, universal and contextual, policy and practice, constitute the central problem this literature review addresses.

Given the urgency and complexity of the issues outlined above, this literature review pursues three interrelated objectives. First, it aims to systematically explore how local wisdom is integrated into character education within Indonesian ECE settings, drawing on empirical studies from diverse regions and institutional types. Second, it seeks to analyze the degree of alignment, and the points of friction, between these grassroots cultural practices and the overarching frameworks of Kurikulum Merdeka and the Profil Pelajar Pancasila, examining whether national policy genuinely accommodates or merely superficially acknowledges local wisdom. Third, the review identifies persistent challenges, including inadequate teacher preparation, the marginalization of indigenous communities, and the tension between Western pedagogical norms and local cultural values, alongside emerging best practices and future opportunities for deepening the synergy between local wisdom and national ECE policy. Collectively, these objectives respond to the call for more culturally responsive, decolonized approaches to childhood education, approaches that treat Indonesia's cultural diversity not as a pedagogical obstacle, but as its most profound educational resource.

METHOD

This study adopts an Integrative Literature Review (ILR) approach, which is appropriate for synthesizing findings from diverse methodological traditions, including qualitative case studies, policy analyses, and curriculum evaluations, in order to construct a comprehensive understanding of a complex, multi-layered phenomenon (Abdussamad & Sik, 2021; Darmalaksana, 2020; Kusumastuti & Khoiron, 2019). Unlike a strict systematic review that limits itself to experimental designs, the integrative approach accommodates the interpretive and contextual nature of research on local wisdom and ECE policy, which often operates within ethnographic, phenomenological, or critical frameworks. Literature was retrieved from multiple academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals), Garuda (Garba Rujukan Digital), and SINTA-indexed national journals, to ensure broad coverage of both internationally peer-reviewed and Indonesian nationally accredited

scholarship (Fathurrochman et al., 2025; Istianti et al., 2025). The search was conducted using keyword combinations in both English and Indonesian, namely: "local wisdom," "early childhood education," "character building," "education policy Indonesia," "Kurikulum Merdeka," "Profil Pelajar Pancasila," "kearifan lokal PAUD," and "pendidikan karakter anak usia dini." These keywords were combined using Boolean operators (AND/OR) to maximize the relevance and comprehensiveness of retrieved results, following best practices in literature review methodology (Darmalaksana, 2020). Articles were subjected to a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria: included sources were peer-reviewed publications from the last ten years (2015–2026), focused specifically on the Indonesian ECE context, and engaged substantively with themes of cultural values, local wisdom, and/or national education policy; excluded were studies focused on higher education levels, non-Indonesian sociocultural contexts, and purely quantitative studies that did not address policy or cultural dimensions. A final corpus of 19 articles and book sources met these criteria and formed the evidential basis of this review.

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis procedure, which is a widely validated method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns, or themes, across a body of qualitative literature in education research (Abdussamad & Sik, 2021; Kusumastuti & Khoiron, 2019). Each selected source was first read in full and annotated according to its central argument, research context, methodology, and key findings. Codes were then assigned inductively to meaningful units of text, for instance, passages describing policy mechanisms, pedagogical strategies, teacher constraints, or community roles, before being grouped into broader analytical themes. Three primary thematic clusters emerged from this coding process: (1) policy alignment, examining the degree to which frameworks such as Kurikulum Merdeka and the Profil Pelajar Pancasila formally accommodate local wisdom in ECE (Rasidi & Istiningsih, 2025; Fathurrochman et al., 2025); (2) pedagogical practices and models, documenting how schools and teachers operationalize local wisdom integration through specific approaches such as ethnopedagogy, art-based activities, and culturally responsive curricula (Ernawati et al., 2018; Leonia et al., 2025; Sakti et al., 2024); and (3) challenges and structural gaps, capturing the systemic obstacles, including teacher preparation deficits, the absence of clear implementation guidelines, and tension between Western developmental norms and indigenous epistemologies, that impede the full realization of this integration. This thematic synthesis approach enabled a structured yet flexible interpretation of the literature, allowing for both cross-source comparison and nuanced recognition of the contextual

variability inherent in Indonesia's diverse regional ECE landscape (Jaedun & Manaf, 2020; Pratiwi et al., 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theme 1: Manifestations of Local Wisdom in ECE Character Building

