



Integrating Cultural Values in Nationalism Character Education: A Study on Merdeka Curriculum Implementation

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Abstrak

Pendidikan karakter nasionalisme yang terdapat dalam Kurikulum Merdeka perlu diimplementasikan sejak dini, terutama di tingkat sekolah dasar. Namun, banyak guru yang masih lebih mengutamakan penilaian kognitif dibandingkan dengan pendidikan karakter. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menelusuri, menganalisis, dan mendeskripsikan kegiatan pendidikan karakter nasionalisme berbasis budaya yang dilakukan oleh guru dalam pembelajaran di kelas. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pengumpulan data melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Analisis data dilakukan melalui tiga tahapan, yaitu pemadatan data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kegiatan yang dilakukan oleh guru dalam menumbuhkan karakter nasionalisme berbasis budaya terdiri dari empat hal, yaitu: pertama, kegiatan untuk mengenalkan budaya; kedua, kegiatan untuk menghargai budaya; ketiga, interaksi antar perbedaan budaya; dan keempat, refleksi terhadap pengalaman budaya. Disimpulkan bahwa pendidikan karakter nasionalisme berbasis budaya dalam Kurikulum Merdeka dapat tumbuh melalui pembelajaran di kelas, dengan guru sebagai fasilitator yang mengintegrasikan keberagaman budaya dan kearifan lokal di daerahnya masing-masing.

Kata Kunci: Sekolah Dasar, Karakter Nasionalisme, Budaya, Kurikulum Merdeka

Abstract

The character education of nationalism, as outlined in the Merdeka Curriculum, needs to be implemented from an early age, particularly at the elementary school level. However, many teachers still prioritize cognitive assessments over character education. This study aims to explore, analyze, and describe the activities of culture-based nationalism character education conducted by teachers in the classroom. This research employs a qualitative method with data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis is carried out through three stages: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results indicate that the activities conducted by teachers to foster culture-based nationalism character include four aspects: first, activities to introduce culture; second, activities to appreciate culture; third, interaction across cultural differences; and fourth, reflection on cultural experiences. Can be concluded that the culture-based nationalism character education within the Merdeka Curriculum can thrive through classroom learning, with teachers acting as facilitators who integrate cultural diversity and local wisdom from their respective regions.

Keywords: Elementary School, Nationalism Character, Culture, Merdeka Curriculum

1. INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is expected to restore learning by offering character and academic improvements to students. The learning carried out is in the form of project-based activities by developing soft skills and character according to the profile of Pancasila students, learning with more essential materials and a flexible curriculum structure. So that its implementation can run according to the needs of each school (Almarisi, 2023; Ningrum et al., 2023). The implementation of the Merdeka curriculum has been based on several findings, including better growth and adherence to Indonesian culture than the previous curriculum (Tin et al., 2023; Yunaini et al., 2022). This is indicated by the efforts to change competencies to be more comprehensive and continuously improve interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary sciences. Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is a collaboration carried out by all parties in the world of education, including teachers who conduct learning in the classroom (Novtian, 2023; Silvia & Tirtoni, 2023). Implementing learning in the Merdeka Curriculum always follows the development of the times.

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Learning that is designed now must follow the development of each era. Presenting learning according to the development of the era will prepare students to adapt more easily to current competencies and skills (Bosica et al., 2021; Rasheed et al., 2020). Learning results that utilize media according to the development of the era will increase students' activity, motivation, and concentration levels and various learning models are used to influence improving students' academic learning outcomes (Surandi et al., 2020; Yildirim, 2017). Learning activities that follow the development of the era focus on academic achievement and character formation.

Field findings indicate that schools implementing the Merdeka Curriculum always carry out learning activities based on the Pancasila student profile. The learning activities carried out focus not only on academic results but also on character. The purpose of implementing learning activities is to improve competence and uphold the character values of students (Armadani et al., 2023; Sumandya et al., 2022). Learning is carried out in various activities, including intra-curricular activities, Pancasila student profile strengthening projects and extracurricular activities (Armadani et al., 2023; Sibagariang et al., 2021). In addition to academics, learning in the Merdeka Curriculum aims to foster the character of students.

