



From Local Wisdom to School Innovation: Reconstructing Buton Cultural Values for Character Education Management in Secondary Schools

Nanik Hindaryatiningsih¹, Jafar Ahiri², Omasrianto³, Fina Amalia Masri⁴, Ansor Putra⁵, Jamal Harimudin⁶

^{1,3}Department of Accounting Education, Universitas Halu Oleo, Indonesia

²Department of Economic Education, Universitas Halu Oleo, Indonesia

⁴Department of Language and Literature, Universitas Halu Oleo, Indonesia

⁵English Literature Study Program, Universitas Halu Oleo, Indonesia

⁶Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia

*Correspondence to: nanik.hindaryatiningsih@uho.ac.id

Abstract: The increasing concern about the decline in students' moral behavior has prompted the need for innovative approaches to character education, one of which is through the integration of local cultural values into educational management. However, previous research has been dominated by descriptive explorations of local wisdom and has yet to yield systematic integration into the school management framework. This study aims to reconstruct Butonese cultural values into an innovative model for character education management in secondary schools. This study uses a qualitative, ethnographic approach with 100 participants, including traditional leaders, community leaders, principals, teachers, and community members. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, then analyzed using interactive qualitative analysis techniques. The research results identified three Butonese cultural values as the main local wisdom value concepts: gau and pombala, poromu inda posangu pogaa inda koolota, and tuturakana sara. These three cultural values appear across four organizational management systems in educational institutions. Quantitatively, the implementation function shows the highest percentage at 31%, followed by evaluation at 29%, organizing at 22%, and planning at 18%, indicating the dominance of implementing cultural values in educational practices. The character values found in the Butonese local culture include responsibility (58%), cooperation (55%), empathy (40%), discipline (57%), and integrity (33%). Qualitatively, these findings illustrate the integration of local wisdom values in school management to strengthen the implementation of character education programs. Students have a higher level of social awareness and a greater sense of responsibility for maintaining local culture. Thus, this research contributes to the literature on innovative, contextually responsive culture-based education management. The local wisdom values are developed into contemporary character education concepts.

Keywords: character education; cultural values; educational management; local wisdom; school innovation

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INTRODUCTION

Changes in social civilization, marked by the widespread use of digital technology and knowledge across all aspects of human life, have also transformed students' learning activities. However, these changes have negatively impacted students' perceptions of behavior, including changes in discipline, low respect for students and teachers, and attitudes of social responsibility inconsistent with societal norms (Anggaini et al., 2025; Dwistia et al., 2024; Gómez-León, 2025; Kus, 2025; Muttaqin et al., 2023). General findings indicate that technological and scientific advances have affected the success of character education programs in schools, as outlined in the curriculum. These character education values have not been implemented in the context of students' real-life experiences at school. Empirical studies have found that research examining the achievement of character education goals and changes in student behavior still lacks a comprehensive understanding of character education practices. Several studies have identified problems, such as low levels of student discipline, stemming from a lack of respect for teachers. The development of digital technology, which has led to a proliferation of social media, has limited students' social interactions with peers, leading to a lifestyle of individualism reflected in low respect for others and limited awareness (Anggaini et al., 2025; Dwistia et al., 2024). Other studies indicate that schools have not fully implemented character education as a primary aspect of classroom teaching and learning (Fahmi, 2025; Harrison et al., 2016; Sarifah et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2026). These findings suggest that existing character education practices remain largely normative and have not consistently produced behavioral outcomes (Al Halbusi et al., 2023; Sarifah et al., 2025; Suryani, 2025).

Empirical findings point to a decline in students' morals and character, which appears to be separate from the systematic, holistic development of educational practices. Nevertheless, the government has issued

policies on character education as part of the curriculum. This means that character education programs must be incorporated into student learning activities. Schools must design these programs within the framework of comprehensive school management. In many cases, teaching practices continue to prioritize cognitive achievement, while the systematic integration of moral and ethical values into school management processes remains underdeveloped (Hidayat et al., 2022; Muassomah et al., 2020; Suryanto et al., 2023). Thus, this situation creates an imbalance between the implementation of character education and the transformation of student behavior. Field conditions have revealed that the education system is unable to address global challenges, particularly in maintaining the morale of the younger generation or graduates.

