

Research Article

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Author for correspondence:

Hendratno

✉ hendratno@unesa.ac.id

✉ Department of Elementary Education, Faculty of Education, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

Building Resilience in Students through Character Education Based on Indigenous Wisdom: An Approach for Conflict Zones

Hendratno , Mohammad Syahidul Haq , Nurul Istiqfaroh , Ali Fakhruddin , Nanda Veruna Enun Kharisma , Evi Rizqi Salamah , Suprayitno 

Abstract

Background/Purpose. This study aims to examine the role of character education grounded in local wisdom in developing students' resilience in conflict-affected regions of East Java, Indonesia. Local wisdom-based character education is expected to help students face life challenges with independence and strong moral character.

Materials/Methods. The research employs a Pretest-Posttest Control Group Design involving two groups: experimental and control, with a total of 173 primary school students living in conflict-prone areas. Data were collected through questionnaires measuring four dimensions of resilience: courage, perseverance, responsibility, and adaptability, alongside classroom observations assessing the integration of local wisdom values into learning activities. Data analysis was conducted using a t-test to determine differences between pretest and posttest scores in both groups.

Results. The findings indicate that local wisdom-based education has a positive impact on students' resilience. The mean resilience score of the experimental group increased from 5.61 (SD = 0.52) to 7.71 (SD = 0.57), while the control group increased from 5.56 (SD = 0.51) to 6.11 (SD = 0.59). The t-test revealed a highly significant difference between pretest and posttest scores for the experimental group ($t = -16.41, p < 0.001$), compared with a smaller but still significant improvement in the control group ($t = -3.32, p = 0.002$). Among the four measured dimensions, perseverance and adaptability showed the most significant improvement, reflecting the influence of cultural practices such as traditional games and community-based values that foster determination and flexibility in overcoming challenges.

Conclusion. The study confirms that local wisdom-based character education has a statistically significant positive effect on students' resilience, particularly in the dimensions of perseverance and adaptability. This approach contributes to holistic student development and aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 and 16 by promoting quality education and peacebuilding through culturally grounded learning.



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1. Introduction

Character education is a crucial element in education, aimed at shaping individuals with strong moral values. One of the main objectives of character education is to develop students' personalities so that they can be responsible, overcome challenges, and actively contribute to society (Zakso et al., 2022; Istiyono et al., 2021). In Indonesia, character education not only focuses on academic aspects but also on students' social, moral, and emotional dimensions, which are essential in forming resilient characters, especially in conflict-prone areas (Hart, 2022). In this context, an educational approach that incorporates local wisdom becomes highly relevant for integrating existing cultural and social values within the community.

Local wisdom, as part of traditional culture, plays an important role in supporting character education. Local wisdom can be understood as the knowledge, customs, and values that have evolved in society over time and have been passed down from generation to generation (Arsal et al., 2023; Hasyem, 2022). These values encompass moral and social aspects, as well as life skills that can help individuals become more resilient in facing life's challenges (Ahmar & Azzajjad, 2025; Subandi et al., 2025; Yani et al., 2025; Utami et al., 2025). In conflict-prone areas, local wisdom is one resource that can strengthen students' character resilience, helping them survive and adapt in uncertain conditions.

The application of resilient character education in conflict-prone areas is highly urgent. Social conflicts often lead to instability that can affect children's psychological and social development (Cavanagh & Huston, 2008). In these areas, students are frequently faced with environments characterized by tension, which can affect their mental health and their ability to interact positively in society. Therefore, resilient character education plays a vital role in equipping students with skills to manage their emotions, confront uncertainty, and develop a positive attitude in the face of adversity. A resilient character helps students remain resilient in the face of challenges and adapt to changes around them.