Character education consists of three categories, namely knowledge, feelings and actions (Martono, 2019; Wu & Chen, 2020). The character formed in learning is based on the Pancasila student profile. So that learning in the Merdeka Curriculum aims to foster the character of students, starting from knowledge about the character, feelings they have, and actions taken by students. The formation of students' characters is carried out so that they become universal people. The formation of character in students aims for students to have global competence and behave according to the values of Pancasila (Kadir, 2023; Permatasari & Murdiono, 2022). The character of students formed in learning is based on the Pancasila student profile, including being faithful, devoted to God Almighty, having noble morals, global diversity character, independent, working together, creative, and critical thinking (Kusumawardani et al., 2021; Retnasari et al., 2021). One of the characteristics of the Pancasila student profile that is important for students to have been the global diversity character.

Various learning activities carried out by teachers to foster a character of nationalism in students, namely: first, getting to know and appreciate culture (Fatmawati et al., 2018; Hartanto, 2019). Activities carried out start from exploring cultural identity, exploring knowledge, norms, and beliefs and practicing global diversity in life; second, conducting communication and interaction between cultures that aim to consider and foster various perspectives (Ramandanu, 2019; Saripudin et al., 2021). Fostering perspectives can be achieved by helping each other and being tolerant of others who are different from themselves and third, reflecting on the diverse experiences that are carried out (Gitiha et al., 2024; Tijisma et al., 2020). Various cultural experiences that are carried out will eliminate stereotypes and prejudices and align existing cultural differences so that new good characters are formed in themselves (Kasman et al., 2022; Qodr et al., 2021). Therefore, it is very important to have a character of nationalism so that the good personality that exists in him always remains steadfast in maintaining his identity as a student with the character of a Pancasila student profile.

Nationalism is part of the character of global diversity, and students need to maintain their identity and compete in the 21st century. Important elements in the character of nationalism are always knowing and appreciating culture, having intercultural communication skills when interacting with others, and reflecting and being responsible for the experience of global diversity by actively participating in building an inclusive environment. This research offers a new approach by integrating local cultural values into

nationalist character education, which has not been the main focus in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. This approach provides a practical dimension to how character education can be contextualized according to cultural diversity in Indonesia. Based on the information above, this study aims to analyze and describe the activities carried out by teachers to promote a character of nationalism, which is carried out in learning activities in elementary schools that implement the Merdeka Curriculum.

2. METHODS

The research is descriptive with a qualitative approach aimed at knowing, explaining, and describing the application of character education of nationalism in learning. Data collection in the study was carried out using observation, interview, and documentation activities (Yusanto, 2019). The instrument used in the survey of the application of nationalism character education in elementary school learning is shown in Table 1. The grid of the needs analysis instrument developed by the researcher is also shown.

Table 1. Table of Data Instruments

No	Instrument Aspects	Question Number
1	Activities to Introduce Surrounding Culture	1,3,5
2	Activities to Appreciate Culture	2,6
3	Activities for Interacting between Cultural Differences of Students	4,7
4	Activities to Introduce Surrounding Culture	8,9

Observations were carried out during learning activities in five elementary schools in Yogyakarta that implemented the Merdeka curriculum. The participants were teachers and students. Participants were selected using purposive sampling techniques. Teachers and students who participated in the study were implementers of learning activities in the Merdeka Curriculum. Data collection using observations were carried out when teachers carried out learning activities for grade IV elementary school students. Interviews were conducted with teachers and students. Documentation was used to support data in the research conducted.

The data analysis process involved several key stages, including data compression, data presentation, and the drawing of conclusions. In the data compression stage, relevant information was identified and condensed to focus on essential points, ensuring clarity and efficiency in the analysis. This was followed by the presentation of the data, where findings were organized in a structured format to facilitate interpretation and understanding. Lastly, conclusions were drawn based on the patterns, themes, and insights derived from the data. To ensure the reliability and validity of the analysis, data triangulation was employed. This method integrated and compared the findings from multiple sources, such as interviews and observations, to confirm the consistency and accuracy of the results. By cross-verifying the data through triangulation, the study strengthened the credibility of its findings and minimized potential biases in the analysis process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The research results were conducted after observations, interviews, and documentation. The discussion consists of getting to know the surrounding culture, appreciating culture, interacting between cultures, and reflecting on cultural experiences. The

introduction of culture with the aim of strengthening the character of nationalism is carried out with various activities shown in [Table 2](#).

