

Integration of Ethnic Tengger Local Cultural Values in Merdeka Curriculum for Elementary Education Level A-C

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Abstract

This study examines the integration of local cultural values of the Tengger ethnic community into the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary education level, specifically across phases A to C. Utilizing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with educators and school administrators, direct classroom observations, and analysis of curricular and instructional documentation in public elementary schools located in Tosari District, Pasuruan Regency. The findings reveal that core Tengger cultural values, such as deliberative consensus, communal cooperation (*gotong royong*), and interreligious harmony are systematically embedded within thematic learning activities and Pancasila Student Profile (P5) projects. These values are internalized through pedagogical strategies that align with Lickona's framework of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, fostering holistic character development among students. Teachers contextualize learning content by linking curriculum competencies to students' lived cultural experiences, thereby enhancing relevance, engagement, and ethical understanding. The study demonstrates that the Merdeka Curriculum provides a flexible platform for the incorporation of local wisdom, enabling culturally responsive and sustainable character education. These findings highlight the potential of curriculum localization to strengthen national education goals while preserving indigenous identity and community values within formal schooling.

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum; Tengger Local Culture; Elementary School Character Education; Cultural Value Integration; Contextual Learning

INTRODUCTION

The integration of local cultural values into the educational curriculum is essential for fostering a more inclusive and culturally relevant learning environment. In Indonesia, the Merdeka Curriculum, which offers a more flexible and context-specific approach to education, faces the challenge of incorporating local wisdom while promoting national unity in a diverse society. The Tengger ethnic group in Tosari, Pasuruan, with its rich cultural heritage, provides a unique opportunity to explore how its local values—such as communal cooperation, interfaith harmony, and consensus-based decision-making—can be integrated into the curriculum for elementary education levels A–C. This integration is crucial not only for preserving local cultural identities but also for nurturing students' social awareness, tolerance, and sense of community.

This study aims to address this challenge by examining how the local cultural values of the Tengger ethnic group can be effectively incorporated into the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary level. The importance of this research lies in its potential to offer valuable insights into how the Merdeka Curriculum can be adapted to be more inclusive of local cultural practices, thus making learning more meaningful and contextually relevant. As Indonesia continues to navigate its diverse cultural landscape, incorporating local wisdom into education is key to ensuring that students not only acquire academic knowledge but also develop character, social responsibility, and an appreciation for cultural diversity.

The significance of integrating local cultural values into education has been highlighted in previous studies. Researchers like Sarnita & Andaryani (2023) and Susiloningsih (2020) have underscored the importance of multicultural education in fostering tolerance and social cohesion (Sarnita & Andaryani, 2023; Susiloningsih, 2020). Furthermore, studies by Alfafan & Nadhif (2023), Limbong et al. (2022), and Chotimah et al. (2018) demonstrate that the integration of local cultural values—such as those of the Tengger ethnic group—can promote mutual respect and collaboration among students from diverse backgrounds (Alfafan & Nadhif, 2023; Chotimah et al., 2018; Limbong et al., 2022). These studies also emphasize the role of teachers in effectively articulating and implementing local values within the curriculum, a critical component for the success of such integration (Fajrussalam et al., 2020; Susiloningsih, 2020).

While the existing literature provides valuable insights into multicultural education, this study offers a novel contribution by specifically focusing on how the Tengger ethnic

group's cultural values can be integrated into the Merdeka Curriculum for elementary education. The research will explore how values such as consensus-based decision-making, communal cooperation, and interfaith harmony can be incorporated into both formal educational activities (such as thematic learning and Pancasila Student Profile projects) and informal cultural practices. The study will use Lickona's (1996) character education framework, which emphasizes three key components: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Lickona, 1996). By applying this framework, the research aims to examine how local cultural values contribute to the holistic development of students' moral and social character.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze how the local cultural values of the Tengger ethnic group are integrated into the Merdeka Curriculum at elementary education levels A–C. Specifically, the research will investigate how values like communal cooperation, tolerance, and interfaith harmony are embedded into the curriculum through both formal educational content and cultural practices in the community. By doing so, the study will offer a model for integrating local cultural wisdom into the curriculum, enhancing not only students' academic learning but also their moral development and social cohesion. The ultimate goal is to demonstrate how the Merdeka Curriculum can effectively accommodate local cultural values, contributing to a more inclusive and sustainable approach to character education.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, which is well-suited for exploring the integration of Tengger ethnic local cultural values into the Merdeka Curriculum at elementary education levels A–C. Qualitative research allows for a deep, contextual understanding of the challenges, experiences, and perspectives of both educators and local community members involved in the curriculum's implementation. By using this approach, the study aims to uncover the complexities of integrating local cultural values into national educational frameworks, focusing on the social and cultural dynamics within the community.

