

Habituation of Likurai Cultural Values as an Instrument for Student Character Education in Schools on the Indonesia–Timor Leste Border

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ABSTRACT:

This study aims to describe how local cultural values, particularly the Likurai dance, are internalized as part of student character education in schools on the Indonesia-Timor Leste border. Likurai culture, as one of the cultural heritages of border communities, contains various character values such as peace, togetherness, discipline, responsibility, and love of the homeland. This research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Atambua, using a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques in the form of in-depth interviews, literature studies, and documentation studies without direct observation. Informants in this study consisted of teachers, principals, students, and traditional leaders. The results show that Likurai culture is understood by the school community not only as traditional art, but also as a means of instilling contextual and meaningful character values. The habituation process is carried out through extracurricular activities, ceremonies, and the integration of cultural values into learning, especially social studies learning. Obstacles faced include limited resources and a lack of attention to local culture in formal school policies, while support comes from the local community and traditional institutions that have developed around the school environment. This study concludes that local culture such as Likurai has great potential to become an instrument of character education, especially the character of nationalism and conflict resolution that is relevant and contextual to the context of the Indonesian-Timor Leste border region.

Keywords: Likurai culture, character education, border schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

Character education is a crucial aspect in shaping students' personalities, leading them to become individuals with noble morals, responsibility, and a love for the nation's culture. Education is not merely about transferring knowledge but also about developing SMART students. Being smart alone is not enough. A balance between academic ability and character is essential. Character is even a key asset in building a nation (Ginting, 2024). Therefore, character traits such as discipline, responsibility, and tolerance are crucial in schools, especially in junior high school, as students are at this stage in the development of their identity and moral values, which will influence their future behavior.

Schools have a strategic role in instilling character values through various approaches, including through the integration of local culture amidst the currents of globalization and the challenges of today's era. Therefore, according to (Andriani Ana & Agung Nugroho, 2023), schools are expected to not only teach brain knowledge, but also teach the values of human life that are considered necessary. Hermino et al (2020), schools can internalize values such as honesty, responsibility, tolerance and

social care through integration in the curriculum both in subjects and extracurricular activities. Contextual learning that emphasizes local culture makes these values easier to understand and internalize for students. Related to that, (Karsiwan, Lisa Retnosari , Anita Lisdiana, 2020), character that can be formed through education based on local wisdom such as the values of honesty, tolerance, cooperation, caring attitude, wise and prudent attitude in the learning process through research, student assignments in the learning environment.

National identity is closely related to community culture because culture reflects the values, norms, and customs that grow and develop in the daily life of a nation. Through culture, distinctive characteristics are formed, such as language, arts, customs, and belief systems. Preserved and valued community culture serves as a strong foundation in shaping national identity, strengthening nationalism, and fostering pride in ancestral heritage. Therefore, preserving local culture not only preserves tradition but also strengthens national identity in the face of globalization. (Hasni & Said, 2020) emphasize the importance of local wisdom in our education as a whole as part of efforts to increase our national resilience as a nation. Furthermore, local wisdom-based learning strengthens students' cultural identity, fosters a love of the homeland, and increases social awareness through the introduction of local cultural values (Najiyah et al., 2023). One local culture rich in character values is the Likurai dance, which originates from communities in the Indonesia-Timor Leste border region, particularly in Belu and Malaka Regencies, East Nusa Tenggara. This dance is not merely a performing art, but also embodies historical values, togetherness, discipline, responsibility, and love for one's country. These values are relevant to the goals of character education as outlined in the Independence Curriculum and the National Education Vision.

The Likurai dance is a traditional war dance typical of the Belu region, East Nusa Tenggara (Tahan et al., 2023). According to (Oktavianus, O., Citrawati, A., Nurmalena, N., & Fakhrizal, 2024), traditional Indonesian dances, including the Likurai, are rich in symbolism that reflects harmony, unity, and the relationship between humans and nature and God. However, in reality, there is little research examining how this culture is internalized in school life, especially in shaping students' character. The urgency and novelty of this research lies in the importance of preserving local cultural values, particularly the Likurai culture, as a foundation for character formation in students in the Indonesia-Timor Leste border region, which is vulnerable to identity crises and external cultural influences. In this context, habituation of Likurai cultural values is not only an effort to preserve cultural heritage but also an innovative instrument in character education that is relevant to local wisdom. This research offers a new approach by integrating traditional cultural practices into the formal educational environment as a contextual and sustainable character strategy in the border region.

