



Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in Practice: Insights from Elementary School Classrooms

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Abstract: The integration of local culture into elementary social studies instruction has become increasingly important in promoting culturally responsive and meaningful education. To create a more meaningful and contextually relevant learning environment, this qualitative case study aims to investigate how teachers integrate local cultural values into their instructional strategies. Ten elementary school teachers were purposefully selected to participate in the study, and data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and a review of lesson plans and instructional materials. Patterns and themes in the data were found using thematic analysis. The results show that teachers utilize field studies, local folktales, and collaborative studies with community leaders to incorporate local culture creatively. However, challenges such as limited cultural relevance in textbooks and the lack of teaching resources hinder the effectiveness of integration. The study concludes that integrating local culture enhances students' cognitive and emotional engagement with the material, fostering a stronger cultural identity and character development. Recommendations for future research include expanding the study's scope to include more schools, examining the long-term effects on students' social and character development, and fostering greater collaboration between schools and local communities.

Keywords: contextual learning; elementary education; integration; local culture; social studies

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INTRODUCTION

The character, perspectives, and behavior of students are greatly influenced by the basic education they receive. It is a stage where the foundation of personality and way of thinking begins to take shape. Basic education plays a crucial role in shaping students' mindsets and attitudes towards their social environment (Niman et al., 2020). One of the subjects that plays a strategic role in this case is social science. Social studies aims to instill social, civic, and national values in children from an early age so that they grow up to be responsible citizens. However, in practice, social studies learning in elementary school is often limited to theoretical concepts. The material tends to be delivered textually and is not directly related to students' daily lives (Roberts, 2014). The lack of connection between the material and the socio-cultural context that is familiar to the child makes social studies lessons feel abstract. This causes students to feel bored when studying social studies efficiently. As a result, their understanding of social concepts that should be concrete becomes low.

Integrating local culture into social studies learning instruction is one viable alternative strategy to address this problem. A community's social, historical, and philosophical values are reflected in its local culture, which can be a rich, pertinent, and contextual learning resource (Suharyanto & Wiflihani, 2024). Through this integration, children can learn from their surroundings, social behaviors, customs, folktales, and inherited values that have been passed down through the years (Anggraini et al., 2022). In this sense, social studies cease to be an isolated academic subject and instead become an integral part of students' daily lives. Furthermore, understanding how local culture can enhance national identity makes this strategy even more vital. Culturally-based education helps shield and strengthen students' character in the face of globalization and cultural homogenization. As such, students learn not only about the world, but they are also encouraged to acknowledge and value their cultural heritage. Aside from imparting knowledge, social studies learning infused with local culture promotes respect for diversity, upholds moral principles, and strengthens the links between students and their communities (Niman et al., 2020).

In fact, there has not been the best implementation of incorporating local culture into social studies in elementary schools. Many teachers do not fully comprehend how to connect Social Studies material to local cultural contexts. Integration is frequently viewed as an add-on rather than a fundamental component of the learning strategy (Darong & Menggo, 2021). Furthermore, teachers find it challenging to create innovative and functional local culture-based learning practices due to a lack of training opportunities and supporting learning materials. Indeed, there are important lessons to be learned from local cultures, attitudes, and practices that can improve learning opportunities and foster a greater sense of community and identity. However, standardized or globalized content frequently takes precedence over these cultural resources. As a result, students lose out on valuable, context-based education that links them to their surroundings and heritage (Osazuwa-Peters,

2021). Along the lines of the problem previously mentioned, previous studies have emphasized the importance of integrating local culture into the classroom. Due to the closeness and familiarity of the material, culturally based learning can enhance student participation and engagement, including students' affective qualities—such as tolerance, social empathy, and a sense of belonging (Koro & Hagger-Vaughan, 2025). By establishing learning in familiar and significant contexts, incorporating local culture into instruction strengthens students' bonds with the subject matter. Students become more involved and motivated when they see how what they are studying reflects their own experiences, customs, and community values (Ayu, 2020; Tolosa et al., 2023). Because of this cultural connection, abstract ideas become relatable, which helps students understand complex subjects. Additionally, it increases students' emotional commitment to the learning process and cultivates an environment in the classroom where they feel valued and acknowledged (White et al., 2022).

