

Integration of Cultural Values in Character Education for Responsibility in Early Childhood: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Character education, particularly the value of responsibility, is a crucial foundation for personality formation in early childhood amid digital disruption that risks weakening social interaction and the internalization of local values. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of integrating local cultural values in shaping responsible character and children's socio-emotional skills, while also formulating a conceptual model for this integration. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method guided by PRISMA 2020, the search was conducted in the Scopus database (10 May 2026) using the keywords local wisdom, cultural value, character education, responsibility, and early childhood, yielding 13 selected articles (2023–2026). The findings show that the internalization of local wisdom through traditional games (Dakon, Gobag Sodor, Balinese games), socioculturally adaptive bibliotherapy, and local educational philosophies (the teachings of Ki Hadjar Dewantara, the Kauna character) effectively enhances children's responsibility, cooperation, and emotional regulation when pedagogically mediated in accordance with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Lickona's character education model. Three main clusters were identified: (1) curricula based on local wisdom, (2) reconstruction of classroom climate through creative media, and (3) sociocultural determinants and the strengthening of educators' cultural competence. The novelty of this research lies in formulating a conceptual model that integrates local culture with sociocultural theory in a manner responsive to the digital era, with the implication that early childhood education (PAUD) curricula need to combine local wisdom with digital literacy so that the formation of responsible character remains contextual and relevant to the times.

Keywords: Early Childhood; Cultural Value Integration; Local Wisdom; Character Education; Responsibility.

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INTRODUCTION

Character education is not a new topic in the world of education, since issues of character or morality have been a central concern for centuries and have drawn strong attention from governments, given that character education contributes to determining the quality of individuals, nations, and states (Ardiyanti & Khairiah, 2021). Character education in early childhood is highly important because this period is a critical time in the formation of behaviors and moral values that will shape a child's personality in the future (Afnan et al., 2024). The goal of character education is to shape personality so that children can act, behave, and possess manners, morals, and good habits in line with religious values, Pancasila, culture, and the goals of national education (Halisa et al., 2025). Responsible character is an essential value that needs to be instilled from an early age in facing future life challenges, namely a person's attitude and behavior in carrying out their duties and obligations as they should (Lailia et al., 2025).

The urgency of strengthening responsible character is becoming increasingly evident amid the digital disruption faced by young children today. The 2024 Early Childhood Profile published by the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2024) reports that 37.02% of children aged 1–4 years and 58.25% of children aged 5–6 years in Indonesia have used a mobile phone, while 33.80% and 51.19% of them, respectively, have accessed the internet independently, with digital exposure occurring well before children have the cognitive and socio-emotional maturity to filter it. The Disrupting Harm in Indonesia study conducted by UNICEF together with ECPAT International and INTERPOL (2022) further found that 42% of children aged 8–18 years had felt uncomfortable or frightened due to online experiences, and at least 2% of children aged 12–17 years had been victims of coercion, extortion, or online sexual exploitation.

In line with this, the Indonesian Commission for Child Protection (KPAI, 2024) recorded 41 cases of children who were victims of pornography and cybercrime during that year, alongside 265 cases of child sexual abuse, with toddlers (aged 1–5 years) as the largest group of victims (581 cases), largely triggered by low digital literacy and weak supervision from parents and schools (DPR RI, 2025). This phenomenon indicates that uncontrolled digital exposure from an early age risks eroding children's internalization of social values and responsibility toward themselves and their environment, making character strengthening based on local wisdom increasingly relevant as a cultural counter-narrative amid the tide of digital globalization.

Theoretically, this study is grounded in two main frameworks. First, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), which asserts that children's cognitive and moral development cannot be separated from social interaction and the use of cultural tools, including language, traditional games, and local narratives, as media that mediate the relationship between children and their social environment. Second, Lickona's character education model (1991), which formulates character formation as a three-dimensional process, namely moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The combination of these two frameworks provides an analytical lens for understanding how local cultural

values, as tools of sociocultural mediation, can holistically nurture all three dimensions of responsible character.