In the context of strengthening the nationalistic character of students, especially junior high school students in border areas, it is important to understand how local cultures, such as Likurai, can be utilized as a means of character education in schools. This research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Atambua because the school is located in a strategic area of the Indonesia-Timor Leste border, which socioculturally has a strong affinity with the Likurai tradition as part of the local identity of the Belu community. In addition, SMP Negeri 2 Atambua represents a school with a diverse student background

ethnically and culturally, making it a relevant place to examine how the habituation of local cultural values can be integrated into character education. The school's location in a border area also makes it vulnerable to the influence of globalization and shifting values, so a character education approach based on local wisdom is needed to strengthen students' national identity and integrity.

Therefore, this study focuses on several important things, namely: how teachers and school officials perceive Likurai culture as a means of character education in border schools; what character values are contained in Likurai culture according to the views of school residents and traditional leaders; how the process of habituation of Likurai cultural values is carried out in school activities according to the narratives of informants; and what obstacles and supports are faced in implementing Likurai culture as an instrument for student character education according to the parties involved. Understanding these aspects is the basis for developing a learning model that is contextual, relevant, and rooted in local wisdom. This study aims to describe the process of habituation of Likurai cultural values as an instrument for student character education in Indonesia-Timor Leste border schools.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Character education is a system in the form of instilling character values that include the will or awareness and actions in implementing values, morals, character and ethics that aim to shape and perfect the young generation of individuals by training their abilities so that they understand and comprehend their respective identities (Ramawati, 2023). In order to build national character, participation and guidance from various components of the nation are needed through character development patterns within the family, character development in educational institutions and character development in the community (Sembiring, Helena R.U. & Ima Rohima., 2017). Character can be formed and developed through educational efforts (Trisiana Anita, 2020).

Character education is a crucial aspect in shaping students' personalities, particularly at the junior high school level, which is in a transitional phase of moral and social development. Various studies emphasize the importance of integrating local wisdom values as an effective strategy in character education. (Sauri, 2017) asserted that a local culture-based character education approach can strengthen students' identity and enrich the process of internalizing moral values. (Annisha, 2024), also showed that the integration of the use of local wisdom in the learning process in the Merdeka Belajar curriculum not only enriches the learning experience, but can create a more holistic, inclusive, and meaningful learning environment. Research by Yuliana (2019) supports this view by demonstrating that implementing local culture in education can enhance students' sense of nationalism, discipline, and responsibility. This approach is considered more effective than generic character models that are less relevant to students' daily lives. However, most of these studies are general in nature and have not yet explored in depth the concrete forms of local culture implementation in the educational process in schools, particularly in the context of border regions with their own socio-cultural dynamics.

Likurai culture, as a cultural heritage of the Belu people, embodies noble values such as cooperation, courage, solidarity, and respect for ancestral traditions. A study by (Maria, 2021), shows that the Likurai dance has potential as a medium for character education through the social values it

embodies. However, this research only highlights cultural aspects in the context of preservation and does not systematically link them to learning strategies or value habituation in formal school environments. Similarly, (Tefa, 2018) emphasizes the importance of revitalizing local culture in East Nusa Tenggara as an effort to strengthen the cultural identity of the younger generation, but does not further examine the pedagogical mechanisms that can be used to make local culture an instrument for character education. Thus, despite awareness of the educational value of local cultures such as Likurai, the existing literature does not explicitly explain how this culture is implemented in a structured manner in learning practices and character formation in schools.