A case study design was chosen for this research, as it provides an in-depth exploration of a specific context—in this case, the schools in Tosari, Pasuruan, which have already implemented the Merdeka Curriculum (BPS Kabupaten Pasuruan, 2021). The case study method allows for a thorough examination of how Tengger cultural values are incorporated

into both formal education, such as thematic learning and Pancasila Student Profile (P5) projects, and informal community practices. By focusing on this specific context, the research offers a detailed understanding of how local wisdom can be effectively integrated into national educational practices.

The participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring that they were knowledgeable about and actively involved in the integration of local cultural values into the curriculum. The research includes school principals, teachers from elementary education levels A–C, and local community leaders such as adat (customary) leaders and religious figures. These participants were chosen because of their direct involvement with the curriculum and their understanding of the Tengger cultural values. Their insights provide valuable perspectives on how local traditions and practices can be translated into educational activities and how they influence students' learning experiences.

Data were collected through a combination of in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected participants to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and strategies for integrating Tengger cultural values into the curriculum. These interviews allowed for flexibility in exploring the participants' viewpoints while focusing on key themes such as the challenges faced in this integration process and the strategies used to overcome them. In addition to interviews, observations were made both inside and outside the classroom. In-class observations focused on how Tengger values were incorporated into thematic learning and Pancasila Student Profile projects, while out-of-class observations were conducted during community events such as cultural rituals, which provided insight into how these values are practiced in daily life and their potential influence on the students.

Furthermore, document analysis was conducted on relevant educational materials, including the Merdeka Curriculum guidelines, lesson plans, and records of the Pancasila Student Profile projects. This analysis helped to assess how Tengger cultural values are reflected in the official curriculum and to determine the extent to which the integration of these values aligns with the broader objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum (Ardiansyah et al., 2023; Djaelani et al., 2013; Pujaastawa, 2016).

The data collected through these methods were analyzed using thematic analysis, a technique that involves identifying patterns and themes within the data. The process began with data reduction, where the data was organized and condensed to focus on relevant

themes related to the integration of local cultural values. This was followed by categorization, grouping similar data to facilitate analysis. The interpretation phase involved making sense of the data and identifying key insights that emerged, followed by drawing conclusions based on the findings (Creswell, 1998). The entire analysis was conducted over a period of three months, from January to March 2025, ensuring that the data was thoroughly reviewed to ensure its validity and reliability.

RESULTS

The Merdeka Curriculum at the Elementary Education Levels A–C represents a significant reform in Indonesia's national education system, shifting the paradigm from content-based learning to one that emphasizes competencies and the development of students. The curriculum is structured into three phases: Phase A (Grades I–II), Phase B (Grades III–IV), and Phase C (Grades V–VI), each designed to align with the psychosocial characteristics and learning needs of students (Kemendikbud, 2024; Kepala Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, 2024).

Phase A (Grades I–II): Strengthening the Foundation for Learning

In this phase, values such as tolerance and cooperation were integrated through activities like folk tales and discussions of social values in Indonesian Language and Civics Education (PPKn). A notable example of this integration is the introduction of interfaith tolerance, which was highlighted through stories of cross-faith participation in the Kasada ritual (see Table 1).

Phase A (Grades I–II): Strengthening the Foundation for Learning

Phase A serves as a crucial bridge between early childhood education (PAUD) and formal primary school education. The Merdeka Curriculum at this stage emphasizes holistic, engaging, and meaningful learning experiences. The focus is not solely on academic achievement but rather on the learning process to prepare students for future educational success.

Learning activities in Phase A support six foundational areas of development: religious values and character, emotional maturity, social and language skills, positive learning attitudes, motor skills and self-care abilities, and cognitive maturity. Assessments are authentic and narrative, based on real-life observations of student behavior. Teachers are

expected to be sensitive to developmental stages and create psychologically safe learning environments that encourage exploration and curiosity.

Key activities include educational games, motor skill exercises, storytelling, and reflective dialogues. One common challenge in this phase is parental pressure for early academic results, which can sometimes conflict with the holistic approach emphasized by the curriculum.

To instill character values, the Merdeka Curriculum in Phase A also integrates local cultural elements as part of the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) project. One example is the incorporation of Tengger cultural values into subjects such as Indonesian Language, Civics (PPKn), and Islamic Religious Education (PAI).