Therefore, a potential approach is needed that is appropriate to the challenges faced in strengthening character education. One approach that aligns with students' learning experiences and real-life situations is the integration of local cultural values into school management practices (Astuti & Apriliani, 2025; Hidayat et al., 2022; Maisyaroh et al., 2023; Sakti et al., 2024; Sobon et al., 2025). Furthermore, Indonesia has a diverse culture that characterizes behaviors and attitudes with distinctive cultural values. Local wisdom embodies philosophical principles and moral guidance that have long served as social norms in society (Anas et al., 2026; Agung et al., 2024; Hanapi et al., 2025). In the context of the Buton community in Southeast Sulawesi, cultural values such as gau and pombala (democratic deliberation and cooperation), poromu inda posangu pogaa inda koolota (unity and togetherness), and tuturakana sara (justice and honesty in supervision) reflect ethical principles that guide social interactions and community life. This cultural philosophy emphasizes cooperation, respect, compassion, tolerance, and moral responsibility, all essential elements of character education.

The diversity of values within Indonesia's cultural heritage offers opportunities to develop contemporary educational management, a practice that has yet to be widely researched and practiced. Previous studies have often limited the application of local wisdom values to educational contexts, such as in group discussions or the content of required student learning. However, research examining local wisdom values and systematically reconstructing them into an innovative framework for managing educational institutions, particularly character education programs, remains scarce. This is, although many schools already provide modern education. This has led to the integration of local cultural values into school management, which often remains fragmented and lacks a clear conceptual framework. This is despite the demands of globalization and rapid socio-cultural changes in community life, which are evolving without regard for the readiness of human resources. This situation undoubtedly challenges the continued preservation of local cultural values for future generations in the face of increasingly dominant external cultural influences. This situation undermines students' already weakened moral foundations (Alsaleh, 2024; Shabrilia et al., 2022). Another issue arises related to the decline in students' sense of belonging to their local culture. Therefore, schools must develop innovative strategies to preserve students' understanding of local cultural values, making contemporary education more meaningful.

Given these challenges, it is necessary to reinterpret and reconstruct local cultural values so they can serve not only as cultural heritage but also as a strategic foundation for school management in character education. Schools can also implement changes in the application of local wisdom values and community traditions as part of organizational management systems to develop character education programs (Haq et al., 2022; Fajri et al., 2026; Rasna & Tantra, 2017; Sakti et al., 2024). Implementing character education integrated with local cultural values can be a quality strategy for managing education and a responsive, sustainable educational innovation that strengthens local wisdom values and incorporates real-life values into students' lives within the school environment (Astuti et al., 2025).

Although numerous studies examining local wisdom values and character education have been conducted, they remain descriptive in nature. There has been limited examination of cultural values in the classroom during student learning and discussions, or their inclusion in specific subject matter. Meanwhile, research has systematically and comprehensively integrated local cultural values into a holistic educational management framework. More specifically, local wisdom values can be applied to the operational principles of school organizational management, such as planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating. This gap highlights the need for a more integrative and management-oriented approach to culture-based character education. Therefore, this study focuses on a descriptive cultural analysis, proposing a conceptual reconstruction of Butonese cultural values into a structured model for character education management. While previous research has focused on the application of local cultural values in classroom learning activities, this study proposes a culture-based management framework that integrates local wisdom into strategic educational management processes. Therefore, this study makes a distinct contribution by focusing on local wisdom values that are not cultural content but rather strategies for educational management practices in schools to implement character education. Therefore, this study aims to reconstruct Butonese cultural values into an innovative model for character education management in secondary schools, bridging the gap between cultural heritage and contemporary educational management practices. By transforming local wisdom into a systematic educational framework, this study seeks to bridge the gap between cultural heritage and modern educational management practices.

METHODS

This research employed a qualitative approach with ethnographic methods (Lim, 2025; Oranga et al., 2023). The rationale for using ethnography was that it provides researchers with the opportunity to comprehensively understand the cultural meanings, social norms, and value systems that are embedded in educational practices, particularly those related to specific cultural studies (Reeves et al., 2013). Using this method, this study delved deeper into the values of local wisdom in the Buton community, which have been applied in schools' educational management practices to implement character education programs. This study, in turn, provided a conceptual reconstruction for character education planning in secondary schools.