Values such as self-control, cooperation, and inner peace are also instilled through the movements and philosophy of this dance. Seran (2007) in (Telik et al., 2021) states that the Likurai dance also symbolizes joy and meaningful happiness, strengthening bonds of brotherhood and mutual respect. This dance is usually performed by 10 women and 2 men. Initially, this dance was intended to welcome heroes who triumphed over their enemies. However, today, this dance is still preserved for artistic and cultural performances (Nugraha, 2021).

Schools in border areas face unique challenges in character education. (Sutrisno, 2020) and (Wahyuni, 2022) noted that students in border areas often experience shifting values and identity crises due to the unfiltered influence of outside cultures. In this situation, national and formal approaches to character education are often inadequate because they fail to address students' socio-cultural realities. Although these studies provide critical analyses of social conditions in border areas, no study has specifically proposed local cultural integration as a contextual solution to address character issues in these areas. Besides schools, the family environment is the most crucial factor in shaping a child's character because it is their first educational institution. Meanwhile, the school environment is not only a place to produce superior and high-achieving students or simply a place to transfer knowledge, but also serves as a learning environment oriented toward moral values, preparing children to enter a diverse society (Bustami Mohammad Reevany et al, 2021).

(Sembiring. Helena R.U. & Ima Rohima., 2017) stated that in order to build national character, participation and guidance from various components of the nation are needed through character development patterns within the family, character development in educational institutions and character development in the community environment. One of the subjects that can implement habituation in this study is Social Studies because Social Studies focuses on the formation of citizens who have character, are critical and care about their social and cultural environment. Social Studies studies the relationship between individuals, society and their environment, including local cultural values that live and develop in society. Therefore, Social Studies is an appropriate medium for integrating Likurai culture into learning, because this culture is not only part of the local heritage but also contains social values that support character development such as tolerance, cooperation and responsibility.

Border regions generally have unique social, cultural, and geographical characteristics and often face challenges in education, national identity, and cultural integration. In border areas, the influence of external cultures (in this case Timor Leste) is quite strong, so efforts are needed to strengthen local

and national cultural identities through education. As the front porch, the face of Indonesia's borders should reflect safe and prosperous conditions (Muta'ali Lutfi, 2018). Despite their important role in maintaining national sovereignty, the development of border regions generally lags behind other regions (Noveria Mita, Ganewati, John Haba, Firman Noor, 2016). There are four regencies in East Nusa Tenggara Province that share a land border with East Timor: Kupang, TTU, Belu, and Malaka. Indonesia's land border areas in these four regencies are still experiencing underdevelopment. The quality of human resources in this region is still relatively low. Accessibility, infrastructure, and supporting facilities for population activities are still limited (Julqurniati & Susanty, 2019).

Based on the literature review above, it can be concluded that there is still a gap in the study of character education, particularly those that connect local cultures such as Likurai with value habituation strategies in formal education. Previous studies tend to stop at the conceptual level or cultural preservation, without explaining concretely how these values are internalized through habituation in the school environment. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining how the habituation of Likurai cultural values can be used as an instrument for character education at SMP Negeri 2 Atambua, a school that represents the geographical and sociocultural context of the Indonesia-Timor Leste border. This research is expected to provide empirical and theoretical contributions in the development of a local culture-based character education model in the border region.

3. METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, with the aim of describing and understanding how cultural values in the Likurai dance are internalized as part of student character education in schools on the Indonesia-Timor Leste border. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the meanings, perceptions, and experiences of educational actors in depth without having to directly observe activities in the field. This research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Atambua because the school is located in a strategic area of the Indonesia-Timor Leste border. Data sources in this study consist of primary data obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants: teachers, principals, students, traditional leaders and parents. And secondary data in the form of supporting documents such as lesson plans, extracurricular programs, documentation of school cultural activities and relevant literature. Data collection in this study was carried out through a study of literature closely related to the values of the Likurai dance, interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to obtain narrative and exploratory data with the aim of exploring informants' understanding of Likurai cultural values, their application in the school context, and their impact on student character formation. As well as documentation studies including the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP), cultural activity programs at school, archives of extracurricular activities and school profiles.