For instance, tolerance and cooperation are fostered through folk tales about life in the "pawon" (family kitchen), symbolizing togetherness and communication within the family. Interfaith tolerance is introduced through stories of cross-faith participation in the Kasada ritual, an important tradition in Tengger culture. Family deliberation activities teach principles of democracy and the importance of listening to others' opinions from an early age.

These activities not only strengthen local cultural roots but also shape students' characters aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile, which includes global diversity, mutual cooperation, noble character, critical thinking, and independence. Thus, integrating local culture provides an effective and contextual approach to imparting valuable moral lessons relevant to the students' lives.

Table 1 below summarizes how Tengger cultural elements are integrated into learning in Phase A through the P5 project.

Table 1. Integration of Tengger Cultural Values into P5 (Phase A)

Phase	Tengger Cultural Element	Values Embedded	Implementation in Subjects / P5	Pancasila Student Profile
A	Pawon Life (Family kitchen)	Tolerance (al-tasamuh), Cooperation (al-ta'awun), Courtesy	Folk tales in Indonesian Language, social value discussions in PPKn, group work	Global diversity, Mutual cooperation, Noble character

A	Cross-faith participation in Kasada	Interfaith tolerance, Unity	Local hero stories in Religious Education (PAI), social harmony reflection in P5	Faith and piety, Global diversity
A	Family deliberation	Democracy, Listening to others' opinions	Deliberation activities in class (PPKn), simple decision-making simulations	Critical thinking, Independence, Mutual cooperation

Phase B (Grades III–IV): Strengthening Social Literacy and Democratic Values

Phase B represents a shift from holistic, integrative learning toward a more structured, subject-based approach, while maintaining a strong emphasis on contextual and meaningful learning experiences. The main objective at this stage is to develop students’ functional literacy and numeracy skills, alongside nurturing character traits that support their social interactions and responsibilities.

In this phase, subjects begin to be taught separately—such as Pancasila Education (PPKn), Social Studies, and Indonesian Language—but the curriculum still encourages integration through large-scale projects or thematic learning. Students are introduced to scientific methods and basic inquiry skills to foster curiosity and develop logical, evidence-based thinking.

The Merdeka Curriculum at this level highlights the importance of students’ ability to understand informative texts, recognize social realities, solve straightforward mathematical problems, and reflect on moral values in everyday contexts. Values like honesty, responsibility, and empathy are explicitly taught in subjects such as Religious Education and PPKn, and are also embedded in daily classroom activities and assessments. Teachers act as facilitators who create learning environments that are both intellectually challenging and emotionally supportive. Assessment strategies focus on formative evaluation, using simple rubrics and qualitative feedback to guide students’ growth.

A significant cultural integration in Phase B involves introducing students to the traditional deliberation system and the value of tolerance within the Tengger community. Students learn about “*musyawarah mufakat*”, the consensus-based decision-making process, which contrasts with majority voting systems. The *Unan-unan* ceremony, a key cultural event, is used as an educational medium to teach social responsibility and the interconnectedness

of humans and nature (Marzuki, 2016). Through observation of this ceremony, students create reports or posters that reflect the social and cultural values imparted by the ritual.

The table below (Table 2) summarizes how Tengger cultural elements are woven into the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) in Phase B.

Table 2. Integration of Tengger Cultural Values into P5 (Phase B)

Phase	Tengger Cultural Element	Values Embedded	Implementation in Subjects / P5	Pancasila Student Profile
B	Customary decision-making (musyawarah)	Consensus decision-making, Local democracy	Discussions on democratic values in PPKn, role-playing community leaders in P5	Critical thinking, Mutual cooperation
B	Unan-unan ceremony	Tolerance, Cooperation, Relationship with nature	Observation of traditional activities under P5 theme “Local Wisdom”, creation of reports/posters	Global diversity, Sustainable living
B	Simple and collective lifestyle principles	Anti-discrimination, Equality, Social ethics	Discussions in PAI/PPKn, classroom reflection activities through inspirational stories	Independence, Noble character

Phase C (Grades V–VI): Reflection, Analysis, and Social Action

Phase C marks a period of intellectual consolidation where students are expected to develop systematic and analytical thinking skills. Learning outcomes at this stage require more complex cognitive abilities, such as constructing simple arguments, drawing conclusions, and critically evaluating social and natural phenomena. The Merdeka Curriculum at this phase focuses on strengthening functional competencies and preparing students for the transition to secondary education.

