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Fostering Sustainable Character through Locally-Based Learning: A Qualitative Study of Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism as a Learning Resource

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Abstract

Local potential-based learning is an approach that can support the development of sustainability-oriented character among primary school students. This study aimed to explore the potential of Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism as a local-based learning resource for fostering sustainability-oriented character. A qualitative case study approach was employed. Data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation involving agrotourism managers, farmers, and small and medium enterprise (SME) actors selected through purposive sampling. The data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis by organizing, categorizing, interpreting, and drawing conclusions based on four research focuses: the educational potential of the agrotourism site, sustainability-oriented character values, experiential learning, and school–community collaboration. The findings reveal that Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism provides an authentic learning environment integrating agricultural cultivation, product processing, and community empowerment. Experiential learning activities foster environmental awareness, responsibility, cooperation, appreciation of local potential, and a sustainable entrepreneurial mindset. In addition, the agrotourism site strengthens collaboration between schools and the local community, creating contextual learning experiences that support the implementation of Education for Sustainable Development. These findings suggest that Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism has strong potential as an effective local-based learning resource for cultivating sustainability-oriented character among primary school students.

Keywords: Sustainability-oriented character; Local-based learning; Agrotourism; Experiential learning; Sustainable education

1. Introduction

Global challenges—such as climate change, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and the escalating exploitation of natural resources—have become issues that impact the sustainability of human life. Through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Target 4.7, the United Nations emphasizes the importance of education in equipping learners with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that support the realization of sustainable development (Arsyad et al., 2026). In this context, education is no longer viewed merely as a means to enhance academic competence but also as a vehicle for fostering a "sustainability-oriented character." In this study, such character is understood as a set of values encompassing environmental concern, responsibility, cooperation, appreciation of local potential, and an awareness of the need to preserve natural resources. Instilling this character needs to begin at the primary education level, as this phase is a crucial period for shaping the values, attitudes, and habits that form the foundation of learners' future behavior. At this developmental stage, learners more readily internalize character values through meaningful learning experiences; thus, primary education plays a strategic role in preparing a generation capable of contributing to sustainable development.

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Despite the strategic role of education in fostering a sustainability-oriented character, the implementation of classroom instruction still faces various challenges. Teaching tends to be teacher-centered and focused on the theoretical delivery of material, leading learners to memorize concepts rather than construct understanding through real-world experiences. Consequently, learning activities often fail to utilize the surrounding environment as a learning resource relevant to the students' lives. This limits opportunities for learners to recognize local potential and understand the interconnections between human activity and the environment. Ultimately, sustainability-oriented character values—such as environmental concern, responsibility, cooperation, appreciation of local potential, and awareness of natural resource preservation—fail to develop optimally. In fact, learning that provides direct experience through interaction with the real-world environment has proven more effective in helping learners build understanding and internalize those values compared to instruction focused solely on the theoretical delivery of concepts.

One approach that can be applied to address this issue is place-based learning—an instructional method that utilizes local potential, the environment, culture, and local wisdom as contextual learning resources (Lubis & Mardiana, 2025). In this approach, the surrounding environment serves as the primary learning context, allowing students to construct knowledge through direct experience, observation, and interaction with their own living environment. Place-based learning is also linked to the experiential learning approach, which emphasizes that knowledge is built through real-life experiences that are subsequently reflected upon to foster understanding and character development (Ana, Syahri, & Tinus, 2025; Meutiawati, 2023). Through such learning experiences, students not only gain a deeper grasp of concepts but also cultivate environmental awareness, a sense of responsibility, collaborative skills, and an appreciation for local potential. This approach is particularly relevant for primary education; students at the concrete operational stage of development find it easier to comprehend concepts through direct experience rather than abstract explanations. Thus, place-based learning aligns with the principles of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which highlight the importance of the learning process in shaping the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that support sustainable development. In this context, place-based learning functions not merely as a contextual teaching strategy but also as a means to foster a sustainability-oriented mindset through learning experiences rooted in the students' own environment and local assets. One example of implementing place-based learning with these characteristics is the use of the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site as a learning resource.

As a major center for premium starfruit production and an agrotourism icon in Blitar City, the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site serves not only as a tourist destination but also as an educational space that showcases the region's local potential. These characteristics make it a promising resource for place-based learning, offering students an authentic educational experience. Through various activities—ranging from learning about starfruit cultivation, plant care, and harvesting to the processing of agricultural produce—students can directly observe food production processes while gaining an understanding of the interconnections between humans, the environment, and the sustainable use of natural resources. This learning experience not only helps students build a more contextual understanding of the concepts being studied but also has the potential to foster enduring character values—such as environmental awareness, responsibility, cooperation, appreciation for local potential, and respect for the farming profession (Putri, 2025; Yasin, Utami, Putri, Salsabila, & Ovayana, 2025).