Additionally, the employment of local cultures helps students build a positive self-image and confidence. Students are more likely to feel proud of their identity and origins when their culture is recognized and honored in school settings. It reaffirms their identity and the value of their heritage (Chintawidy & Sartini, 2022; Reilly et al., 2024; Rezaei & Latifi, 2020; Suharyanto & Wiflihani, 2024). Academic achievement, as well as general emotional and social well-being, depend on having a sense of belonging. Likely, teaching through a local cultural lens also promotes cultural knowledge and critical thinking (Darong, 2022; Fatmawaty et al., 2022; Hajhosseini et al., 2016; Hamdi et al., 2018). In addition to developing an appreciation and respect for cultural diversity, students also become more reflective about their own values and perspectives. It creates space for discussions on morality, social responsibility, and historical context. As students examine how culture shapes attitudes and actions, they broaden their worldviews and develop the capacity to navigate various contexts with compassion and understanding. Integral to the studies above, transforming education into an instrument for growth and preservation through the incorporation of local culture strengthens communities (Tolosa et al., 2023). It closes the generational divide by enabling students to share their own perspectives and learn from community members and elders. Students are encouraged to participate actively in their society, and this reciprocal learning process strengthens cultural continuity. By accomplishing this, education transcends academic instruction and becomes a driving force behind creativity, cultural resilience, and significant social advancement (Heng & Yeh, 2022; Selleck, 2020).

Despite the fruitful findings, the majority of previous studies lack a thorough examination of implementation strategies in elementary education and are more general in character rather than being specific to social studies. Therefore, a research gap exists that needs to be addressed. The studies in question have not explicitly examined the integration of local culture into primary school social studies learning instruction. Furthermore, little is known about the difficulty teachers encounter and how cultural integration directly affects students' academic performance. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct research that thoroughly examines the implementation of local cultural integration in primary social studies instruction methodically and efficiently. Thus, this study aims to explore how the integration of local culture in teaching enhances students' engagement and learning outcomes. It also aims to explore the role of cultural relevance in promoting students' sense of identity and community connection within the educational environment.

There is a great expectation that the results of this study will contribute to the development of a grounded, engaging, and contextualized social studies learning paradigm. Theoretically, it will improve education, particularly in culturally based teaching methods and their application in elementary school social studies. It may also serve as a scholarly resource for future research on multicultural education, contextual education, and the role of basic education in preserving culture. Practically speaking, this study might help teachers create social studies teaching resources that successfully and imaginatively integrate regional culture. Additionally, it might help local governments and schools create educational policies that encourage the incorporation of local culture into the curriculum. Additionally, the results may serve as a basis for creating learning materials that are more engaging and relevant.

Socially, this research could help formal education preserve local cultures. Young generations are more likely to grow up feeling proud of and a part of their cultural heritage if they are exposed to and taught about it from an early age. To preserve Indonesia's rich and varied cultural identity, this can serve as a powerful social capital. Consequently, including local culture in social studies not only enhances the quality of education but also contributes to the development of a cultured, morally upright, and intensely patriotic generation. In light of this, it is crucial and necessary to conduct a study on how local culture might be incorporated into social studies instruction in elementary schools. Academic achievement is simply one aspect of a quality education; another is developing full people, who are aware of their environment, their cultural heritage, and themselves. To effectively educate the country's next generation, it is intended that this research will uncover successful pedagogical, cultural, and social approaches.