Meanwhile, data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman interactive model which includes, Data reduction, namely selecting and simplifying interview data and documents according to the research focus, data presentation, namely compiling data in narrative form, direct quotes and thematic categories as well as drawing conclusions and verification, namely concluding thematic patterns and linking them to character education theory and local cultural values. Furthermore, to

ensure the validity of the data, researchers used several techniques including source triangulation, by comparing information from various informants (teachers, students, parents, traditional leaders), member check, namely asking for confirmation from informants and the use of references or supporting literature, as reinforcement and comparison of field findings.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion of this research are divided into several points, namely:

4.1. Likurai Cultural Values

The results of the study indicate that the Likurai culture, as one of the cultural heritages of the people in the Indonesia-Timor Leste border region, contains a number of strong and relevant character values for education. Based on the results of literature studies and interviews with teachers and traditional leaders, it was found that the main values in Likurai are; 1) mutual cooperation, reflected in togetherness when dancing in groups; 2) discipline, which is seen from the harmony of movement and time of practice; 3) respect for tradition, seen in respect for customs, traditional clothing and dance accompanying rituals; 4) peace, seen from the togetherness and joy of both dancers and the community as an audience; and 5) nationalism and cultural identity, because Likurai is a symbol of resistance and struggle of the community against the colonizers as well as a symbol of peace and cultural identity of the border community. Likurai dance is currently often performed by elementary, middle and high school students as an art choice in art subject exams but its values have not been fully internalized through learning for student character education. These values are still alive and preserved by local communities, but have not been fully integrated systematically into formal character education practices in schools.

Originally, Likurai was a war dance to welcome heroes returning from the battlefield. The values of courage, fighting spirit, and respect for the fighters are strongly embedded in every movement and procession of the dance (Yosefina et al., 2019). After independence, the meaning of Likurai transformed from a symbol of war victory to a symbol of peace, brotherhood, and welcoming guests. This demonstrates the adaptation of cultural values to changing times. (Clotilde Seran & Antonius Bere, 2024), the Likurai dance emphasizes the values of togetherness, unity, and solidarity among residents. This dance symbolizes strong social relations and community cohesion, especially in efforts to maintain and preserve local culture. Meanwhile, (Da Costa et al., 2024), the Likurai dance serves as a medium for passing on Belu values, norms, and cultural identity to the younger generation, strengthening pride and love for ancestral heritage.

4.2. Likurai Cultural Habituation Strategy

Local wisdom values are integrated into the curriculum, teaching materials, and school activities, such as the 5S (Greeting, Smiling, Greeting, Polite, Courteous), the use of regional languages, local traditions, and religious and nationalist activities. Habituation is carried out through familiarization, training, providing examples, creating situations that reflect local values, and character assessment (Najiyah et al., 2023). The results of the study indicate that the Likurai cultural habituation strategy has been implemented by schools in border areas as an effective way to instill character values in students. This strategy is carried out through the integration of local culture into various school

activities, both in formal and non-formal learning. This implementation is generally seen in three main habituation strategies found in the field: first, Culture-Based Routine Habituation. This is reflected in schools that incorporate Likurai cultural elements, such as dances, songs, or traditional symbols, into daily and weekly routines. For example, the flag ceremony every first or last Monday of the month concludes with a short Likurai dance performance by students. Traditional greetings or local expressions are used as forms of greeting between students and teachers. This strategy fosters discipline, respect, and a love for local culture, which then become part of students' daily habits at school.

The second strategy is the integration of cultural values in learning. This is evident in teachers who consciously integrate the values contained in the Likurai culture into the subject matter, especially in subjects such as PPKn, Social Studies, cultural arts, and Indonesian. One example in Social Studies, students are divided into several groups and asked to analyze the social and cultural values in the Likurai tradition (e.g., mutual cooperation, solidarity, gender roles, heroism). The goal of Character Education in this activity is to develop students' cooperation, tolerance, and social empathy. In addition, in Indonesian lessons, students are asked to write essays or stories about their experiences participating in cultural training or performances. This strategy is effective in developing reflection on character values, such as responsibility, cooperation, and love of the homeland, through the meaning of local culture. Third, extracurricular activities where schools organize special extracurricular activities, such as the Likurai Cultural Studio, which actively involves students in the preservation and direct practice of regional culture. Furthermore, collaboration with traditional leaders, parents, and local communities is carried out in various activities, such as traditional dance training, annual cultural festivals, and cross-school or village activities. This strategy strengthens students' cultural identity, strengthens social ties between the school and the community, and instills pride in cultural heritage and social responsibility.