Practical implementation through traditional games and educational philosophies, such as the teachings of Ki Hadjar Dewantara, has been shown to create a holistic learning ecosystem for developing empathy and cooperation (Lathifah et al., 2025). In addition, the use of culturally adaptive media, such as bibliotherapy, functions as a “mirror” that strengthens children's resilience and self-understanding of their roles and responsibilities (Hull et al., 2025).

A number of studies have paid attention to this issue from various perspectives. (Syahria A Sakti, Endraswara, & Rohman, 2024), through a systematic literature review, showed that local cultural values such as gotong royong (mutual cooperation) have universal relevance in shaping responsible character and tolerance in early childhood. In line with this, Halisa et al (2025) specifically examined the implementation of local-wisdom-based character education at a kindergarten, while Lathifah et al (2025) demonstrated that traditional games grounded in the philosophy of Ki Hadjar Dewantara effectively foster children's empathy and cooperation. From the perspective of educators' roles, Arifiyanti et al (2025) highlighted the strategies of kindergarten teachers in Indonesia for developing children's prosocial behavior, while et al (2026) showed that a character development program based on the indigenous “Kauna” culture can strengthen the emotional relationship between teachers and students. In another domain, Hull et al (2025) showed how culturally adapted bibliotherapy functions to strengthen children's resilience through self-identification with local narratives.

These studies share a common starting point, namely the belief that cultural values and local wisdom play an important role in shaping early childhood character, and each provides empirical evidence that enriches understanding of this phenomenon. However, each study tends to remain confined to one specific domain: Sakti et al (2024) focused on mapping cultural values in general without explicitly linking them to a particular developmental theoretical framework; Halisa et al (2025) and Lathifah et al (2025) are case studies or descriptive works within a single local context without systematically synthesizing findings across the literature; Arifiyanti et al (2025) and Korb et al (2026) place teachers as the main unit of analysis rather than the process of character internalization within the child; while Hull et al (2025) address a different Pacific cultural context and emphasize resilience rather than the dimension of responsibility specifically. No deliberate effort has yet been found to weave Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Lickona's three-dimensional model into a single coherent synthetic framework, while also taking into account the pressures of the digital era that now also shape the landscape of children's development.

Based on this mapping of the literature, this article was developed through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to map the extent to which local cultural values have been integrated into early childhood curricula, while also formulating a conceptual model that bridges Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Lickona's character education model into a single applicable framework for shaping responsible character that is responsive to the digital context. Thus, the contribution offered does not stop at reaffirming the importance of local wisdom as previous studies have done, but rather lies in developing an integrated

conceptual framework that can serve as a practical reference for designing local-wisdom-based early childhood education curricula amid the challenges of the times.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design following the PRISMA 2020 protocol (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) to ensure transparency and replicability of the article selection process. Data searches were conducted in the Scopus database (10 May 2026) using a combination of the keywords “local wisdom”, “cultural value*”, “indigenous knowledge”, “character education”, “responsibility”, “moral development”, “early childhood”, “preschool”, and “kindergarten”, combined with the Boolean operators: (“local wisdom” OR “cultural value*” OR “indigenous knowledge”) AND (“character education” OR “responsibility” OR “moral development”) AND (“early childhood” OR “preschool” OR “kindergarten”). The search was restricted to the years 2023–2026, document type of journal article, English language, and open access status.

The inclusion criteria were: (1) empirical articles or systematic reviews on the integration of cultural values/local wisdom in the education or character development of young children (0–8 years); (2) published between 2023–2026; (3) written in English; (4) open access status; (5) indexed in Scopus. The exclusion criteria were: (1) no conceptual relevance to cultural values or children's responsible character; (2) conference proceedings, editorials, or opinion pieces; (3) full text not accessible.