Central to Phase C are project-based learning, problem-solving strategies, and explorations of relevant issues. Students are actively involved in decision-making processes, collaborative teamwork, and honing effective communication skills. Teachers play a key role in designing meaningful, challenging learning activities that encourage students to access

diverse information sources beyond textbooks and to synthesize these ideas into presentations or written work.

Assessment in Phase C combines formative, summative, and performance-based evaluations of projects, covering multiple competency dimensions. A notable challenge during this phase is the varying abilities among students, requiring teachers to be flexible and creative in their instructional approaches to help every learner reach their potential.

Tengger cultural values such as ecological responsibility and symbolic tolerance are embedded in project-based learning activities. For example, the “*Menebang Satu, Menanam Dua*” (“Cut One, Plant Two”) philosophy emphasizes environmental conservation and ecological responsibility. Additionally, values like honesty, sacrifice, and loyalty are conveyed through stories of local heroes, integrated into Indonesian Language and Pancasila Education (PPKn).

Students are encouraged to critically reflect on social and environmental issues by forming independent opinions and proposing solutions. Symbolic tolerance is explored through case studies of the Walagara (traditional wedding) ritual, providing a platform to discuss how the Tengger community balances cultural traditions with religious principles. These activities reinforce global diversity and foster critical thinking skills among students.

Table 3 below summarizes the integration of Tengger cultural values into Pancasila Student Profile (P5) during Phase C.

Table 3. Integration of Tengger Cultural Values into P5 (Phase C)

Phase	Tengger Cultural Element	Values Embedded	Implementation in Subjects / P5	Pancasila Student Profile
C	“Menebang Satu, Menanam Dua” philosophy	Environmental conservation, Ecological responsibility	P5 and IPAS project “Sustainable Lifestyle,” school environmental reflections	Sustainable lifestyle, Independence
C	Walagara (traditional wedding) ritual	Symbolic tolerance, Cultural and religious adaptation	Case study on traditional values in PPKn/Religious Education, debate/presentation	Critical thinking, Global diversity

C	Local hero and legend stories	Honesty, Sacrifice, Loyalty	Writing narratives/poems about local heroes (Indonesian Language)	Creativity, Noble character, Independence
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Strengthening Through the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) Project on Tengger Local Wisdom

All phases (A–C) are integrated with the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) project, which focuses on themes such as "Local Wisdom," "Global Diversity," and "Sustainable Lifestyles." This project teaches students to design, implement, and evaluate socially relevant activities. For example, students are involved in simulations of traditional ceremonies, local plant conservation, and environmental preservation activities that are directly related to Tengger culture.

Despite the successful integration of many cultural values, several challenges were encountered. Teachers reported that, although there is strong support for integrating local values, there are limitations in resources and training to adequately address the rich cultural heritage of the Tengger community. Some teachers also mentioned difficulties in balancing the demands of the national curriculum with the integration of local cultural practices, due to the limited flexibility in adapting the curriculum to fully reflect local traditions. This explanation can be presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Integration of Tengger Cultural Values in Primary Education

Phase	Social and Spiritual Values	Tolerance	Community Life Values
A (Grades I–II)	Pawon culture: tolerance, mutual help, courtesy	Interfaith participation in the Kasada ceremony	Family deliberation: resolving differences through dialogue
B (Grades III–IV)	" <i>Adat musyawarah</i> ": decision-making without voting	Unan-unan ceremony: tolerance, social responsibility	Simplicity and collectivity: happiness in social relations
C (Grades V–VI)	" <i>Menebang satu, menanam dua</i> " philosophy: ecological wisdom	Walagara ritual: practicing adat without violating religion	Local hero stories: honesty, sacrifice, loyalty

DISCUSSION

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary education levels A–C supports a flexible and contextual learning environment, especially in transmitting social, spiritual, and life values rooted in local culture. In the Tengger indigenous community, these values represent not only social norms but also moral and spiritual systems that are internalized through daily practices. Education grounded in such local context has strong potential to holistically develop students' character, aligning with Lickona's character education theory, which emphasizes moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Lickona, 1996; Lickona & Wamaungo, 2013).

These three aspects are manifested through various cultural expressions and educational activities in Tengger society, and their integration within the Merdeka Curriculum aligns well with its principles of contextual learning, differentiation, and the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) projects.