The research was conducted in Buton, Southeast Sulawesi, a region where traditional cultural values are still practiced and upheld in the community's daily lives. Participants included 20 leaders active in the development of traditional culture, 20 community leaders, 20 school principals, 20 teachers, and 20 community members concerned with Buton's cultural values and knowledge of Buton's cultural heritage. The participant selection technique was purposive, based on their roles and active participation in various cultural and educational activities in the Buton region. These participants were purposively selected based on their roles and involvement in community cultural and educational activities (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The data collection process involved several techniques: 1) interviews aimed at exploring Buton cultural values and their relationship to values in character education; 2) observations aimed at delving deeper into cultural activities in communities and schools to uncover local wisdom values applied and practiced in daily life in the community and schools; and 3) analysis of cultural manuscript documents, traditional norms, and educational policies related to character education. This enabled researchers to understand the philosophical meanings inherent in Buton cultural traditions and their application in the school environment, specifically in character education programs within each educational institution's management system (Miles et al., 2014).

The data analysis consisted of three stages, each using interactive qualitative methods. The first step was data reduction, which was conducted to identify and categorize data according to the needs of the focus problem. At this stage, the researcher coded the data obtained from interviews and observations. Coding was conducted openly by identifying the values contained in the Butonese culture and their relationships to character education practices, followed by axial coding to examine the relationship between the application of cultural values and character education management. The second, data display, is the stage of systematic data analysis related to the relationship between local wisdom values in Butonese culture and their reflection in school management of character education programs. In this stage, the data from the first stage were thematically entered, aiming to establish conceptual links between local wisdom values and management within character education programs. Next, the analyzed data were presented quantitatively and qualitatively to demonstrate analytical transparency. Quantitative data were presented as percentages to illustrate the relative dominance of each theme. This approach did not aim for statistical generalization but rather provided a descriptive representation of qualitative patterns. The third step was to conclude by answering the research questions. The data findings were summarized to answer the research questions.

To verify data validity (reliability), this study conducted a credibility analysis process through ongoing participant engagement and consistent checks. Furthermore, the accuracy of the interview data was confirmed through review and interpretation. Discussions with colleagues were also conducted to avoid data bias during interpretation. In addition to credibility, transferability was assessed by analyzing the research background contextually. Therefore, the reliability and confirmability processes underwent an audit documenting data collection, data analysis, and data source triangulation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis found that the cultural values of the Buton community are significantly related to the management structure of school educational institutions, particularly in character education development programs. The values that apply in the community's social life are evident in every school's organizational management system, as shown in the percentages from the interview data in [Figure 1](#).