The body of literature reviewed consistently demonstrates that local wisdom in Indonesian ECE takes multiple tangible forms, each carrying embedded moral and social values that serve as natural vehicles for character development. Traditional games, collectively known as *dolanan anak*, represent one of the most prevalent and pedagogically rich manifestations. Games such as *engklek* (hopscotch), *gobak sodor*, and *jamuran* are not merely recreational; they require children to negotiate rules, exercise self-discipline, collaborate with peers, and show sportsmanship, directly cultivating values such as honesty, cooperation, responsibility, and tolerance (Leonia et al., 2025; Sakti et al., 2024). Research from Cirebon further confirms that institutionalized traditional practices, including sayings and local kinship values derived from cultural figures, instill piety, decency, and discipline in young children through daily structured routines (Ernawati et al., 2018). These findings align with the broader ethnopedagogical principle that cultural artifacts are not supplementary to education but are its most authentic content.

Folklore and storytelling (*dongeng*) constitute another major channel through which local wisdom is transmitted in ECE settings. Indigenous narratives carry moral frameworks embedded in recognizable cultural contexts, making abstract values such as empathy, justice, and humility concrete and memorable for young children (Fathurrochman et al., 2025). In Javanese communities, the principle of *unggah-ungguh*, a sophisticated system of linguistic and behavioral politeness calibrated to social relationships, is taught informally through story, song, and everyday classroom interaction, cultivating children's awareness of hierarchy, respect, and social sensitivity from an early age (Sakti, Endraswara, & Rohman, 2024). Similarly, in Sundanese communities, the tripartite philosophy of *silih asah, silih asih, silih asuh*, literally "to mutually sharpen, to mutually love, to mutually nurture", has been institutionalized in programs like "Rebo Nyunda" in West Java, which dedicates one day per week to Sundanese language, dress, and cultural practices as a form of intentional character education (Yulindrasari & Djoehaeni, 2019). These culturally specific practices demonstrate that the form of character education must be indigenized to be effective.

In Central Java and the Ex-Kedu Residency, empirical research employing structural equation modeling across 430 children at 24 ECE institutions confirmed that multiculturalism

and local wisdom provide a measurable foundation for character formation (Jaedun & Manaf, 2020). Meanwhile, in Bandung, the "Ngapem" tradition has been adapted into early childhood character education activities specifically to maintain national identity and foster patriotism, showing how even ceremonial local practices can be pedagogically repurposed without losing their cultural authenticity (Suratmi & Hartono, 2024). Arts-based activities, including traditional music, dance, and visual arts tied to local cultural motifs, have also emerged in the literature as powerful platforms for internalizing local wisdom because they engage children kinesthetically, emotionally, and socially at once (Leonia et al., 2025; Masdul et al., 2024). Taken together, these manifestations reveal a rich and varied ecosystem of local pedagogical resources that, when deliberately integrated into ECE, organically foster the character traits most valued by Indonesian society.

Table 1. Key Local Wisdom Practices and Associated Character Values in Indonesian ECE

| Local Wisdom Practice | Cultural Origin | Character Values Fostered | Source |
|--|-------------------------|---|---|
| Dolanan anak (engklek, gobak sodor, jamuran) | Java / National | Cooperation, discipline, sportsmanship, honesty | Sakti et al. (2024); Leonia et al. (2025) |
| Unggah-ungguh (politeness system) | Javanese | Respect, social sensitivity, humility | Sakti et al. (2024) |
| Silih asah, silih asih, silih asuh | Sundanese | Mutual care, empathy, nurturing | Yulindrasari & Djoehaeni (2019) |
| Rebo Nyunda program | West Java | Cultural identity, patriotism, solidarity | Yulindrasari & Djoehaeni (2019) |
| Ngapem tradition | Central Java/Yogyakarta | National identity, patriotism, social cohesion | Suratmi & Hartono (2024) |
| Traditional arts (music, dance, visual arts) | Regional / National | Creativity, cultural pride, collaboration | Leonia et al. (2025); Masdul et al. (2024) |
| Local kinship values (sayings of SGJ) | Cirebon | Piety, discipline, decency | Ernawati et al. (2018) |
| Folklore and dongeng (storytelling) | National / Regional | Empathy, justice, moral reasoning | Fathurrochman et al. (2025) |