Article Screening and Selection Process

Article selection followed the four stages of PRISMA 2020, namely: (1) Identification: the initial search in the Scopus database yielded 306 records based on the keywords above. (2) Screening: records were automatically filtered by year, document type, language, and accessibility, followed by manual title-abstract screening by two independent reviewers. (3) Eligibility assessment: articles that passed screening were assessed in full text based on the inclusion-exclusion criteria; disagreements in assessment were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached. (4) Inclusion: a final review of thematic relevance excluded one article (Lu et al., 2026) that focused on the clinical diagnosis of pneumonia, resulting in 13 final articles for qualitative and descriptive quantitative analysis.

Data Synthesis Method

Data (title, authors, year, method, key findings, and conclusion) were extracted into a synthesis matrix (Table 1) and analyzed using narrative thematic synthesis through three stages: line-by-line coding, development of descriptive themes, and development of analytical themes based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Lickona's character model. This process produced three main thematic clusters, namely (1) local-wisdom-based curricula and learning strategies, (2) reconstruction of classroom climate and creative media, and (3) sociocultural determinants and supporting ecosystems for character formation,

which were subsequently synthesized into the conceptual model in Figure 1 (see Results and Discussion).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on a systematic search using the PRISMA 2020 protocol in the Scopus database, 13 final articles were obtained that met all inclusion criteria and thematic relevance to the integration of cultural values and responsible character in early childhood (Table 1). One article that was initially included in the preliminary search results, a study on the clinical diagnosis of pneumonia in children (Lu et al., 2026), was excluded from the final synthesis because it fell outside the conceptual scope of character education and cultural values, as noted in the Methods section. To provide a comprehensive picture of research trends, methods, and the substance of the findings from each article, structured data extraction was carried out and is presented in the form of a synthesis matrix in Table 1.