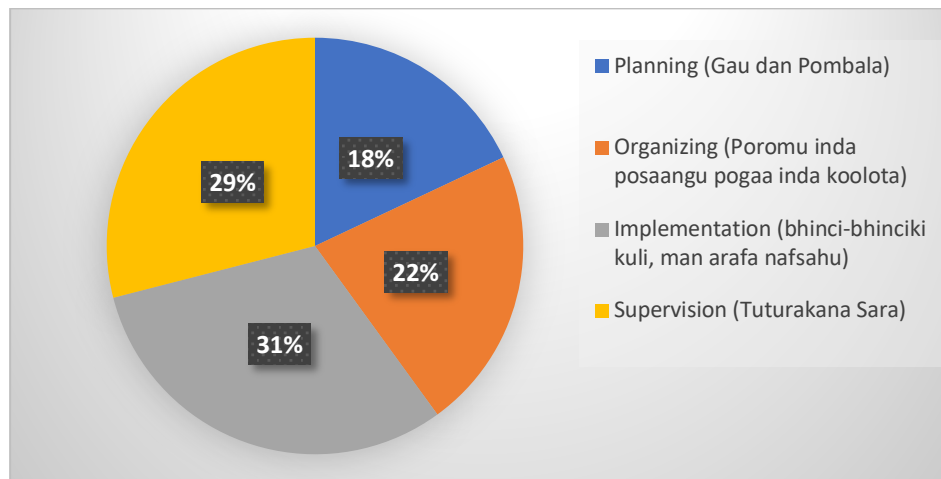


Figure 1. Percentage of Educational Management Function Data

Figure 1 illustrates the local wisdom values embodied in the Buton culture within the management systems of educational organizations. These values emerge in every organizational management system. The data shows that the highest ranking occurs in the management implementation system, followed by evaluation, organization, and planning. This means that the values that emerge reflect practical rather than theoretical educational implementation. Thus, a gap is found between conceptual and practical integration. Schools often apply cultural values only in school management planning, but this is not fully implemented in the operational system and is not reflected in the evaluation system.

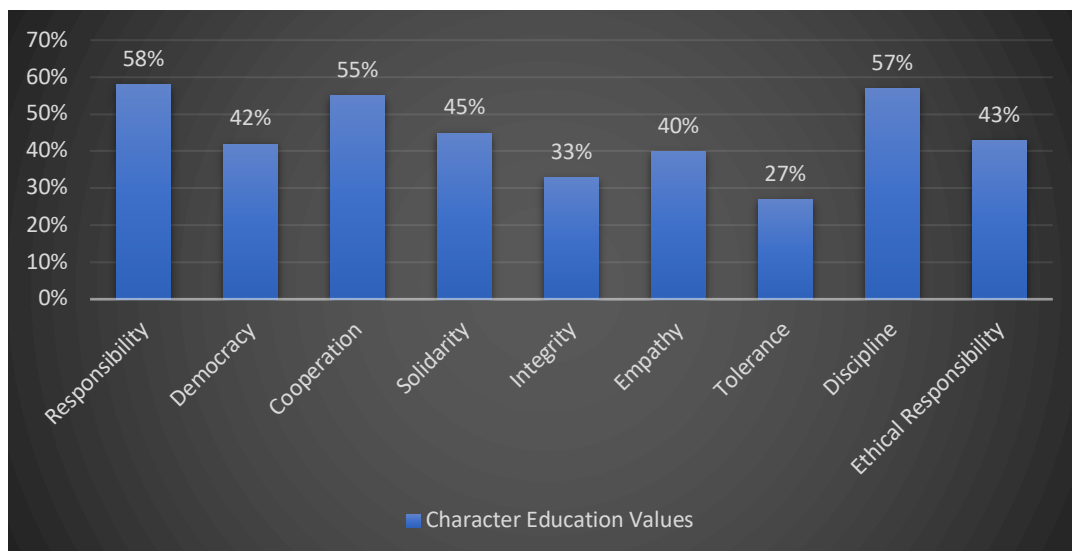


Figure 2. Percentage of Educational Values Found in Local Cultural Values

Figure 2 is a procedural finding of character education values from local wisdom values in the Buton Culture. From the Gau and Pombala cultural values, two character education values were identified: responsibility at 58% and democracy at 42%. Character education from the Poromu inda posangu pogaa inda koolota cultural value is the value of cooperation at 55% and solidarity at 45%. Character education in the cultural value of Buton Philosophy of Life (bhinci-bhinciki kuli, man arafa nafsahu) is empathy at 40%, integrity at 33%, and tolerance at 27%. Meanwhile, the character education values from the Tuturakana Sara cultural value found are discipline at 57% and responsibility towards applicable social ethics at 43%. The character education values contained in each local Buton cultural value are in harmony with the management function of education implementation and with the character education values that students must possess through education in schools. The recapitulation of the Buton cultural value model for the implementation of character education in secondary schools is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Recapitulation of the Buton Cultural Values Model for Character Education Management in Secondary Schools