Theme 2: The Framework of National Education Policy

The Profil Pelajar Pancasila (Pancasila Student Profile) constitutes the ideological and operational core of Indonesia's contemporary character education policy. Formally articulated within the Kurikulum Merdeka framework, it defines six interdependent dimensions that Indonesian learners, including ECE students, are expected to develop: (1) Beriman, Bertakwa kepada Tuhan Yang Maha Esa, dan Berakhlak Mulia (Faith, Piety, and Noble Character); (2) Berkebinekaan Global (Global Diversity); (3) Bergotong Royong (Mutual Cooperation); (4) Mandiri (Independence); (5) Bernalar Kritis (Critical Reasoning); and (6) Kreatif (Creativity) (Suratmi & Hartono, 2024). These six dimensions are not intended to be addressed in isolation; rather, national guidelines specify that they must be cultivated simultaneously and holistically as an integrated portrait of the Indonesian learner's identity. Significantly, a case study of PAUD Istiqomah found that five of the six dimensions were already measurably achieved through existing school programs, suggesting that the Profil Pelajar Pancasila is attainable within ECE settings when institutional commitment is present (Leonia et al., 2025; Masdul et al., 2024).

The most structurally innovative mechanism of Kurikulum Merdeka is its mandate for every school to develop a Kurikulum Operasional Satuan Pendidikan (KOSP), a localized operational curriculum adapted to the specific characteristics of the institution, its learners, and their socio-cultural environment (Fathurrochman et al., 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2025). This mechanism effectively decentralizes curricular authority to the institutional level, granting teachers and school leaders the agency to determine which local content, including local wisdom, traditional practices, and indigenous knowledge, is most relevant to their students' lived contexts. Additionally, Kurikulum Merdeka incorporates Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5), thematic, project-based learning units explicitly designed to deepen students' engagement with the dimensions of the Pancasila Profile through experiential, culturally embedded activities. The Merdeka Curriculum also organizes learning around broad thematic units, such as "I Love Indonesia", that structurally invite the integration of local cultural narratives, traditions, and community values into the formal curriculum (Masdul et al., 2024; Pratiwi et al., 2025; Rasidi & Istiningsih, 2025; Suratmi & Hartono, 2024).

The policy genealogy leading to Kurikulum Merdeka reflects a gradual yet deliberate shift in Indonesia's educational philosophy. The 2013 Curriculum first formally introduced character education as a curricular priority, while the Character Education Strengthening Movement (PPK) of 2015 institutionalized this commitment at the program level (Rasidi & Istiningsih, 2025). The Law on the National Education System (UU No. 20, 2003) had already

established the legal foundation for respecting cultural diversity within national education, mandating that local wisdoms and regional potential be incorporated into educational practice (Yulindrasari & Djoehaeni, 2019). More recently, three integration pathways have been identified for inserting local wisdom into Kurikulum Merdeka: as a standalone local content subject (muatan lokal), as cross-disciplinary enrichment embedded within core subjects, or as the thematic focus of P5 projects (Fathurrochman et al., 2025). This three-pathway architecture provides schools with flexibility in how they accommodate local wisdom, though, as later themes will reveal, the absence of standardized guidelines for each pathway generates significant variation in implementation quality across Indonesia's diverse regions (Hakim, 2024; Rambe & Pasaribu, 2025).

Table 2. Profil Pelajar Pancasila: Six Dimensions and Their Alignment with Local Wisdom Practices

| Dimension | Core Meaning | Aligned Practice | Local Wisdom | Source |
|-------------------------|--|---|-----------------------------------|---|
| Beriman Berakhlak Mulia | & Faith and noble moral character | Local religious Hajar Dewantara | kinship acculturation, philosophy | Masdul et al. (2024); Ki Ernawati et al. (2018) |
| Berkebinekaan Global | Appreciation of cultural diversity | Rebo Nyunda, character | Indigenous arts | Yulindrasari & Djoehaeni (2019); Jaedun & Manaf (2020) |
| Bergotong Royong | Mutual cooperation and collective action | Dolanan anak, asah/asih/asuh, royong values | silih gotong royong | Leonia et al. (2025); Yulindrasari & Djoehaeni (2019) |
| Mandiri | Self-reliance and personal initiative | Engklek, directed project learning | traditional arts, self-learning | Sakti et al. (2024); Pratiwi et al. (2025) |
| Bernalar Kritis | Critical and reflective thinking | Folklore analysis, problem-solving traditions | local traditions | Fathurrochman et al. (2025) |
| Kreatif | Creativity and innovative expression | Traditional visual arts, local craft-making | music, dance, local craft-making | Leonia et al. (2025); Masdul et al. (2024) |