In Indonesia, several regions still have the potential for social conflict, including areas in East Java. These regions often face significant challenges in creating peace and social harmony, which, in turn, affect the character development of the younger generation. Therefore, character education grounded in local wisdom offers a potential solution to this issue by developing students who are not only academically intelligent but also mentally and morally resilient in the face of social pressures and conflicts (Hidayati et al., 2020; Mansur & Sholeh, 2024). This type of resilient character education is essential for equipping students to live harmoniously with others in a multicultural, challenging society.

Social education in elementary schools indeed plays a central role in shaping students' character. However, the implementation of resilient character education based on local wisdom should not be limited to social education alone. It must be integrated comprehensively into all subjects at the elementary school level. This is important because students' character is shaped by various experiences they encounter, both through academic learning and social interactions (Saripudin et al., 2021). By integrating local wisdom values into various aspects of elementary education, students not only learn about cultural values but also internalize them in everyday life, both inside and outside the classroom, and in their interactions with peers.

Local wisdom-based character education not only teaches values related to morality and ethics but also life skills needed to overcome life's challenges. For example, traditional games such as *engklek*, *eggrang*, and *sondak* teach perseverance, cooperation, and mental resilience in the face of failure. These games not only serve as entertainment but also as educational tools that teach students how to face obstacles, learn from failure, and collaborate in teams to achieve common

goals. Local wisdom-based education in all fields of elementary education has a more holistic impact in shaping resilient character in students (Ayaz Alkaya & Akca, 2024; Garrett, 2014).

Although many studies support the importance of character education in creating a better society, significant challenges remain in its implementation, especially in conflict-prone areas. Many schools in these regions have not fully utilized the potential of local wisdom in their curriculum. Badrasawi, Ahmed, and Eid (2018) similarly noted that schools in conflict zones often struggle to integrate contextual cultural values into teaching due to systemic and situational barriers. This is due to a lack of understanding of how local wisdom can be applied in education and its impact on students' character development. Furthermore, Zulkifli and Nuryaman (2025) emphasize that local wisdom plays a crucial role in conflict resolution and sustainable peacebuilding, yet its integration into the formal curriculum remains limited. Therefore, further research is needed on the implementation of local wisdom-based character education and its impact on students' development of resilient character, particularly in conflict-prone areas.

Local wisdom-based character education is believed to help students develop resilience in facing life's challenges, especially in regions frequently affected by social tensions. Local wisdom, through traditional values embedded in games and social practices, offers a highly contextual approach to help students learn about mental and moral resilience. For example, in *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Education and Children in Jammu and Kashmir* (Ilyas, 2024), it is stated that peace education is essential for helping students from conflict zones develop adaptability, tolerance, and moral capacity amid trauma. Additionally, *Six Educational Approaches to Conflict and Peace* (Almanza, 2022) suggests that integrating cultural and local approaches into the educational curriculum can strengthen students' character in critical situations. In education, local wisdom functions not only as traditional knowledge but also as a tool to reinforce students' character, helping them be more prepared to face global and local challenges in the future.

This study aims to fill this research gap by examining the role of local wisdom-based character education in building resilient character among students in conflict-prone areas in East Java, Indonesia. Focusing on elementary school students living in conflict-prone regions, this study explores how local wisdom-based education can enhance students' character resilience in the face of the social and cultural challenges they encounter. In an increasingly interconnected world influenced by globalization, education must continue to consider long-standing local values. This is also related to efforts to preserve cultural identity amid rapid modernization. Samier (2015) emphasizes how globalization in education can lead to issues of social and cultural security. Teachers and students need to recognize local wisdom as a source of valuable values that strengthen cultural identity and instill positive behaviors (Riley et al., 2024; Fakhrudin et al, 2025). By integrating local wisdom into character education, schools can ensure that students are not only prepared to compete globally but also to continue to appreciate and preserve their cultural heritage. Therefore, this research is important for revealing the potential of local wisdom in shaping resilient student characters, which can serve as substantial social capital in building a more stable and peaceful society in the future.