At the elementary school level, integrating culture into the social studies program is a pedagogical approach that incorporates aspects of local culture as instructional strategies, contexts, and content. This approach is based on the concept that instruction ought to be relevant to students' lives, meaningful, and contextual (Darong, 2022; Darong et al., 2021; Darong & Menggo, 2021). Local culture offers a wealth of values

and authentic social behaviors that can help students grasp abstract ideas in a more tangible way within the framework of Social Studies, which encompasses history, social studies, economics, and civic education. As such, local culture-based learning can improve learning outcomes while also fortifying national identity (Briando et al., 2023; Fatmawaty et al., 2022). In addition, values found in local culture include tolerance, patriotism, discussion, and mutual collaboration, all of which are consistent with the goals of social studies learning. Following Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, Topçiu and Myftiu (2015) suggest that learning is significantly influenced by the social and cultural environment in which people are born. As a result, social studies learning instruction that integrates local cultural components fosters a learning environment that is strongly connected to students' everyday lives. Due to the information feeling relevant and familiar rather than foreign, more profound meaning-making and comprehension are made easier (Niman et al., 2020).

Several key concepts in multicultural education also support the significance of cultural integration in instructional design. The goal of multicultural learning instruction is to provide students the information, mindset, and abilities they need to survive in a society that is ethnically and culturally diverse (Chun, 2016; Derakhshan, 2021; Goh, 2016; Pinariya & Sutjipto, 2021; Selleck, 2020; Tong & Cheung, 2011; Wang, 2015; Xiang & Yenika-Agbaw, 2021). Given the enormous cultural diversity, incorporating local culture into social studies instruction serves as a valuable tool for promoting tolerance and fostering awareness of diversity, while also preserving cultural heritage. Students are more inclined to accept and value different cultures when they are taught about and from their own (Koro & Hagger-Vaughan, 2025; Ratminingsih & Budasi, 2018; Tolosa et al., 2023). Likewise, research suggests that cultural integration in social studies encourages collaborative and active learning strategies, as well as critical thinking. Culturally sensitive teaching methods can raise student motivation and involvement (Darong, 2022; Hamdi et al., 2018; Koro & Hagger-Vaughan, 2025).

In addition to improving teaching strategies, including culture in social studies has a favourable impact on character building. Darong and Menggo (2021) assert that direct and contextual experiences are the most effective way to teach character. Integrity, accountability, social awareness, and cultural pride can be effectively instilled through local culture, which represents collective ideals (Dekeyser et al., 2020; Hanif et al., 2024; Humphreys & Wyatt, 2014). In this regard, social studies provide a means of developing people who are not only intellectually strong but also morally and socially oriented. However, the literature also emphasizes the importance of teacher readiness and proficiency in achieving cultural integration in social studies (Darong et al., 2021). Teachers must be creative in developing relevant teaching strategies and resources, possess sufficient cultural knowledge, and be skilled in adaptive pedagogy. Teachers need to be facilitators who understand the cultural diversity of their students and can utilize culture to enhance, rather than hinder, learning. As such, the authenticity of this research lies in its approach, which places local culture not just as a contextual example, but as the primary source of teaching materials relevant to students' daily lives. Although various studies have discussed the importance of contextualization in education, there are still limited studies that systematically integrate local cultural elements into the social studies curriculum in a direct and applicable manner.

Another challenge arises from the limited availability of teaching materials and learning resources that specifically and systematically incorporate local culture. Many social studies textbooks are still geared toward a national audience and do not adequately incorporate knowledge that is relevant to students' local contexts. This creates a disconnect between the social contexts that students encounter and the content taught in the classroom (Chu, 2017; Lee & Eun, 2024; Niman et al., 2020). Furthermore, the main contribution of this research is the development of a social studies learning model based on local culture, which can enhance understanding of social concepts while fostering students' cultural identity from an early age. Thus, this research contributes to the development of contextual education theory and practice, especially in efforts to preserve culture and increase the effectiveness of social studies learning in elementary schools. As a result, several studies suggest creating teaching materials and curricula based on local culture, which can be tailored to the unique features of each area. In conclusion, research suggests that incorporating local culture into elementary school Social Studies instruction is a strategy that enhances teaching strategies and content while also fostering character development, broadening students' social awareness, and promoting cultural identity. Although its implementation faces several difficulties, particularly regarding resources and teacher competency, the literature largely supports this integration as a pertinent, successful, and impactful strategy in the context of multicultural basic education.