Theme 3: The Synergy, Where Policy Meets Practice

The literature provides compelling empirical evidence that Kurikulum Merdeka's policy architecture and local wisdom-based pedagogical practices can and do converge productively when institutional conditions are favorable. Project-based learning (PBL) within P5 has emerged as the most consistently documented mechanism for this convergence: schools in diverse regions have utilized PBL units focused on local cultural themes, such as traditional craft production, community storytelling festivals, and indigenous ecological knowledge, to simultaneously address multiple dimensions of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila in a single learning experience (Suratmi & Hartono, 2024). A study from rural Indonesia found that teachers who embraced the KOSP mandate reported a "renewed sense of ownership" over their curriculum, using local wisdom narratives, cultural practices, and community-based projects to create learning experiences that resonated deeply with children's everyday lives (Pratiwi et al., 2025). This alignment between policy flexibility and cultural authenticity represents the most promising dimension of Kurikulum Merdeka's implementation in Indonesian ECE.

Local wisdom functions as a uniquely effective contextual vehicle for the Profil Pelajar Pancasila's abstract aspirations precisely because it makes values visible, embodied, and emotionally meaningful for young children. The dimension of Berkebinekaan Global, for example, is most powerfully cultivated not through abstract lessons about diversity but through participatory engagement with one's own cultural heritage, a principle demonstrated by the Rebo Nyunda program's success in building cultural pride alongside tolerance (Yulindrasari & Djoehaeni, 2019). Similarly, the bergotong royong dimension is far more effectively internalized through cooperative traditional games or community harvest rituals than through decontextualized classroom instruction (Leonia et al., 2025). The integration models identified by Fathurrochman et al. (2025), Direct (local wisdom as the primary content), Parallel (local wisdom taught alongside national content), and Complementary (local wisdom enriching existing units), provide a practical taxonomy for how schools can calibrate their synergy strategies to their institutional capacity and cultural context. These models have been proposed as replicable frameworks that could inform educational reform in other culturally diverse developing nations.

The literature consistently foregrounds teachers and community members as indispensable cultural mediators in this synergy. Teachers, particularly those with deep personal ties to local traditions, play a dual role: as curriculum designers who translate national policy into culturally relevant learning experiences, and as living embodiments of local values

whose modeling behavior is central to character education (Ernawati et al., 2018; Pratiwi et al., 2025). The philosophy of Ki Hajar Dewantara, Ing Ngarso Sing Tulodo (lead by example), Ing Madya Mangun Karso (inspire in the middle), Tut Wuri Handayani (support from behind), has been adopted by Indonesian education policy as the conceptual spirit animating this teacher role, explicitly integrating indigenous educational philosophy into the national policy framework. Beyond teachers, the literature highlights the critical importance of traditional leaders (tokoh adat), parents, and community elders as sources of cultural knowledge and accountability in ECE programs. The most successful programs documented in the literature, from Cirebon's kinship-based ECE to Yogyakarta's ethnopedagogical preschool, are uniformly characterized by a robust, trust-based collaboration between school and community ((Ernawati et al., 2018; Masdul et al., 2024; Rambe & Pasaribu, 2025; Sakti et al., 2024; Yusuf et al., 2025).

Theme 4: Challenges and Barriers to Implementation

Despite the evident potential of local wisdom integration, the literature converges on a consistent set of structural and pedagogical barriers that limit its systematic realization across Indonesian ECE. Teacher competency is the most frequently cited challenge: multiple studies report that the majority of ECE educators lack adequate training in identifying, pedagogically translating, and contextually applying local wisdom within the curricular structures of Kurikulum Merdeka (Istianti et al., 2025; Rambe & Pasaribu, 2025). A study developing local wisdom-based KOSP in kindergartens found that teachers explicitly reported difficulty translating abstract local wisdom concepts into concrete activities appropriate for early childhood developmental stages, with one teacher acknowledging, "Sometimes we have difficulty associating local values with concrete activities that children can understand" (Pratiwi et al., 2025). Quantitative data further corroborates this: research involving local wisdom-based modules found that 62.5% of surveyed teachers made no attempt to connect their teaching with local wisdom, and 75% did not employ any ethnoscience or culturally based pedagogical approach, despite reporting high theoretical support for such integration (Istianti et al., 2025).