Thus, this study not only provides new insights into character education in conflict-prone areas but also contributes significantly to efforts in creating a more harmonious society through education. The development of resilient character among students forms a strong foundation for achieving the SDGs, particularly SDG 4 and SDG 16, which emphasize the importance of quality education and peace (Grobler & Dittrich, 2024). Therefore, this research is expected to be a starting point for introducing and implementing local wisdom-based education more widely, both in conflict-prone areas and across Indonesia.

Although numerous studies have examined character education and the incorporation of cultural or local values into the curriculum, empirical evidence on the direct impact of local wisdom-based character education on students' resilience, particularly in conflict-prone regions, remains limited. Previous works have tended to focus on moral formation or peace education in general, without quantitatively measuring how local wisdom-based approaches influence the dimensions of resilience, such as perseverance, adaptability, responsibility, and courage. Moreover, most prior studies have been qualitative, lacking comparative experimental designs that demonstrate statistical significance.

To bridge this gap, the present study provides quantitative evidence using a Pretest-Posttest Control Group Design to assess the effect of local wisdom-based education on resilience development among elementary school students in conflict-affected areas of East Java. This research, therefore, contributes an original empirical model of character education grounded in indigenous cultural practices, demonstrating how traditional values, when systematically integrated into the curriculum, can significantly strengthen perseverance and adaptability, the two most critical dimensions of resilience. The findings are expected to enrich the theoretical framework of character education and offer practical implications for policy and curriculum design in conflict-prone educational contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Local Wisdom-Based Character Education

Local wisdom-based character education integrates local cultural values and traditions into the learning process to shape students' character. This approach aims not only to improve students' academic abilities but also to strengthen their morality and social skills in facing life's challenges. Local wisdom refers to the knowledge, customs, and values inherited through generations within a community, reflecting ways of life and adapting to the social and cultural environment (Arsal et al., 2023). By incorporating local wisdom into education, students can learn about responsibility, cooperation, perseverance, and deep moral values that are crucial in building a strong and resilient character. Local wisdom-based education becomes highly relevant in conflict-prone areas, as it can create students who are not only intellectually competent but also strong in facing social pressures.

2.2. Resilient Character of Students to Build Sustainable Education

Resilient character is the ability of an individual to overcome challenges, adapt to changes, and persist under pressure (Majnarić et al., 2021; Keskin, 2022). Resilient character includes several dimensions, such as courage, perseverance, responsibility, and adaptability (Demirci et al., 2021). In sustainable education, resilient character is essential because students with mental and emotional resilience can more easily face obstacles in their lives, both in social environments and in formal education. In the context of education in conflict-prone areas, resilient character helps students manage their emotions, remain positive in the face of uncertainty, and continue striving even in the face of failure (Yu-wang & Xia, 2022; Stockinger et al., 2021). This resilient character becomes key in creating individuals who not only survive but also contribute to building a better and more sustainable future. Education that shapes resilient characters will ensure students can overcome existing challenges and adapt to future changes.

2.3. The Potential of Conflict-Prone Areas in Indonesia

Indonesia has several regions that are prone to conflict, often triggered by social, political, and economic tensions (Setiawan, 2021). These areas face significant challenges in creating social stability and sustainable development. The conflicts that often occur impact children's psychological and social development, hindering their overall development. In conflict-prone areas, character education focused on building resilience becomes extremely important. Education based on local wisdom can be a solution to these challenges, as it teaches cultural values that help students adapt

to social challenges. Additionally, this approach can enrich students' understanding of the importance of peace, cooperation, and respect for cultural differences, which are essential in building a harmonious and stable society. Therefore, local wisdom-based education in conflict-prone areas has great potential to strengthen students' social resilience and character, while also supporting sustainable development goals in Indonesia.

3. Methodology

This study uses a quantitative approach with a Pretest-Posttest Control Group Design (Creswell, 2014) to examine the impact of local wisdom-based character education on students' resilient character in conflict-prone areas. This design involves two groups: the experimental group, which receives local wisdom-based education intervention, and the control group, which follows conventional learning. Data are collected using a questionnaire that measures students' resilience and observations to monitor the application of these traits during the learning process. This design allows for comparisons between the pretest and posttest, providing evidence of changes in students' resilient character.