METHODS

To achieve this goal, this study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing a case study. This approach was chosen because it enables researchers to understand the experience of teachers in integrating local cultural elements into the teaching and learning process in a contextual and in-depth manner (Creswell, 2014). A case study allows for a holistic and in-depth exploration of phenomena in a real-world environment, particularly in social studies learning practices within the classroom. This study involved six elementary school teachers who were purposively selected based on two main criteria: 1) having a formal education background in the field of social sciences; and 2) having more than five years of social studies teaching experience. These criteria are

designed to guarantee that the informant has sufficient competence and experience to provide relevant and credible information for the research.

This study aims to explore in depth the process of integrating local culture in social science learning in elementary schools. The main focus of the research is to understand how local culture can be used as a contextual, relevant, and meaningful learning resource for students. By placing local culture at the heart of learning, this research aims not only to examine teachers' pedagogical practices but also to explore the social, cultural, and civic values embedded in local wisdom taught in the classroom. Through this approach, the research is expected to contribute to the development of an applicable local culture-based social studies learning model and strengthen students' cultural identity from an early age.

Data collection was conducted through three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The interview was conducted using a semi-structured guide that is open to flexibly explore teachers' views, strategies, and challenges in integrating local culture in social studies learning. Classroom observation is conducted to directly observe learning activities that incorporate local cultural elements into teaching materials. Meanwhile, document analysis focused on teaching materials, such as Lesson Plans and syllabi, to assess the extent to which local culture has been incorporated into learning planning and how consistent it is with practice in the field. These three techniques complement each other in producing in-depth and holistic data.

The collected data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, adapting the steps outlined by Darong et al. (2023). Thematic analysis is used to identify relevant patterns, themes, and categories in the context of local cultural integration in social studies learning. This process involves systematic data encoding, categorization, and interpretation of meanings that emerge from informant narratives and classroom observations. To ensure the validity of the findings, triangulation of sources and methods was employed, involving the comparison of results from interviews, observations, and documents. In addition, member checking is also carried out by asking the informant to clarify and confirm the interpretation made by the researcher, to ensure that the data obtained and interpreted accurately reflect the reality they experience.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The key findings of incorporating local culture into Social Studies instruction at the elementary school level are compiled in the table below. It highlights the main themes gleaned from observations and interviews, such as how teachers integrate aspects of local culture into their courses, the goals they pursue, the difficulties they encounter, and the impact on students' comprehension. It also describes practical solutions that teachers have devised. To put each theme in perspective and offer genuine insight into classroom practices, representative quotes are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Local Culture Incorporation in Social Studies

Theme	Sub-theme	Description	Extract
Integration of Local Culture	Use of local folktales and legends Cultural field studies Modification of lesson plans and teaching media	Teachers integrate local culture through contextual materials, visits to cultural sites, and by modifying lesson plans and worksheets using students' local culture.	Folktales from this village were included in the lesson plan because the children became instantly interested and understood them easily.
Objectives of Integration	Cultural preservation Increasing student engagement Character education based on local values	The aim of cultural integration is not only to reinforce content but also to instill social values and character rooted in local culture.	When the story comes from their own area, they become more enthusiastic, and more students actively ask questions.
Challenges of Cultural Integration	Non-contextual textbooks Dominance of non-local cultures Difficulty in finding local cultural sources	National textbooks often present content from other regions (e.g., Javanese culture in books used in Sumatra), making it difficult for students to connect with the material.	The book showcases other cultures, but the students here have never encountered them in real life.
Impact on Student Understanding	Lack of meaningful connection Lack of self-identification in materials Cognitive barriers	When textbook culture does not align with students' experiences, they struggle to understand the material and feel emotionally and cognitively disconnected.	When we discussed other cultural elements, the students were confused. There is none of that here. However, when we discussed their locality, they instantly related.