The scarcity of locally relevant teaching materials, official guidelines, and institutional resources constitutes a second major barrier. Unlike national curriculum subjects that benefit from centrally produced textbooks and standardized teaching aids, local wisdom-based ECE requires the development of bespoke materials tailored to each region's specific cultural landscape, a resource-intensive task that most institutions lack the capacity to undertake

independently (Firdausy et al., 2024; Rambe & Pasaribu, 2025). For Indigenous communities specifically, this gap is most acute: the national education system has historically produced materials reflecting dominant Javanese or Western cultural paradigms, rendering them pedagogically irrelevant, or even culturally alienating, for children in Papua, Kalimantan, or other regions with distinct indigenous identities. The decentralized governance structure that theoretically enables local innovation in practice creates an uneven landscape: wealthier, better-staffed urban institutions in cities like Jakarta can leverage local autonomy to develop rich KOSP, while rural and remote ECE institutions are left without the human or financial resources to do the same. Hakim's (2024) case study of DKI Jakarta explicitly documents this disparity, showing that local authority capacity, not just national policy design, is a critical determinant of implementation quality.

The tension between cultural diversity and the demand for standardized assessment represents a third, structurally deeper challenge that existing policy has not yet resolved. The Profil Pelajar Pancasila articulates universal character outcomes, but the pedagogical pathways through which different regions pursue those outcomes, rooted in radically different local wisdom traditions, are inherently incomparable using uniform metrics (Adriany, 2026; Jaedun & Manaf, 2020). National child development standards (STPPA No. 137/2014) have been criticized for embedding Western developmentalist assumptions, particularly Piagetian stage theory, that impose a universalized cognitive developmental timeline on children from vastly different cultural environments. Even within the domain of character assessment, empirical research found that two indicators, sincerity (*keikhlasan*) and discipline, were statistically non-significant in an empirical model of character education in Central Java, suggesting that what constitutes measurable character expression varies meaningfully across cultural contexts. This diversity-versus-standardization tension is not merely a technical measurement problem; it reflects a deeper epistemological conflict between the universalist assumptions of national policy and the particularity inherent in local wisdom traditions (Adriany, 2026; Firdausy et al., 2024).

Table 3. Summary of Implementation Challenges and Their Primary Sources

| Challenge Category | Specific Barrier | Key Sources |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| Teacher Competency | Insufficient training in local wisdom pedagogy | Rambe & Pasaribu (2025); Istianti et al. (2025) |
| Teacher Competency | Difficulty translating local concepts for young children | Pratiwi et al. (2025) |
| Resource Limitations | Lack of locally relevant teaching materials | Firdausy et al. (2024); Rambe & Pasaribu (2025) |
| Resource Limitations | No standardized policy guidelines for KOSP development | Rambe & Pasaribu (2025); Hakim (2024) |
| Governance Gaps | Urban-rural disparity in institutional capacity | Hakim (2024) |
| Cultural Marginalization | National materials reflecting dominant cultural paradigms | Firdausy et al. (2024); Adriany (2026) |
| Assessment Standardization | Universal metrics incompatible with diverse cultural expressions | Jaedun & Manaf (2020); Adriany (2026) |
| Epistemological Conflict | Western developmentalism embedded in STPPA standards | Adriany (2026) |

Theme 5: Opportunities and Recommendations for the Future

The literature, while documenting significant challenges, simultaneously points to a set of promising opportunities that policymakers, educators, and communities can leverage to strengthen the integration of local wisdom in Indonesian ECE. The most consistently recommended intervention is the systematic strengthening of collaboration among ECE institutions, local governments, and cultural custodians, including traditional leaders (tokoh adat), community elders, and parents. Rambe & Pasaribu (2025) explicitly recommend that policymakers prioritize adequate teacher training, foster close school-community partnerships, and develop supporting infrastructure as an integrated reform package. Studies from Yogyakarta and Cirebon demonstrate that schools which have institutionalized structured collaboration with community cultural figures produce richer, more authentic local wisdom integration than those operating in institutional isolation (Ernawati et al., 2018; Sakti et al., 2024). The parent-teacher collaborative model documented by Yusuf, Pajarianto, & Sulaiman

(2025), where teachers implement cultural values structurally through curriculum and parents reinforce them at home, offers a particularly replicable model for bridging the school-community divide.