Cultural Value	Cultural Meaning in Buton Society	Educational Management Function	Implementation in Schools	Character Outcomes
Cultural Value	Cultural Meaning in Buton Society	Educational Management Function	Implementation in Schools	Character Outcomes
Gau dan Pombala	Deliberation, participation, and collective decision-making	Planning of character education programs	School meetings, participatory planning involving principals, teachers, and stakeholders	Responsibility, democratic attitudes
Poromu inda posaangu pogaa inda koolota	Unity, cooperation, and shared responsibility	Organizational management of school programs	Collaboration among teachers, staff coordination, and a teamwork culture	Cooperation, solidarity
Buton Life Philosophy (bhinci-bhinciki kuli, man arafa nafsahu)	Moral and spiritual awareness guiding social behavior	Implementation of character education activities	Integration into classroom learning, extracurricular activities, and daily school culture	Integrity, tolerance, empathy

The identification of key cultural principles such as *gau dan pombala*, *poromu inda posaangu pogaa inda koolota*, and *tuturakana sara* indicates that local wisdom contains ethical norms that guide cooperation, justice, collective responsibility, and social harmony. These values are part of character education and help students understand social life in schools. The cultural values developed in character education programs become patterns that govern interactions, decision-making, and accountability within the educational context. Therefore, the values of local wisdom that apply to social life serve not only as a moral code but also as a system that governs school organizational practices.

The findings conclude that Butonese cultural values not only serve as a framework for community culture and local heritage, but also shape them. However, they can also be a strategy for building a meaningful and dynamic organizational system that meets social needs and the needs of modern education delivery, in line with current developments. This means that emerging local cultural values can serve as a guide for developing student behaviors required for 21st-century education delivery. Values such as cooperation, responsibility, and awareness of social ethics can help students improve their quality of life. The value of cooperation is evident in the cultural philosophy of *Pohamba-hamba*. This value teaches a spirit of teamwork and mutual respect, fostering a sense of solidarity within the community. Traditions often derived from these cultural values include activities closely related to daily life, such as helping with house construction, agricultural work, religious ceremonies, or other activities involving all stakeholders in the community.

Furthermore, traditional literary forms such as *kabanti* contain moral teachings related to ethical behavior, social harmony, and religious awareness. These cultural expressions serve as informal educational media through which moral values are transmitted across generations. The reconstruction of these cultural values shows that Butonese culture contains strong ethical principles that can be integrated into the management of character education in schools. Thus, education can be a transmission of local cultural values (Akhmar et al., 2023). Thus, the government, society, and schools can work together to build local cultural values into formal education in the Indonesian context so that the challenges of technology can be overcome and Indonesian students have cultural characters that are in harmony with those of the Indonesian nation (Anom & Rassanjani, 2026; Yatim et al., 2025).

The cultural values philosophy of *Gau* and *Pombala* concerns organizational planning strategies for character education programs in schools. In this strategy, the emphasized values relate to deliberation, democracy, freedom of expression, and decision-making through mutual agreement. Therefore, the findings of these values in character education program planning relate to the involvement of all parties in the school and collaboration in planning appropriate ways to teach character education values. Teachers and principals can conduct joint discussions on the design of learning activities that can instill character education values in students. This can even involve parent representatives to achieve the goals of the character education program. The *Gau* and *Pombala* cultures illustrate participatory program planning and joint decision-making that can represent the opinions and desires of all parties to ensure the success of the character education program. This finding is reinforced by previous research demonstrating that the successful implementation of character education to strengthen student character begins with thorough, collaborative planning (Dahanayake, 2023; Maisyaroh et al., 2023).

The values embodied in the *poromu inda posaangu pogaa inda koolota* philosophy from data analysis are unity and responsibility. In educational institutions such as schools, this emerges in collaborative activities between school members and other institutions. This means that schools and other related institutions share a common goal of achieving educational goals. Each person and institution has their own function and role in achieving educational goals. Therefore, all school members, including students, teachers, administrators, and leaders, are required to collaborate to deliver high-quality educational programs, such as character education (Fei, 2020; Marginson et al., 2023). If the organizational culture is collaborative, the school environment can have comfortable conditions, adequate facilities, and a balance in all aspects of educational delivery.

The local wisdom values, which constitute the philosophy of life of the Buton people, related to the values applied in character education, include: a) *man arafa nafsahu faqad arafa rabbahu* (self-awareness in the religious dimension); b) *bhinci-bhinciki kuli* (mutual respect and social harmony); and c) values emphasizing faith, compassion, tolerance, honesty, discipline, and responsibility. Students can understand these values through classroom learning activities, non-academic activities such as extracurricular activities, daily interactions with school members, examples of teacher behavior, and guidance and counseling activities. Thus, these values become closely related to students' real lives and become part of their daily moral values, understood not only as theoretical concepts but also as practical ones (Tiara et al., 2024).