The relevance of utilizing Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism as a local-based learning resource becomes increasingly significant when viewed against the challenges facing the sustainability of Indonesia's agricultural sector. Data from the 2023 Agricultural Census reveals that the farming population in Indonesia remains dominated by Generation X and Baby Boomers, while Generation Z farmers account for only about 2.14% of the total (Darmawan, 2023). This situation underscores the importance of introducing the agricultural world at the primary education level, enabling students to appreciate the sector while understanding the necessity of maintaining food sustainability. Furthermore, using Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism as a learning resource creates opportunities for collaboration among schools, farmers, agrotourism managers, MSMEs, and the local community to craft more authentic learning experiences. The involvement of these various stakeholders allows students not only to learn about crop cultivation processes but also to understand the transformation of agricultural produce into value-added products and to recognize the interconnections between environmental, economic, and social aspects in achieving sustainable development. These characteristics demonstrate that Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism holds potential not merely as a local-based learning resource, but also as a space for experiential and collaborative learning that fosters a sustainability-oriented mindset in students.

Various studies have shown that leveraging local potential in education can create more contextual learning experiences while supporting character development. Research by Sulistyorini et al. (2022) indicates that thematic teaching materials based on local wisdom are effective in developing the character of primary school students by integrating regional potential into the curriculum. Meanwhile, Andini et al. (2022) explain that agrotourism has the potential to serve as an educational tourism venue offering learning experiences through agricultural activities; however, their research focused more on destination development than on implementation as a school-based learning resource. Fitriyah et al. (2022) also posited that character education based on local wisdom is effective in shaping students' character values, yet it has not integrated agritourism areas as learning environments. These findings indicate that research concerning local-based learning, agritourism, character education, and experiential learning tends to be conducted in isolation, focusing predominantly on media development, learning effectiveness, or tourism destination management.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no studies have specifically examined how the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site is utilized as a local-based learning resource to foster sustainability-oriented character in elementary school students. Furthermore, there is limited research—particularly using a qualitative approach—that deeply explores the potential of agrotourism as a learning resource, the learning experiences formed through student interaction with the agrotourism environment, the sustainability-oriented character values that develop, and the collaboration between schools and the community in supporting local-based learning. Therefore, this study employs a qualitative approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of the process of utilizing the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site as a local-based learning resource for fostering sustainability-oriented character. The novelty of this research lies in the integration of four aspects: the potential of agrotourism as a local-based learning resource, the formation of sustainability-oriented character, experiential learning, and the collaboration between schools and the community within the context of the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site.

Based on this background, the study aims to describe and analyze the potential of the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site as a local-based learning resource, explore the sustainability-oriented character values that can develop through learning activities, and explain how experiential learning and school-community collaboration support the formation of sustainability-oriented character in elementary school students. Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the study of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) implementation—specifically through the perspectives of place-based learning and experiential learning—and provide a more comprehensive understanding of utilizing agrotourism as a learning resource for character formation. Practically, the findings are expected to serve as a reference for educators in designing more contextual local-based learning, for the management of the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site in optimizing the area's educational function, and for policymakers in developing the use of local potential as a learning resource that supports sustainable education.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design. A qualitative approach was selected to gain an in-depth understanding of the potential of the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site as a local-based learning resource for fostering sustainable character development among elementary school students. Through the case study design, the research focuses on examining the phenomenon within a real-world context, enabling the researcher to explore the area's educational potential, sustainable character values fostered through learning activities, experiential learning opportunities, and prospects for collaboration between schools and the community.

The research was conducted at the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site in Blitar City, East Java. This location was selected using purposive sampling because it serves as both a major starfruit production hub and an agrotourism area with significant potential as a local-based learning resource. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on their involvement in and knowledge of site management and the implementation of educational activities at the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site. The informants included agrotourism managers, farmers, and micro, small, and medium enterprise operators who process the harvested starfruit. These individuals were chosen because they possessed relevant information regarding the area's potential, educational activities, agricultural product processing, and community involvement in supporting the agrotourism site's educational function.

Research data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to examine environmental conditions, starfruit cultivation activities, educational facilities, and the area's potential as a source for local-based learning. Interviews were held with the agrotourism manager, farmers, and vendors to gather information regarding the potential of Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism as a learning resource, sustainable character values that could be fostered through learning activities, experiential learning, and forms of collaboration between schools and the community. Documentation—including activity photos, educational program records, brochures, and other supporting materials—was used to complement and reinforce the data obtained from observations and interviews.