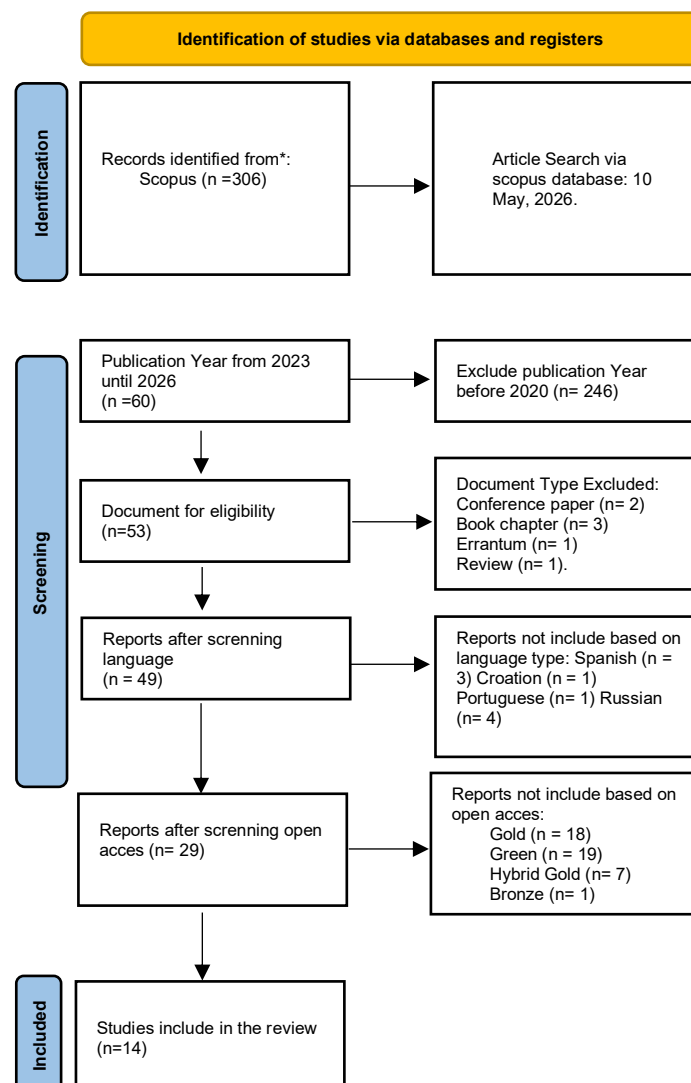


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram

Table 1. Article Synthesis Matrix

No	Article Title	Author (Year)	Method	Key Findings	Conclusion
1	<i>The Role of Principal Leadership Management as a Driving Force in Implementing the Independent Curriculum Using AI</i>	Yuni et al (2025)	Qualitative (Interviews & Observation)	School principal leadership is the main driving force in adopting AI technology for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in early childhood education.	School innovation depends on the principal's managerial ability to facilitate technology training for teachers.
2	<i>Strategies of Indonesian Kindergarten Teachers for Developing Children's Prosocial Behaviour</i>	Arifiyanti et al (2025)	Qualitative (Virtual Interviews)	91.8% of teachers reported challenges in children's prosocial behavior and identified the collaborative model as the most effective development strategy.	Collaborative learning is a key strategy for strengthening children's values of sharing and cooperation in Indonesia.
3	<i>Implementation of Traditional Games Based on Ki Hadjar Dewantara's Philosophy to Develop Social Skills in Early Childhood</i>	Lathifah et al (2025)	Descriptive Qualitative	Traditional games (Dakon, Gobag Sodor) applied with KHD's philosophy effectively enhance children's empathy and cooperation.	Integrating Ki Hadjar Dewantara's teachings through traditional games creates a holistic learning ecosystem.
4	<i>Kauna: Enhancing the Teacher-Student Relationship Through Indigenous Character-Based Professional Development</i>	Korb et al (2026)	Experimental (55 educators)	The local-culture-based "Kauna" character development program significantly enhances teachers' affection and social intelligence.	Local-wisdom-based teacher training strengthens the emotional and pedagogical relationship between teachers and students.
5	<i>Integrating Local Cultural Values into Early Childhood Education to Promote Character Building</i>	Sakti et al (2024)	Systematic Literature Review (SLR)	Local cultural values (such as gotong royong) have strong universal relevance in shaping responsible character and tolerance.	Early childhood curricula that integrate local culture accelerate the internalization of positive character values in children.
6	<i>Effectiveness of Motor Learning Model Based on Local Wisdom in Improving Fundamental Skills</i>	Yoda et al (2024)	Descriptive Quantitative	The Balinese-traditional-game-based motor learning model (MLMBLW) achieved a very high effectiveness rate (81.3%).	Using local wisdom in physical activities effectively improves gross motor skills while preserving cultural identity.
7	<i>Mirrors for Pacific Islander Children:</i>	Hull et al (2025)	Mixed Methods	Children showed increased resilience	Culturally adaptive literacy functions

No	Article Title	Author (Year)	Method	Key Findings	Conclusion
	<i>Teaching Resilience Through Culturally Adapted Bibliotherapy</i>			when reading materials (bibliotherapy) reflected their identity and cultural background.	as a “mirror” that strengthens children’s mental health and resilience.
8	<i>Stories 'with the Characters Reversed': Children's Opinions of Feminist Children's Stories in Early Education</i>	Martínez-García et al (2023)	Qualitative (Ethnography)	Children tend to engage in “boundary maintenance work” by correcting feminist stories to align them back with traditional gender norms.	Educators need to be aware of the “hidden curriculum” and critically guide children when using non-traditional literature.
9	<i>Movement Language as a Means for Preschoolers to Embody a Motor-Plastic Image</i>	Gorshkova (2023)	Theoretical & Diagnostic Review	Movement language (motor-plastic) enables children aged 3-7 years to express artistic and cognitive imagery non-verbally.	The development of children’s creative abilities can be optimized through mastery of cultural means in the form of structured plastic movement.
10	<i>Cultural-Historical Approach to Preschoolers' Dance Creativity: Problems and Solutions</i>	Gorshkova (2023)	Theoretical Review (Vygotskian)	Dance creativity is viewed as a process of cultural mediation in which children learn to use symbolic tools (movement) to express themselves.	Dance in early childhood education is not merely a physical activity, but rather the development of higher psychological functions through body language.
11	<i>Humorous Potential of Board Games for Children of Senior Preschool Age</i>	Rudenskiy et al (2024)	Qualitative (Observation)	Elements of humor in board games create a positive classroom microclimate and reduce children’s learning anxiety.	Board games have great potential in developing children’s emotional intelligence through enjoyable interaction.
12	<i>Attributions Towards Shyness and Unsociability in Argentinian Children from Different Social Contexts</i>	Castillo et al (2023)	Quantitative (Vignette)	Children from vulnerable social environments tend to attribute negative traits to withdrawn (shy) peers.	The sociocultural environment strongly influences how children perceive and respond to peers’ social behavior.
13	<i>Defining Quality of Preventive Oral Health Services in a Northern First Nations</i>	Brown-Walkus, et al. (2023)	Concept Mapping	The quality of children’s dental health services is determined by the cultural competence of	Preventive health services for children in indigenous