Social and Spiritual Values in Daily Life Practices

The aspects of moral knowing and moral feeling are embedded in the domestic practices of the Tengger people, especially through the pawon (kitchen) tradition. This kitchen is more than a functional space; it serves as a moral and educational chamber, where children learn cooperation, courtesy, and responsibility. This resonates with Muassomah et al. (2020), Nurdin & Yusuf (2022) who found that family environments contribute significantly to children's positive social behavior (Muassomah et al., 2020; Nurdin & Yusuf, 2022).

Additionally, the practice of *musyawarah* (deliberation) within families and communities fosters democratic values and equips children with communication and conflict-resolution skills. This non-confrontational, consensus-oriented approach to decision-making encourages openness and is essential in democratic character development (Aura et al., 2023; A. Marzuki et al., 2018; A. M. A. Marzuki, 2016). These findings reinforce previous studies that highlighted the role of local wisdom in fostering participatory citizenship and respectful dialogue among young learners (Limpong et al., 2022).

Spiritual values are reflected in ecological practices like "*menebang satu, menanam dua*" (cut one, plant two), which emphasize environmental stewardship. Such values are suitable for integration into IPAS and P5 learning, reinforcing the dimension of moral action through environmentally responsible behavior.

Tolerance in Social and Religious Practices

Lickona (1996) describes moral feeling as including empathy and a commitment to coexist peacefully (Lickona, 1996). In Tengger society, tolerance is enacted through inclusive cultural and religious activities such as the Kasada and Unan-unan rituals, where people of different faiths participate respectfully, even without religious obligation (Astina et al., 2021; Fadli, 2017; Istiqomah et al., 2023; Putri et al., 2022; Susanto & Numata, 2023).

This model of active tolerance goes beyond acceptance; it embodies accommodation and respect in practice. Furthermore, the Walagara wedding ritual provides an example of symbolic tolerance, where Islamic communities adapt traditional rituals to remain within religious guidelines—a reflection of cultural continuity and religious adaptation. These real-life cases not only offer rich learning resources but also support the Pancasila Student Profile dimensions of global diversity and noble character.

Tengger Community Values

Lickona's concept of moral action is best developed through lived experience and modeling. Tengger community values such as honesty, sacrifice, and loyalty are conveyed through oral storytelling, traditional performances, and daily social roles. These practices are consistent with Muassomah et al. (2020), who emphasized experiential learning as effective for character building (Muassomah et al., 2020).

Additionally, the values of simplicity and collectivity contribute to an understanding of happiness as tied to social contribution rather than material wealth (Situmorang & Aslam, 2020; Stolz et al., 2013). These ideas can be effectively taught through project-based learning strategies, a central approach in the Merdeka Curriculum.

Although integration efforts are progressing, teachers have reported challenges such as limited training and materials related to local culture. These findings echo those of Fajrussalam et al. (2020), who highlighted the need for institutional support and teacher capacity building in multicultural curriculum integration (Fajrussalam et al., 2020). Addressing these barriers is essential for sustaining and expanding the positive impact of cultural value integration (see Table 5).

This study is limited in its geographical scope and participant diversity, focusing solely on elementary schools in the Tosari sub-district. Consequently, generalizing findings to broader contexts should be done cautiously. Further comparative research involving other

indigenous groups and education levels is recommended to strengthen the applicability and scalability of the integration model proposed.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that the integration of Tengger ethnic cultural values into the Merdeka Curriculum contributes significantly to the character formation of elementary students by aligning moral education with the lived realities of local communities. By embedding social values such as mutual cooperation, courtesy, and responsibility, alongside life values like honesty and sacrifice, the curriculum fosters moral knowing, feeling, and action in a culturally grounded framework. The incorporation of these values through both academic subjects and P5 projects demonstrates the curriculum's capacity to support holistic, context-sensitive learning.

Theoretically, this research underscores the relevance of local wisdom in shaping character education, enriching current pedagogical discourse with culturally responsive approaches. Methodologically, it illustrates how the Merdeka Curriculum can serve as a flexible platform for integrating indigenous values into formal education. Practically, the findings offer a viable model for cultivating character in pluralistic societies, particularly through traditions such as pawon culture and interfaith community ceremonies.

By addressing the intersection of local culture and national curriculum reform, this study fills a critical gap in the literature on culturally contextualized education. To enhance impact, future efforts should focus on improving teacher readiness and resource availability through targeted professional development and material support. Further research is needed to assess the long-term behavioral outcomes of such integration and to explore its adaptability in other indigenous settings, thereby contributing to more inclusive and effective educational practices across Indonesia.

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