Data obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation were analyzed using a descriptive-qualitative approach. The analysis involved organizing the data, categorizing it

according to the research focus, interpreting the findings, and drawing conclusions. Data categorization was based on four research foci: (1) the potential of Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism as a local-based learning resource; (2) sustainable character values that can be developed through learning at the site; (3) experiential learning as a means to foster an interest in agriculture; and (4) the role of Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism in strengthening the relationship between schools and the community. The analysis results are presented as a descriptive narrative supported by data from observations, interviews, and documentation.

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation involved comparing information obtained from the agrotourism manager, farmers, and MSME operators. Meanwhile, technique triangulation involved comparing data derived from observations, interviews, and documentation. Additionally, the researcher confirmed interview findings with the informants to ensure alignment between the collected data and the information provided, thereby enhancing the credibility of the research results.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 The Potential of Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism as a Local-Based Learning Resource

Identification results indicate that Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism holds significant potential as a local-based learning resource, offering an authentic learning environment and educational activities that can be integrated into the learning process. The site features approximately five hectares of starfruit cultivation land, serving as both a production area and a destination for educational tourism. Beyond fruit-picking activities, the management offers various educational programs—such as the "Star Adventure Outbound"—which include packages ranging from "Little Star," "Star Wars," "Mini Adventure," and cooking classes to "One Day" and "Two Day" packages for the general public. Visitors consist predominantly of early childhood education (PAUD) and kindergarten students; the management even provides shuttle services for schools within Blitar City to facilitate these educational visits. Interviews revealed that the individuals facilitating these educational activities include farmers and agrotourism staff who directly introduce visitors to the starfruit cultivation process.

Other findings indicate that the learning potential at Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism extends beyond plant cultivation to encompass agricultural product processing and community economic empowerment. Starfruit that does not meet fresh-market standards is utilized to create various processed products, such as opak gambir (traditional wafer rolls), starfruit chips, dried candied starfruit, and starfruit puree. These practices demonstrate how the community optimizes agricultural produce through sustainable resource utilization principles, thereby generating added economic value. For students, this provides a concrete learning experience regarding the interconnections between agriculture, entrepreneurship, and the preservation of local assets. Direct interaction with farmers and MSME operators also enables students to gain a comprehensive understanding of the entire process, from production to the marketing of agricultural products.

This potential demonstrates that Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism embodies the characteristics of local-based learning by utilizing the surrounding environment as the primary context for the learning process. Local-based learning positions the local environment and culture as learning resources, allowing students to connect academic material with real-life

experiences. Research findings in Sinulingga et al. (2025) indicate that instruction leveraging local resources enhances student engagement, fosters critical thinking skills, strengthens independence, and builds a sense of pride in the local region. Consequently, utilizing Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism as a learning resource not only enriches students' learning experiences but also reinforces the relevance of their education to the social and cultural conditions of their local environment.

These research findings align with the approaches of place-based learning and Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), both of which emphasize the importance of learning experiences rooted in the learners' real-world environments. Research cited in Vilona et al. (2026) indicates that integrating local assets into instruction fosters active student engagement, enhances contextual understanding, and provides a more meaningful learning experience than classroom-bound instruction alone. Furthermore, the study in Zami et al. (2026) explains that garden environments can serve as learning laboratories, enabling students to develop observational skills, critical thinking, environmental literacy, and interdisciplinary understanding through hands-on experience. These characteristics are also evident at the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site, which offers tangible objects, authentic activities, resource persons, and agricultural processing practices that can be utilized in various educational activities.

Based on these findings, the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site serves not merely as a tourist destination but also as a valuable local learning resource, offering direct learning experiences through interactions with the environment, farmers, and the community's economic activities. This potential provides a crucial foundation for developing contextual and meaningful instruction, while also serving as a springboard for fostering sustainability-oriented character traits in students through the utilization of local assets.

3.2 Sustainable Character Values Fostered through Learning at Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism

Analysis indicates that local-based learning at the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site not only offers a contextual learning experience but also creates opportunities to cultivate various sustainable character values. These traits develop through students' active engagement in a series of learning activities—ranging from planting and tending to crops, harvesting, and grading fruit by quality, to processing the harvest into economically valuable products, participating in group discussions, maintaining orchard cleanliness, and interacting directly with farmers and agrotourism managers. Interview findings reveal that managers often involve children in plant care and aim to instill an appreciation for the farmers' hard work. These statements demonstrate that the agrotourism learning activities go beyond mere knowledge acquisition; they are designed to foster environmental awareness, respect for the farming profession, and an understanding of the importance of preserving local resources.