No	Article Title	Author (Year)	Method	Key Findings	Conclusion
	Community: A Concept Mapping Study			service providers and mutual trust with the community.	communities must be based on local values and needs to be effective.

It should be emphasized that the articles by (Castillo et al., 2023) and Brown-Walkus et al. (2023), although not directly addressing Indonesian local cultural wisdom, remain relevant because each reveals the role of sociocultural determinants in children's social perception, which contributes to emotional regulation and social responsibility, as well as the importance of cultural competence within the ecosystem supporting children's well-being. Both aspects conceptually underpin the formation of responsible character within Vygotsky's sociocultural framework, making their inclusion in the synthesis justified.

Local-Wisdom-Based Curriculum and Learning Strategies

An analysis of the studies by Sakti et al (2024), Lathifah et al (2025), and (Yoda et al., 2024) reveals empirical convergence on the importance of integrating local cultural values into early childhood curriculum design. The values of gotong royong (mutual cooperation) and togetherness embedded through traditional games (such as Dakon, Gobag Sodor, and traditional Balinese games) have proven to be not merely a medium for preserving cultural heritage, but also act as an effective instrument of stimulation. The MLMBLW model developed by Yoda et al. (2024) recorded an effectiveness rate of 81.3%, confirming that children's gross motor learning develops optimally when packaged within physical activities close to their sociocultural environment. From Vygotsky's perspective (1978), traditional games function as a cultural tool that mediates the internalization of collective values through guided participation between the child and the educator/caregiver as a more knowledgeable other, allowing the abstract value of responsibility to be understood concretely and contextually by the child. This aligns with Ki Hadjar Dewantara's philosophy, which emphasizes the Tri-N principle (Niteni, Nirokke, Nambahake) within a holistic learning ecosystem.

Classroom Climate Reconstruction, Emotional Regulation, and Creative Media

Aspects of emotional stimulation and creativity in early childhood are explored in depth by (Gorshkova, 2023, 2025) and (Rudenskiy et al., 2024). The use of movement language and expressive dance (motor-plastic imagery) is positioned as a tool of symbolic mediation (a Vygotskian approach) that transforms casual body movement into a meaningful means of non-verbal communication. Alongside movement arts, the creation of an inclusive classroom climate is supported by the use of board games infused with humor. This element of humor has scientifically been shown to reduce children's instructional anxiety, allowing children to build emotional intelligence and social bonds with peers in a relaxed and positive psychological condition. This process is consistent with the moral feeling dimension in Lickona's model (1991), in which a positive emotional climate becomes a prerequisite for children to internalize values affectively before they are manifested in consistent responsible action (moral action).