The questionnaire is designed to measure four dimensions of resilient character: courage, perseverance, responsibility, and adaptability. A Likert scale is used to measure students' behavioral frequency before and after the intervention. Observations are conducted during the learning process to record the application of resilient character traits among students and the implementation of local wisdom in classroom activities. This research was conducted in several elementary schools in conflict-prone areas in East Java, Indonesia, with a sample of 173 students. The sample selection is conducted using purposive sampling, targeting students who may be influenced by social conflicts in the area. The subjects of this study are expected to provide a representative picture of the impact of local wisdom-based character education.

Data analysis includes both descriptive and inferential analysis. Descriptive analysis is used to describe the characteristics of the data, such as the mean and distribution of pretest and posttest scores. Inferential analysis uses a t-test to examine significant differences between pretest and posttest results in both groups. The results of the t-test will show whether local wisdom-based education has a significant impact on changes in students' resilient character.

4. Results

This study aims to examine the impact of local wisdom-based character education on the development of resilient character in students from conflict-prone areas. Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires completed by students in both the experimental group, which received the local wisdom-based educational intervention, and the control group, which followed conventional learning. The data from the pretest and posttest were analyzed to identify changes in students' resilience. The indicators of resilient character are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Variable Indicators

No	Indicator	Description
1.	Courage	The ability of students to overcome fear and take risks.
2.	Perseverance	The ability to keep trying despite difficulties and failure.
3.	Responsibility	The ability of students to take responsibility for their actions and decisions.
4.	Adaptability	The ability of students to adjust to changes and challenges that arise.

The data indicate a significant improvement in all dimensions of resilient character in the experimental group after receiving the local wisdom-based educational intervention. In contrast, the control group showed little or no significant change in their resilient character after following conventional learning.

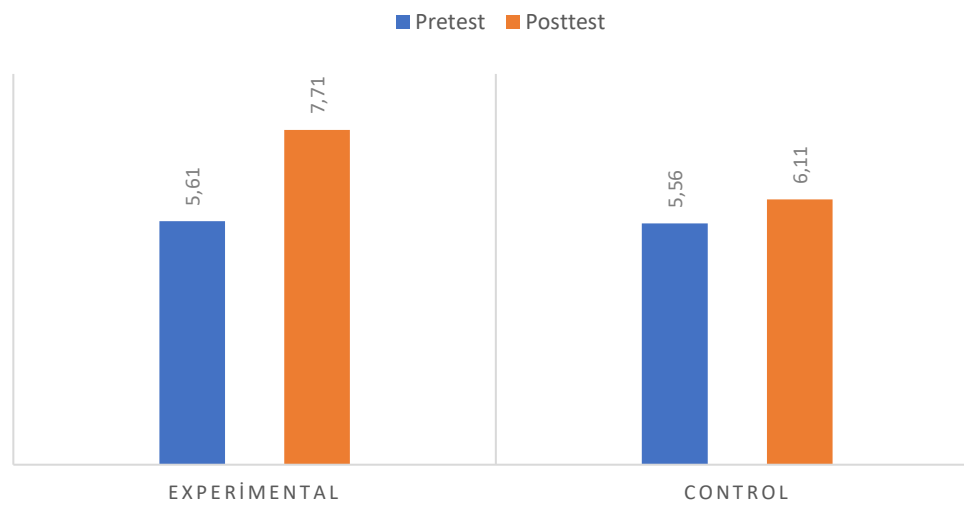


Figure 1. Descriptive Pretest and Posttest for Experimental and Control Groups

Based on Figure 1, the experimental group showed significant improvement in resilient character after receiving the local wisdom-based education intervention, with the posttest mean score (7.71) higher than the pretest mean score (5.61). Meanwhile, the control group showed smaller improvement (pretest: 5.56, posttest: 6.11). To test whether the difference between pretest and posttest in both groups is significant, a paired t-test was conducted for both the experimental and control groups. The results of the t-test indicate a significant difference between the pretest and posttest in the experimental group but not in the control group.