The development of flexible, culturally sensitive evaluation metrics represents a second critical opportunity. Current national assessment frameworks measure character development against universal benchmarks that fail to capture the diversity of its cultural expressions across Indonesia's 300+ ethnic groups (Adriany, 2026; Jaedun & Manaf, 2020). Scholars advocate for portfolio-based, ethnographic, and narrative assessment approaches that document children's character development within their own cultural frameworks, allowing, for instance, a Batak child's expression of *dalihan na tolu* (solidarity) or a Bugis child's demonstration of *siri' na pacce* (honor and social solidarity) to count as evidence of the *bergotong royong* dimension without forcing these expressions into a single standardized rubric (Firdaussy et al., 2024; Istianti et al., 2025). The three integration models proposed by Fathurrochman et al. (2025), Direct, Parallel, and Complementary, could serve as the basis for a differentiated national assessment framework that acknowledges diverse pathways to the same character outcomes. Istianti et al. (2025) further propose bridging frameworks that explicitly connect traditional values with modern pedagogical standards, providing a theoretical scaffold for this kind of culturally responsive assessment innovation.

A third cluster of opportunities lies in digital documentation, knowledge systematization, and inter-regional learning exchange. The vast reservoir of Indonesia's local wisdom traditions remains largely undocumented and inaccessible to ECE practitioners, particularly in remote regions, a gap that digital archiving and open-access platforms could begin to address. Critically, scholars call for a fundamental paradigm shift in how Indonesia conceptualizes the relationship between global and local in ECE, moving away from the assumption that Western developmental frameworks are the neutral standard to which local practice must conform, and toward a decolonized, culturally affirmative epistemology that positions Indonesia's diverse wisdom traditions as legitimate, rigorous knowledge systems in their own right (Adriany, 2026; Yulindrasari & Djoehaeni, 2019). The spirit of the 1955 Bandung Conference, with its assertion of non-Western agency and solidarity, has been invoked as a historical and philosophical foundation for this reimagining of Indonesian childhood studies (Adriany, 2026). Realizing this vision will require not only policy reform but also a sustained investment in teacher professional development, community empowerment, and the

institutional courage to treat *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* as a genuine educational principle rather than a ceremonial motto.

CONCLUSION

The integration of local wisdom into Indonesian Early Childhood Education represents a vital pedagogical strategy for cultivating deeply rooted, contextually meaningful character development. As this integrative review has demonstrated, the recent shifts in national education policy, most notably the flexibility afforded by *Kurikulum Merdeka* and the holistic character aspirations of the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*, provide an unprecedented structural opportunity to formalize these grassroots cultural practices. Manifestations of local wisdom, ranging from *dolanan anak* (traditional games) to indigenous storytelling and ethnopedagogical principles, effectively operationalize abstract national values like *bergotong royong* (mutual cooperation) and *berkebinekaan global* (global diversity). When implemented through frameworks like Project-Based Learning (P5) and localized operational curricula (KOSP), local wisdom transitions from being a mere cultural relic to functioning as a dynamic, lived curriculum that resonates deeply with young learners' everyday realities and community identities.

However, the realization of this synergy is substantially hindered by systemic barriers, primarily the inadequacy of teacher preparation in culturally responsive pedagogy and a profound scarcity of localized educational resources. Furthermore, a deeper epistemological tension persists between the diverse expressions of character rooted in over 300 ethnic groups and the universalized, often Western-centric, developmental metrics currently dominating national assessment standards. To overcome these challenges, future educational efforts must prioritize comprehensive teacher training, establish stronger school-community partnerships, and champion the creation of flexible, culturally sensitive assessment frameworks that validate diverse expressions of moral development. Ultimately, unlocking the full potential of Indonesian ECE requires a fundamental paradigm shift: moving beyond treating *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* as a symbolic motto, and instead fully embracing Indonesia's rich tapestry of local wisdom as the central epistemological foundation for national character building.

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