Table 2. Activities to Introduce Surrounding Culture

No	Data Presentation
1	The teacher explains various batik motifs
2	The teacher explains the diversity of race, religion, and ethnicity that exist among students in the class
3	The teacher provides icebreaking based on national culture
4	Students and teachers must sing regional or national songs at certain times

Base on [Table 2](#), teachers can carry out various activities using different media to introduce knowledge about the love of the homeland based on culture. Some of these activities present batik motifs that exist in Indonesia. Some of them present batik motifs that exist in Indonesia. This introduction can be carried out during intracurricular learning activities or displayed in various school facilities, such as banners attached to school walls or painted on the walls. In addition, teachers explain the diversity of races, religions, and ethnicities in various regions of Indonesia in several learning materials. When learning activities occur, teachers sometimes provide icebreakers in the form of singing or fun activities based on the typical culture of a region. Several teacher activities introduce the character of the love of the homeland based on culture. These activities aim to introduce the richness of culture in Indonesia so that students will know the differences and similarities that students have. After the teacher teaches about understanding, the teacher then teaches students to appreciate the existing culture. The explanation is shown in [Table 3](#).

Table 3. Table of Activities to Appreciate Culture

No	Data Presentation
1	Teachers schedule special class duty to clean shadow puppets
2	Teachers give advice to clean miniature traditional houses in the classroom
3	Pray according to the religion of the students before and after learning

Base on [Table 3](#), respecting culture is discussed in the researcher's findings when teachers form a character of nationalism. Findings in the field show that teachers teach students to respect culture in various ways, including scheduling special duties to clean shadow puppets presented as learning media in the classroom. In addition to shadow puppets, teachers also schedule students to clean miniature traditional houses in the classroom. The diversity of religions in the classroom, consisting of various places of origin, requires students to pray according to their religion before and after learning. Activities to respect culture and foster a character of nationalism in learning are carried out in various ways to respect differences in the classroom and school environment. After students can appreciate culture which is part of the activity of strengthening the character of nationalism, the teacher then provides an opportunity to interact with the cultural differences possessed by students, as described in [Table 4](#).

Table 4. Table of Activities for Interacting between Cultural Differences of Students

No	Data Presentation
1	Seating arrangements for students with different cultural backgrounds
2	The teacher organizes students to do group activities

No	Data Presentation
3	The beginning of learning with discussion activities with one another about various activities according to the learning material

Base on [Table 4](#), the next activity to form a character of nationalism that researchers found included the arrangement of seats between students with different cultural backgrounds because, in the class, there are students who come from various regions in Indonesia. Discussion activities carried out by teachers before starting the core learning activities are one way to present interaction between students so that they can exchange opinions and form empathy between students with different backgrounds. Learning activities by forming groups are an effort by teachers to accustom students to interact with each other to find answers after deliberations are carried out between group members with different answers. Interaction between students from diverse cultures allows students to exchange knowledge and practices about the culture in their environment. So, diverse cultural references can give students a good character of love for their homeland. Finally, activities to form a character of nationalism are carried out by reflecting on students' cultural experiences described in [Table 5](#).

Table 5. Table of Activities to Introduce Surrounding Culture

No	Data Presentation
1	Providing practice questions from the material of nationalism with a cultural theme
2	Providing opportunities to observe and clean up trash at the end of learning
3	Providing reflection questions at the end of learning
4	Giving students homework to enliven the cultural festival

Base on [Table 5](#), reflection on cultural experiences is a teacher's activity when it aims to form a character of nationalism. Various activities include teachers providing practice questions from the material of nationalism with a cultural theme, usually delivered during learning Pancasila education, Javanese language, and natural and social sciences. Every time learning is about to end, students are asked to reflect on the cleanliness of their surroundings because the culture that is formed is that when students come clean, they must also go home clean. Giving reflection questions at the end of learning and when there is a significant cultural day, students are asked to make a report as homework to enliven the cultural festival. Carrying out cultural reflection is one of the activities teachers emphasize because students will become more in love with the homeland with culture-based activities.

Discussion

Referring to the research objectives and findings on the formation of a nationalist character, the discussion is described in four discussion analyses: introducing the surrounding culture, appreciating culture, interacting between cultures, and reflecting on the cultural experiences of students.