One character value likely to develop through these activities is environmental concern. By actively caring for plants, observing starfruit growth, and maintaining the orchard's cleanliness, students gain firsthand experience regarding the importance of environmental balance. Such experiences help students grasp that agricultural success depends not only on harvest yields but also on efforts to preserve the quality of the soil, the crops, and the surrounding environment. This approach aligns with the concept of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which positions education as a means to build awareness, shape attitudes, and encourage concrete actions toward sustainability. Gustika (2025) confirms that ESD-based environmental education

has shifted from simple knowledge transmission toward the development of environmental literacy, active learner participation, and action competence through contextual experiences. Similarly, Vioreza et al. (2023) explains that implementing ESD in primary education plays a crucial role in fostering awareness, responsibility, and sustainable lifestyles by engaging students in activities related to environmental, social, and economic issues.

Beyond fostering environmental awareness, the educational experience at the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site also holds the potential to cultivate a sense of responsibility and a spirit of cooperation. The value of responsibility is reflected when students are given the opportunity to tend to plants, complete observation tasks, and look after the facilities throughout the activities. Meanwhile, working in groups—engaging in discussions, processing the harvest, and creating starfruit-based products—allows students to learn how to collaborate, respect the opinions of others, and complete tasks collectively. These activities demonstrate that experiential learning not only develops academic skills but also builds the social character essential for life in society. This finding is supported by Hasan et al. (2023) learning models, which indicates that direct learning experiences shape character through the active engagement of learners in real-world activities. Such experiences render the learning process more meaningful, as students do not merely receive information but also experience, reflect upon, and apply the values they have learned within authentic situations (Puspitowati, 2019).

Other character values with the potential to develop include an appreciation for local potential and a spirit of sustainable entrepreneurship. Activities involving the processing of starfruit into opak gambir (traditional wafers), chips, dried candied fruit, or purée demonstrate to students that agricultural produce can be transformed into products with added economic value. Through this process, students learn that fruit unsuitable for sale as fresh produce can still be utilized to create useful products, thereby reducing resource waste. Furthermore, activities such as product creation and the production of digital content regarding Karangsari Starfruit offer students the opportunity to discover their region's potential while promoting it to the public. This experience has the potential to foster pride in local identity, appreciation for the farming profession, and an awareness that preserving local assets is part of the effort to achieve sustainable development.

Based on these findings, the learning experience at the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site does more than simply utilize the environment as a learning resource; it provides an experience that enables students to cultivate sustainable character values—such as environmental concern, responsibility, mutual cooperation, and appreciation for local potential. These values are not imparted through lectures but are instead fostered through real-world experiences, interactions with the environment and the community, and direct involvement in agricultural activities. Consequently, the locally-based learning at the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site holds significant potential to support the implementation of sustainability-oriented education—an approach that emphasizes not only knowledge acquisition but also the development of character traits relevant to the challenges of sustainable development.

3.3 Experiential Learning as a Means to Foster an Appreciation for Agriculture

Analysis indicates that the educational program at Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism employs experiential learning as the primary approach to introducing students to the agricultural world. Unlike classroom-based instruction, this program offers students the opportunity to actively engage in various agricultural activities—such as planting and tending

to crops, observing starfruit growth, harvesting, grading fruit by quality, processing the harvest into value-added products, and interacting directly with farmers and agrotourism managers. Furthermore, students participate in collaborative activities, ranging from group work and processing starfruit products to creating digital content that showcases the potential of the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site.

Active involvement in these stages provides students with an authentic learning experience (Wiastra, Dwi, Dewi, & Dewi, 2025). They gain insight not only into the final product—ready-to-eat starfruit—but also into the extensive process involved, spanning from planting and maintenance to the utilization of the harvest. Through direct interaction with farmers, students also gain an understanding of the challenges, skills, and responsibilities inherent in the farming profession. This experiential approach renders the learning process more meaningful, as students construct their understanding based on real-world experiences rather than relying solely on teacher explanations or textbooks (Saap, 2023).

These findings align with the concept of experiential learning, which places direct experience at the core of the learning process. In this approach, knowledge is constructed through the learners' engagement in real-world activities, followed by a process of reflection and meaning-making regarding the experiences gained. Hasan et al. (2023) learning models indicates that experience-based learning can shape character through the active involvement of students in activities that are contextual and relevant to their lives. Consequently, the activities conducted at the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site not only enrich students' understanding of agriculture but also provide an opportunity for them to connect these experiences to their daily lives.