Table 2. Results of the t-test between Pretest and Posttest

	Mean Difference	Standard Deviation	t-Value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental	-2.01	0.53	-16.41	172	0.000
Control	-0.34	0.59	-3.32	172	0.002

Based on Table 2, the t-test results for the experimental group show a t-value of -16.52 and a p-value < 0.05, indicating a significant difference between the pretest and posttest. In contrast, the control group shows a p-value of 0.002, which is still significant but much smaller than that of the experimental group. This suggests that while there was some improvement in the control group, the changes were not as significant as in the experimental group, which received the local wisdom-based educational intervention.

5. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that local wisdom-based education significantly improves students' resilience, particularly in the dimensions of courage, perseverance, responsibility, and adaptability. The experimental group, which received the local wisdom-based education intervention, showed greater improvement across all indicators of resilient character compared to the control group. This suggests that local wisdom-based education not only introduces cultural values but also strengthens students' character in the face of challenges and difficulties. The most

significant improvement was found in the dimensions of perseverance and adaptability. This aligns with previous findings that state traditional games and local wisdom values can teach students to persist even when faced with failure (Muliadi et al., 2024; Toharudin, 2021). In traditional games such as *engklek* and *eggrang*, students are trained to overcome difficulties and try again after failure, which ultimately enhances their perseverance and adaptability. Additionally, students also learn to work together in teams, which improves the dimensions of responsibility and cooperation.

Beyond these direct behavioral outcomes, the improvement in resilience can be explained through several psychological and social mechanisms. First, local wisdom-based educational activities create strong social support networks, as students interact intensively through collaborative games, group discussions, and shared cultural practices. Such social support is known to reduce anxiety and increase emotional stability, which are important foundations of resilient behavior in children living in conflict-prone environments. Second, involvement in cultural activities strengthens students' sense of cultural belonging, enabling them to internalize the identity, values, and collective narratives of their community. A strong cultural identity has been widely associated with increased self-confidence and emotional endurance when facing challenges. Third, many traditional practices promote collaborative learning, encouraging teamwork, shared responsibility, negotiation skills, and conflict resolution. These processes naturally cultivate perseverance, adaptability, and responsibility, especially when students must collectively strategize, accept mistakes, and regulate emotions during cultural games.

On the other hand, the control group, which only received conventional learning, showed smaller changes in their resilient character. Although there was some improvement, this difference was not comparable to the experimental group, which received local wisdom-based education. This suggests that conventional learning is not yet sufficiently effective in shaping students' resilient character, especially in dealing with social challenges and conflicts around them. Conventional instruction often focuses on cognitive domains and lacks opportunities for culturally grounded, collaborative, and emotionally meaningful experiences that strengthen resilience.

The t-test results, which show significant differences in the experimental group, further support the hypothesis that local wisdom-based education positively impacts students' development of resilient character. Education that integrates local cultural values provides a more meaningful context for students, as they can relate what they learn to their life experiences. This meaningfulness enhances emotional engagement and encourages deeper internalization of positive values. Moreover, these findings resonate with international evidence from conflict-affected regions. Studies in Kenya and Uganda, for example, show that culturally grounded education enhances coping skills and emotional resilience among children exposed to ethnic conflict (Apio, 2022; Obara & Banyard, 2025). Similarly, research in Palestine, Lebanon, and Afghanistan demonstrates that educational practices rooted in community traditions can strengthen students' psychological resilience by reinforcing social cohesion, cultural identity, and collective coping strategies (Utsumi & Muradi, 2024; Sheheda, 2025; Masuwd & Baroud, 2025). These parallels indicate that local wisdom-based approaches have broader applicability and are effective not only in Indonesia but also across diverse conflict-affected contexts globally.