Sociocultural Determinants and Supporting Ecosystems for Character Formation

The environment in which children grow up has a significant impact on how they perceive the social world. The study by Castillo et al (2023) provides critical findings that children from socioeconomically vulnerable backgrounds tend to give negative evaluations of shy peers, indicating harsher social adaptation pressure in marginalized environments. To mitigate this psychosocial pressure, literacy interventions in the form of culturally adapted bibliotherapy have proven effective as an identity “mirror” that strengthens children's resilience and coping abilities Hull et al (2025). However, in the use of children's literature, educators are required to be critical (Martínez-García et al., 2023) in order to dismantle the hidden curriculum that may perpetuate conventional gender bias in children.

At the macro-ecosystem level, Yuni et al (2025) and Korb et al (2026) emphasize that teachers and principals are the main drivers of educational innovation. A local-character-based (Kauna) professional development program can boost teachers' pedagogical empathy capacity, in line with the demands of digital-based (AI) management under the Merdeka Curriculum. In line with this, Brown-Walkus et al (2023) affirm that preventive child health services in indigenous communities will only succeed if medical personnel possess a high level of cultural competence a principle that is conceptually consistent with the importance of educators' cultural competence within the ecosystem supporting early childhood character formation.

Challenges in Implementing Local Wisdom in the Digital Era

Although the evidence above confirms the effectiveness of integrating local cultural values, its implementation in the field is not free from the structural challenges of the digital era. Massive exposure to gadgets and digital content risks shifting children's preferences away from socially interactive traditional games toward more solitary digital activities, thereby reducing the space for social interaction that is a prerequisite for sociocultural mediation according to Vygotsky. On the other hand, gaps in educators' digital literacy also constitute an obstacle to presenting a hybrid approach that creatively and meaningfully combines local wisdom with digital media. Therefore, the future success of local culture integration cannot be separated from the readiness of a contextual digital ecosystem, rather than positioning local culture and digital technology as two opposing poles.

Conceptual Model for Integrating Cultural Values in Character Education

The synthesis of the findings above leads to the formulation of a conceptual model for integrating local cultural values into responsible character education for early childhood. This model depicts the flow: (1) local cultural values as cultural tools input; (2) pedagogical mediation by educators/parents as a more knowledgeable other through curricula, games, and creative media; (3) the process of character internalization through Lickona's three dimensions (moral knowing, feeling, action); to (4) outputs in the form of responsible character, cooperation, and emotional regulation, all of which are moderated by the readiness of the supporting ecosystem and the challenges of the digital era.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review using the PRISMA 2020 protocol successfully synthesized 13 recent scientific articles (2023–2026) indicating a paradigm shift in early childhood education research toward sociocultural integration, local wisdom, and the strengthening of supporting ecosystems. Character formation, motor stimulation, and the strengthening of resilience in early childhood have been shown to achieve

optimal results when rooted in local cultural values and supported by culturally responsive pedagogical competence among teachers, as explained through the combination of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Lickona's character education model in the conceptual model formulated in this study.

Theoretically, this study contributes by bridging Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Lickona's character education model into a single applicable conceptual framework, which has so far not been widely and explicitly integrated in systematic studies of local-wisdom-based early childhood education.

This study has several limitations. First, the article search was conducted in only one database (Scopus), which may have missed relevant literature in other databases such as Web of Science, ERIC, or Indonesian national repositories (Garuda, Sinta). Second, restricting the search to English-language articles risks eliminating studies on Indonesian local wisdom published in Indonesian. Third, the heterogeneity of research designs among the reviewed articles (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods) limits the possibility of conducting a more statistically precise meta-analytic synthesis.

Furthermore, this study offers strategic recommendations for policymakers and early childhood education practitioners to: (1) Design early childhood curricula that explicitly integrate traditional games and local cultural philosophy. (2) Expand educator training programs with content on socio-emotional competence and understanding of indigenous culture. (3) Build cross-sectoral synergy among early childhood institutions, indigenous communities, and child health service centers to ensure the fulfillment of children's rights to holistic, safe, and contextual growth and development. (4) Develop a hybrid approach that combines local wisdom with digital literacy so that the formation of responsible character remains relevant to the challenges of the times.

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