Cultural Introducing Activities

First, the teacher explains the area of origin of the batik maker, the characteristics of the batik, and the philosophy contained in the batik images attached to the classroom walls. This agenda is done with the aim that students recognize various motifs and love batik, which is Indonesian culture and having values of discipline, patriotism and respect for the environment ([Bosica et al., 2021](#); [Solikah & Novita, 2022](#)). The activity of providing

information to students aims to foster a sense of love for batik because it is part of Indonesian culture, so it will form a sense of nationalism.

Second, based on findings in the field, the teacher explains cultural material by providing examples of diversity in the classroom directly. Cultural diversity in the classroom consists of differences in religion, race, and ethnicity. The teacher continues learning about respecting cultural diversity by showing a learning video. Learning using learning videos can help students understand the material and improve their cognitive abilities and understand each other's cultural diversity (Iofrida et al., 2018; Moreira et al., 2023). Learning about the material of appreciating cultural diversity using media can improve cognitive understanding of cultural diversity around us. Third, teachers carry out culture-based icebreaking activities during the ongoing delivery of material. This aims to introduce various materials studied in a fun way and restore students' focus in participating in learning activities (Sagala, 2024; Supeni et al., 2019). Learning will be more enjoyable if interspersed with icebreaking activities and singing traditional songs while delivering the material.

Fourth, teachers and students sing national and cultural songs accompanied by music at certain hours and times every day. Using songs to package the delivery of material can have a significant effect. Learning activities assisted by traditional songs in elementary schools increase students' knowledge (Rahmawati et al., 2021; Szabo et al., 2020). Several teacher activities based on culture introduce the character of nationalism: explaining various batik motifs, understanding the diversity of races, religions, and ethnicities in the classroom, conducting culture-based icebreaking, and singing traditional or national songs at certain times.

Cultural Appreciation Activities

Various culture-based activities are carried out in the independence curriculum during classroom learning to foster a character of love for the homeland. One of the activities that students can do is appreciating culture. Learning activities to respect culture to foster a character of nationalism in students can be carried out in various ways. The teacher instructs students on duty to clean the shadow puppets attached to the walls and the miniature traditional houses in the classroom. The duty activity is one of the activities carried out to carry out the advice given by the teacher so that it will foster good character in students (Djafri & Badu, 2019; Oktaviani & Arimbi, 2015). The character formed in this case is the character of loving a country's unique culture.

Providing equal opportunities to students with different religions and backgrounds when praying is carried out with mutual respect, even though students' beliefs in the class are diverse. This agenda teaches students to respect the differences that exist around them. The prayer activities before and after the learning process are carried out to foster a sense of mutual respect between existing differences (Dewi, 2018; Karimah et al., 2023). Fostering a sense of mutual respect for the differences that exist around them can be taught by teachers when students pray in class, and the prayer activities are carried out according to their respective religious beliefs.

Students' Cultural Differences Interaction Activities

Interacting with students from different backgrounds is an activity that can build a personality of mutual respect in socializing. One of the differences in the background of students is the difference in culture they have. Interacting with friends in class who have different cultures is an activity students use to foster a character of nationalism (Anshori, 2020; Islam et al., 2022). Interaction activities to build a character of nationalism can be done in various ways, including:

There are random seating arrangements in various subjects every week or month. This random placement is an effort by the teacher to make students get to know each other. The seating arrangement aims to create communication and a variety of learning activities that allow students to work together (Anshori, 2020; Vaportzis et al., 2017). The seating arrangement aims for students to get to know each other so that communication and various activities are carried out in learning in the Merdeka Curriculum.

Furthermore, based on the findings of efforts to condition students so that interactions between cultures occur, the teacher carries out group-based learning activities. Group activities are carried out in the form of small groups in which there are several interesting learning activities. The formation of groups directed by the teacher aims to exchange knowledge and actions for students to become better (Jalinus et al., 2019; Peña-Ayala & Cárdenas-Robledo, 2019). Group activities organized by teachers in learning in the Merdeka Curriculum are a way to increase knowledge and actions about nationalism that was previously unknown.

Teacher activities so that students can interact between cultures in learning are carried out by providing time for students to discuss so that there will be an exchange of information. Discussion participants are students whose seating arrangements and activities are carried out before learning begins. The benefit of holding a discussion forum with peers is that it teaches social skills (Iskhakova et al., 2020; Titarenko & Little, 2017). Teachers provide discussion activity facilities so that students can interact with students of various races and religions, and these activities are carried out before starting to learn in the Merdeka Curriculum. This activity allows students to build the ability to love each other among fellow Indonesian citizens.