As educational institutions, schools have systems for evaluating the implementation of formal and informal education, particularly regarding student character development during learning activities. Furthermore, schools evaluate behavior, teacher assessments, and indicators that reflect student character. The findings show that the principles of the *tuturakana sara* cultural value system, grounded in justice, honesty, and ethical responsibility, are essential components that students should master. This means that this character education evaluation system is not solely concerned with rewards and punishments; it also aims to recognize student behavior and direct it toward positive outcomes. This ensures that students understand the school's norms and rules.

The findings revealed that the cultural values of the Buton community can serve as a foundational framework for character education in secondary schools. The findings illustrate that local wisdom values are not only inherited values prevalent in Indonesian society but also a potential strategy for building an integrated education system in schools (Agung et al., 2022; Andriyanti et al., 2024). While previous research examined the positive role of local wisdom in developing character education, it remained descriptive and focused on the school learning environment. Therefore, the results of this study contribute to expanding the framework of school management systems grounded in the local cultural values prevailing in the community surrounding the school. These findings address a long-standing challenge. While culture is typically associated with pedagogical content and classroom learning practices, this study applies cultural values to the management principles of educational organizations, namely schools (Andriyanti et al., 2024; Rasidi & Istiningsih, 2025).

The first finding for the organizational management system in character education, namely planning, emerges from the cultural values of *gau* and *pombala*, which are characterized by deliberation, community involvement, and decision-making based on consensus. Therefore, this finding illustrates the principles of democracy in educational system governance and participatory planning activities. This finding reinforces previous studies that collaborative decision-making in organizational planning impacts fair and sustainable school management (Purwaningsih & Ridha, 2024). A participatory school governance system fosters a sense of shared responsibility among teachers, administrators, and stakeholders in implementing the educational management system (Antonio & Gamage, 2007; Arar et al., 2026; Balonier & Huber, 2025; Harianto, 2024). Therefore, it is understandable that participatory organizational planning can contribute to leadership scholarship in educational management and leadership that is mindful of the local community's cultural framework. As previously discussed, a principal's leadership that incorporates cultural context can contribute to the development of a responsive learning environment in schools that is aligned with student needs (Nadeem, 2024). Therefore, the cultural values of *gau* and *pombala* become practical values for a participatory education planning system.

Another cultural value identified is the philosophical concept of *poromu inda posaangu pogaa inda koolota*, which is used to build a character education system. The values emerging from this content are unity, cooperation, and shared responsibility, fostering a collaborative and participatory school culture. This second finding reinforces the conclusions of previous studies, which stated that collaborative organizations with a collective work culture positively impact the effectiveness of school system management and planned educational outcomes (Bibi & Akram, 2022; Gautam et al., 2025; Paola et al., 2025). Furthermore, local cultural values can strengthen relationships between teachers and students and create a comfortable learning environment (Arar et al., 2026; Thien & Lee, 2023). These findings, reinforced by previous research, provide an understanding of traditional cultural philosophy, which embodies local cultural values and can serve as a framework for implementing an integrated, collaborative educational organization system.

Another finding is the teachings of Butonese cultural philosophy, namely the principles of "*bhinci-bhinciki kuli*" (virtue from virtue and virtue from virtue) and "*man arafa nafsahu faqad arafa rabbahu*" (virtue from virtue and virtue from virtue), which teach the values of moral awareness, empathy, spiritual reflection, and social

responsibility, which must be incorporated into the school organizational system so that character education can align with society. Therefore, it can be concluded that educational practices that incorporate local wisdom values can foster character traits aligned with the concept of character education. Previous studies also reinforce this finding that ethical values and institutional norms must be balanced and consistent so that educational goals and student behavior are integrated with student character outcomes (Fernández-Espinosa et al., 2025; Sanjani et al., 2024). Therefore, the data in this finding, reinforced by previous studies, demonstrates that the ethical system that must be built within schools is a cultural characteristic that can strengthen the school's mechanisms and accountability as an institution that produces quality graduates in knowledge and attitudes. In this regard, norms and culture are preserved in the implementation of education and the educational evaluation process, resulting in a meaningful learning environment for students.