Therefore, character education based on local wisdom can be an effective solution for building resilient character in conflict-prone areas. Although this study shows positive results, there are still challenges in implementing local wisdom-based education across all elementary schools, particularly in broader areas. For this reason, teacher training is needed to help integrate local wisdom into the curriculum and to develop teaching materials that align with local cultural values. Strengthening collaboration with local communities, providing culturally relevant learning resources, and ensuring policy support will be essential to sustaining and scaling up this approach.

6. Conclusion

This study examines the role of local wisdom-based character education in building resilient character among students in conflict-prone areas in East Java, Indonesia. The findings indicate that the intervention of local wisdom-based education significantly improves students' development of resilience, particularly in the dimensions of perseverance, adaptability, responsibility, and courage. The experimental group, which received the local wisdom-based education intervention, showed greater improvement in all aspects of resilient character compared to the control group, which only followed conventional learning. This suggests that local wisdom-based education not only teaches cultural values but also strengthens students' mental resilience in facing social challenges and life's difficulties. By integrating traditional games and local cultural values, this education helps students develop essential life skills, such as cooperation, resilience in the face of failure, and the ability to persevere even in challenging conditions.

7. Suggestion

Local wisdom-based education should be implemented more widely in schools in conflict-prone areas to assess its long-term impact. Schools need to be encouraged to integrate local wisdom values into all aspects of the curriculum, not just in social education or character education subjects, to promote more holistic character development for students. Additionally, teachers should receive specialized training on how to incorporate local wisdom into the learning process. The development of teaching materials that align with local cultural values is also necessary to help students better connect the lessons with their life experiences. Further research is also recommended to explore the long-term effects of local wisdom-based education on students' social, emotional, and academic development. Moreover, local community involvement in education can strengthen the learning process by ensuring that the values taught are relevant to students' daily experiences. Therefore, local wisdom-based education can serve as an effective solution for developing resilient character in students in conflict-prone areas, which, in turn, contributes to achieving SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

Declarations

Author Contributions. Hendratno, Mohammad Syahidul Haq: Literature review, Nurul Istiqfaroh: methodology, data analysis. Ali Fakhrudin, Evi Rizqi Salamah: review-editing and writing, Nanda Veruna Enun Kharisma, Suprayitno: original manuscript preparation. All authors have read and approved the published version of the article.

Conflicts of Interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Approval. The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of Universitas Negeri Surabaya. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Data Availability Statement. The data supporting the results reported in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The dataset used in this research is not publicly available due to (e.g., privacy concerns, proprietary reasons, etc.), but can be accessed by interested parties through direct contact with the research team.

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About the Contributor(s)

Hendratno, Associate Professor, Department of Elementary Education, Faculty of Education, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

Email: hendratno@unesa.ac.id

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0632-9304>

Mohammad Syahidul Haq, Associate Professor, Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

Email: mohammadsyahidulhaq@unesa.ac.id

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8429-7849>

Nurul Istiqfaroh, Associate Professor, Department of Elementary Education, Faculty of Education, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

Email: nurulistiwa@unesa.ac.id

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3717-5616>

Ali Fakhruddin, Assistant Professor, Department of Elementary Education, Faculty of Education, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

Email: alifakhruddin@unesa.ac.id

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4359-8802>

Nanda Veruna Enun Kharisma, Assistant Professor, Department of Elementary Education, Faculty of Education, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

Email: nandakharisma@unesa.ac.id

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-3475-5169>

Evi Rizqi Salamah, Associate Professor, Department of Elementary School Teacher Education, Faculty of Education, Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari, Indonesia

Email: evirizqisalamah@unhasy.ac.id

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-3828-8841>

Suprayitno, Associate Professor, Department of Elementary Education, Faculty of Education, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

Email: suptayitno@unesa.ac.id

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3978-5768>

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