Experience-based learning at the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site also demonstrates that an appreciation for agriculture can be cultivated by directly getting to know, experiencing, and understanding agricultural activities. As students engage in tending to crops, conversing with farmers, and observing how harvests are processed into various products of economic value, they come to understand that the agricultural sector serves not only as a food source but also as a livelihood for the community and a component of local identity. Such experiences have the potential to foster appreciation for the farming profession while raising awareness that the sustainability of the agricultural sector requires the involvement of the younger generation. These findings are consistent with the principles of Education for Sustainable Development, which emphasize the importance of contextual learning in building student awareness, responsibility, and participation regarding sustainability issues through real-world experiences and engagement with the local community (Siburian, 2024).

Based on these findings, experiential learning at the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site not only fosters a more contextual learning process but also provides an opportunity for learners to gain a holistic understanding of agriculture through direct experience. Although this study did not quantitatively measure changes in student attitudes, the series of activities—encompassing observation, hands-on practice, interaction with farmers, and the utilization of agricultural produce—demonstrates that experiential learning has the potential to cultivate an appreciation for agriculture while reinforcing the relevance of locally-based education in supporting sustainable development.

3.4 Agritourism as a Means to Strengthen School-Community Relations

Analysis indicates that utilizing the Karangsari Starfruit Agritourism site as a learning resource not only benefits students but also fosters collaboration between the school and various community stakeholders. This collaboration engages teachers, students, farmers, agritourism managers, and vendors in the implementation of locally-based learning activities. Teachers act as facilitators, integrating field observations with school learning objectives, while farmers and managers serve as resource persons, providing authentic insights into starfruit cultivation and agritourism management. Meanwhile, vendors demonstrate the processing of starfruit into various products with economic value, offering students an understanding of the interconnections between the agricultural sector, the creative industry, and community empowerment.

This collaboration manifests through diverse learning activities requiring the active participation of all parties—such as regular visits to the agritourism site, field observations, vendor-led demonstrations of harvest processing, discussions with farmers, exhibitions of processed starfruit products, festivals highlighting local potential, and the creation of digital content to promote the Karangsari Starfruit Agritourism site. Through these activities, the school not only utilizes the environment as a learning space but also integrates the community into the educational process. Conversely, the community gains the opportunity to showcase local potential to the younger generation and expand the agritourism site's promotional reach through student involvement in various educational activities.

These findings indicate that locally-based learning fosters partnerships between schools and the community to create more contextual learning experiences. This approach aligns with the concept of community-based learning, which utilizes community resources, knowledge, and experiences as integral parts of the educational process (Wahib & Susanto, 2024). The involvement of farmers as resource persons, site managers as field facilitators, and traders as learning partners enables students to acquire knowledge that cannot be fully gained within a classroom setting. Beyond enriching the learning experience, this collaboration strengthens the reciprocal relationship between the school and the community through mutually beneficial activities.

The use of digital media by students to document and promote the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site further expands the scope of this collaboration. The digital content produced by students not only serves as part of the learning process but also contributes to showcasing the agrotourism site's potential to a wider audience. Meanwhile, product exhibitions and festivals centered on local assets provide a platform for schools, farmers, managers, and traders to interact directly and introduce agricultural produce and processed goods to the public. Such collaboration demonstrates that the learning process can yield dual benefits: enriching students' learning experiences while simultaneously supporting the promotion and sustainability of local assets.

Based on these findings, the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site serves not only as a venue for local-based learning but also as a collaborative space connecting schools with the community by leveraging regional assets. The involvement of various stakeholders in the learning process fosters an educational ecosystem that is more contextual, participatory, and sustainability-oriented. Consequently, local-based learning at the Karangsari Starfruit Agrotourism site not only contributes to the development of students' competencies and

character but also strengthens the synergy between the education sector and the community in supporting the preservation of local assets.

4. Conclusion

The use of the Karangsari Starfruit Agro-Tourism site as a locally-based learning resource demonstrates that the surrounding environment can serve as an effective learning space for fostering sustainable character in elementary school students. This potential is reflected not only in the existence of an authentic learning environment but also in the integration of cultivation activities, agricultural product processing, hands-on learning experiences, and collaboration between schools and the community—all of which create contextual and meaningful learning. Through students' involvement in various hands-on activities, learning based on local potential has the potential to foster environmental awareness, responsibility, cooperation, appreciation for local resources, and an understanding of the importance of sustainability. These findings confirm that agrotourism functions not only as a tourist destination but also as a learning ecosystem that supports the implementation of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Therefore, partnerships between schools, agrotourism operators, and the community need to be strengthened so that local potential can be utilized more systematically as part of sustainable character education.

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