The results of this study propose a framework for the character education management process in schools, a breakthrough because it integrates local cultural values. Thus, local wisdom values, as part of cultural heritage, serve as a strategic foundation for the management of character education programs in modern educational institutions, including planning, organization, implementation, and evaluation. Furthermore, the results of this study offer numerous opportunities for further research on integrating cultural values into character education management. These findings can be applied to the cultures of communities in other cities and linked to the uniqueness of each region's culture in managing character education programs across various educational institutions, such as schools, Islamic boarding schools, or madrasas. Therefore, it can be said that local life and culture can support the development of education that has not yet been integrated into school practice (Ramli et al., 2025). Thus, the values contained in local wisdom can be used as an aspect for developing character education by stakeholders, so that students, as part of the next generation, can adapt and develop a sense of responsibility in line with the demands of the globalization era (Lukman et al., 2025; Parhan & Dwiputra, 2023).

The proposed model development in this research is part of a study that enriches the implementation of education grounded in local cultural values, not merely as learning content. It even serves as part of the literature development for the concept of leadership based on local cultural values. Therefore, several key elements of this finding refer to schools as educational institutions that can: 1) integrate the values of local cultural heritage and traditions as part of school policy planning in educational implementation; 2) develop character education values that can become the hallmark of the school and the local community; and 3) collaborate between educational institutions and the community to improve the quality of education delivery. In practice, the proposed model serves as a guide for strengthening character education programs that can address global changes and develop management strategies grounded in local cultural values. By involving the local community, particularly in applying local cultural values to character education programs, a collaborative education system can be built, fostering a shared sense of community ownership of educational quality. It can also create a learning environment and social networks for the continued development of the school. Thus, the character education delivery system becomes not only a desirable part of the curriculum but also a place for students to learn within the community (Fathurrochman et al., 2025; Sakti et al., 2024).

The findings are limited because the application of cultural values is primarily focused on the planning stage of organizational management and has not yet been fully implemented in the development of a comprehensive formal school management structure. Data indicate that their application remains fragmented and not yet systematically integrated. Therefore, transforming local wisdom values from a theoretical to a practical basis provides a novel framework that can encourage more integrated school strategy policies and reflect an Indonesian character. Theoretically, integrating local cultural values into the normative and structural dimensions could constitute a new contribution to the literature on the management of educational institutions. Thus, cultural values are not only a context for describing a society's community but also a complementary and central component of organizational management.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the values of Butonese local wisdom can serve as a strategic framework in managing character education in secondary schools through a culture-based management approach. This study identified four main cultural principles as the basis for the proposed model, namely the values of gau and pombala that contribute to planning through participatory and deliberative decision-making involving school stakeholders; the philosophy of poromu inda posangu pogaa inda koolota that supports program organization by emphasizing unity, cooperation, and collective responsibility; philosophical teachings such as bhinci-bhinciki kuli and man arafa nafsahu that provide an ethical and moral foundation in the implementation of character education; and the principle of tuturakana sara that serves as an evaluation framework based on justice, honesty, and accountability. The values in this study are characteristic of local wisdom and reflect the community's cultural heritage, serving as a foundation for educational management practices and making them relevant to current conditions. The findings yield a proposed character education management model based on Butonese cultural values, integrated with local community cultural values, to incorporate the four main functions

of educational management into the practice. The proposed model aligns with educational practices in schools and can incorporate the community's socio-cultural values. This study has limitations in sample size, research variables, and data collection time, so the results still have potential to inform the development of quantitative instruments to test the model's effectiveness holistically. Longitudinal research could also be conducted to explore the integration of local wisdom values linked to the application of digital technology in schools, thereby ensuring educational practices remain relevant to current globalization. The proposed model could also serve as a cultural model in other studies, such as comparing local wisdom values across communities, and as a foundation for developing educational curricula to preserve cultural heritage values.

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