Students' Cultural Experience Reflection Activities

Reflection activities on cultural experiences are activities carried out by students to foster a character of love for their country. One of these efforts can be carried out in learning activities in the Merdeka Curriculum. After delivering material learning to the social group with cultural material, the teacher provides practice questions regarding culture. Students complete questions from the material in the social group, which aims to determine their ability to understand and improve their thinking skills of students (Dwi Saputra et al., 2022; Irwanto et al., 2018). The practice questions given after the delivery of the material aim to improve understanding of the material and reflect on the learning that is being carried out so that it can be practiced in everyday life. These activities can be carried out in various learning areas in the social groups, such as social sciences, Pancasila Education, and regional languages.

Furthermore, the teacher in the class reflects on the culture of maintaining cleanliness. The teacher allows students to throw away trash around them immediately. The activity of throwing away garbage is a habit/character of nationalism that must be possessed because it will have a good influence on daily life and foster a good culture in him (Fatmawati et al., 2018; Hartanto, 2019). The opportunity given by teachers to build a culture of throwing away garbage can be done in all learning activities in the Merdeka Curriculum. This agenda is the first step for students to foster a character of nationalism so that a culture of maintaining cleanliness is formed in everyday life.

Next, teachers get used to reflecting at the end of learning, which consists of two activities namely: first, the teacher gives special time to reflect in the form of questions and answers, which are used as evaluation material to improve deficiencies in understanding material that has not been understood in learning in the social group and second, reflecting the form of homework consisting of commands for repetition or consolidation practices in the social learning group which will build a good culture for students to learn so that a character

of nationalism is formed (Eğriboyun, 2022; Kamaruddin, 2012). Activities to build a character of nationalism are carried out by reflection at the end of learning. This agenda can be done in several learning activities in social groups with the aim of forming the foundation of a character of nationalism in students. Enlivening the festival is one of the students' efforts to explore the culture that is their identity. Participating in the festival outside of school hours reflects improving several abilities. The emergence of emotional solidarity in participants who participate in the festival influences their perspective on culture as a foundation for activities (McLean et al., 2022; Zhang & Tang, 2021). Students participating in the festival will build new relationships that will influence the quality and emotional solidarity about culture, which is part of nationalism.

This study has significant implications for the development of nationalism character education through the integration of cultural values in the Merdeka Curriculum. The findings can provide guidance for educators, policymakers, and educational institutions in designing learning programs that not only strengthen nationalism but also preserve local cultural heritage. By incorporating cultural values into character education, the Merdeka Curriculum has the potential to become a contextually relevant educational model, fostering a sense of national identity and enhancing appreciation for diversity among students. Furthermore, this research contributes to the literature on holistic approaches in character education, combining local cultural elements with nationalism values.

However, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, it may be limited to specific cultural and regional contexts, making the generalization of findings to other regions or cultures less certain. Second, the implementation of cultural values in the Merdeka Curriculum may be influenced by various factors, such as limited resources, teacher competencies, and the level of policy support at the local level. Third, the qualitative approach used in this study might not fully capture the long-term impacts of integrating cultural values on students' nationalism character development. Therefore, further research with broader scope and diverse methods is needed to strengthen the findings and provide more comprehensive recommendations.

The results of the research carried out, the researcher suggests several things, including first, the time used for further researchers is allocated more time so that the data obtained can be more in-depth; second, the scope of this research is only carried out in classroom learning activities, so that future researchers can obtain data with a wider scope, namely in the extracurricular and co-curricular areas

4. CONCLUSION

Contains Activities to foster a character of nationalism in learning activities in the Merdeka Curriculum can be carried out with various activities ranging from getting to know, appreciating, interacting, and reflecting on cultural experiences. Forming a character of nationalism in each school is carried out with various activities, which can be adjusted to the culture in an area. Cultural diversity in learning in schools is good news because more activities will be used to foster a character of nationalism based on culture. Based on the results of the research that has been carried out, several strategies have been found to foster a character of nationalism in students in Elementary Schools that implement the Merdeka Curriculum, namely, carrying out cultural recognition activities aimed at finding out the various cultures that exist around; carrying out activities to appreciate diverse cultures in students to maintain harmony; interacting with the various cultures that exist in students to foster an understanding of new cultures; reflecting on newly learned cultural knowledge so that they can understand and practice the culture in everyday life.

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