The results of this study also found that the success of cultural habituation strategies is greatly influenced by several factors, including teacher commitment and creativity in inserting cultural values into learning activities, the support of the principal and parents for the importance of character education based on local wisdom, and curriculum flexibility that provides space for local content and contextual activities. Furthermore, in its implementation, habituation can be implemented in several learning models. (Shufa & Tito Pangesti Adji, 2024), strategies include contextual learning (Contextual Teaching and Learning/CTL), Problem-Based Learning (PBL), project-based STEAM, and direct practice in the community. Students are invited to research, document, and practice local wisdom, for example through traditional games, social research, or cultural preservation projects.

4.3. Changes in Student Character after Habituation

After implementing the Likurai culture-based habituation model, positive changes in student character were observed. Observations and interviews revealed increased self-confidence and pride in local culture. Discipline also emerged, particularly regarding time management and responsibility during practice and performances. Cooperation among students, fostered through joint practice and collective participation in cultural activities, increased tolerance and respect for diversity, as students

from diverse backgrounds learned and performed together without discrimination. These changes were not immediate but gradually manifested through the consistent, iterative, and ongoing habituation process. Therefore, schools play a strategic role in instilling character values through contextual, local culture-based learning. Curriculum integration, teacher role models, familiarization, and community collaboration are key to the successful internalization of character values in students. According to (Muslim & Kawakip, 2022), the success of cultural habituation is strongly influenced by collaboration between teachers, schools, local communities, and parents. Teachers act as facilitators, role models, and developers of local culture-based materials.

The results of this study demonstrate that culture-based learning not only shapes individual character (honesty, discipline, and responsibility) but also enhances soft skills such as collaboration, social awareness, and independence. This effect is strengthened if the habituation is carried out consistently and supported by the school environment (Parmin, P., Syafi, M., Junaedi, I., Yulianto, A., Purwantoyo, E., & Mubarak, 2021). Furthermore, according to (Mahardika, B., Kusna, A., Nugraheni, D., Eriyani, D., Yulindasari, N., Taftania, S., Sholihah, V., & Benty, 2020), teachers and principals play a crucial role in instilling a positive school culture. Consistently instilling cultural values through daily habits is highly effective in shaping students' character with integrity, empathy, and responsibility.

4.4. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

This study also identified several supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of the habituation of Likurai cultural values in schools. Supporting factors include community support, particularly from parents and traditional leaders, who are actively involved in cultural activities at school. Furthermore, student enthusiasm, particularly because the cultural approach is considered more enjoyable and meaningful, is evident. Furthermore, the richness of local culture allows for the exploration of character values from various cultural aspects. Meanwhile, inhibiting factors include the lack of training for teachers related to cultural integration in character education, limited time and facilities, particularly for extracurricular cultural activities, and the absence of a specific policy from the education office regarding the preservation of local culture in border schools.

5. CONCLUSION

Cultural habituation strategies, particularly through the inclusion of Likurai culture, have proven to be an effective means of shaping student character in border schools. Routine, integrated, and community-based cultural values instillation is an approach that not only strengthens individual students' character but also reinforces their cultural identity and nationalism in border areas. To optimize the implementation of Likurai cultural values in schools, it is recommended that schools and stakeholders strengthen synergies with the community, particularly parents and traditional leaders, who have proven to be active supporters of cultural activities. Student enthusiasm and the richness of local culture also need to be optimally utilized as capital for contextual and meaningful learning. However, to overcome existing obstacles, it is important for local governments and education offices to provide specific training for teachers on integrating culture into character education, expand the allocation of time and facilities for cultural activities, and formulate policies that support the preservation of local culture, especially in border areas.

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