Teachers' Solutions	a. Creating their own teaching materials b. Consulting cultural figures c. Teacher collaboration	Teachers independently develop contextual teaching materials, seek out local cultural resource persons, and share practices with fellow teachers.	We created our own worksheets filled with stories and culture from this village because the national books are too out of context.
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It is clear from Table 1 that teachers have employed innovative and contextual strategies to integrate local culture into the elementary school social studies curriculum. Nevertheless, the use of textbooks, which often fail to represent the local culture in which students live, is a significant issue. In fact, they tend to be dominated by cultural content from other regions, which may be less relevant to the students. As a result, students struggle to connect social studies concepts to their own lives, as the materials are often disjointed from their everyday experiences, which weakens their cognitive processing. Besides, the curriculum content and local needs are not aligned, which creates the problem in question. Although it is required of teachers to facilitate meaningful learning experiences, these objectives are not sufficiently supported by the teaching resources. By creating their own student worksheets, modifying sample questions, and even inviting community members as guest speakers, teachers have taken the initiative to develop local culture-based teaching materials autonomously. Even though they take more time and work, these activities are concrete, teacher-led solutions. Creating localized learning resources, encouraging textbook publishers to incorporate local cultural content, and providing teachers with more flexibility to select teaching resources tailored to the contexts of their students are potential solutions for the future.

One of the most significant contributors to the development of students' identities and character in primary education is the integration of local cultural elements into social studies learning. Embedding local culture within the curriculum not only enriches the learning experience but also fosters a stronger sense of identity, belonging, and moral understanding among young learners. As the study reveals, deliberate efforts have been made to incorporate local cultural values into the teaching and learning process. These efforts include the use of traditional folktales, myths, and local legends as instructional materials. Local folktales, in particular, serve as highly effective pedagogical tools because they are more relatable and accessible to students. Their familiar narrative structure and cultural context allow students to engage more deeply with the content, enhancing both comprehension and interest. As illustrated in the following abstract, these culturally grounded stories help students connect with the material on a personal level, thereby making Social Studies not only more meaningful but also instrumental in shaping character and identity from an early age.

"I incorporated local folktales from this village into the lesson plan because the students were immediately engaged and understood easily".

This demonstrates how students can more readily connect what they learn to their own experiences when instructional materials are tailored to the local cultural context. Additionally, to provide students with firsthand experiences that deepen their comprehension of local cultural values, some teachers engage their students in cultural field studies, such as visiting cultural sites or discussing local traditions with traditional leaders. By participating in such activities, students can experience the culture firsthand, in addition to learning theoretical information from textbooks. This approach proves to be a valuable strategy for enhancing the context and vibrancy of learning (Canale, 2021; DiBianca & Fasoli, 2020; Pinariya & Sutjipto, 2021; Sari et al., 2018; Sulistiyo et al., 2021; Waloyo et al., 2023). Additionally, teachers adapt lesson plans and instructional materials to meet the needs of their students better, rather than relying solely on available textbooks. Worksheets for students and other instructional resources, which often include examples of local culture pertinent to the students' experiences, are frequently modified in this way. However, despite their many innovative initiatives, the constraint of textbooks that are not contextualized to the students' local culture remains a significant barrier for teachers. Textbooks often highlight cultures from other regions, especially those from more dominant areas, even when the students are in vastly different locations.

"The textbooks mostly contain Javanese culture, but our children here have never seen it in person."

This demonstrates how the information being taught does not align with the social and cultural realities to which the students are exposed (Chu, 2017; Roberts, 2014). Students often struggle to grasp the principles being taught when cultural content in textbooks is disconnected from their personal experiences. This can diminish the significance of learning that should be relevant to their lives. As such, their comprehension of the subject matter is clearly influenced by this discrepancy between textbook culture and real-life student experiences. When studying unfamiliar cultures, students frequently experience confusion. On the other hand, students tend to relate to and comprehend the subject matter more effectively when teachers discuss village

customs or their own local culture, as highlighted in the following extract.

"The children were perplexed when we discussed Wayang. It is not available here. However, when we discussed our village traditions, such as rangkuk alu, they immediately understood".

This evidence suggests that the degree to which content applies to students' daily lives has a significant impact on their emotional and cognitive responses to it (Darong et al., 2021; Miqawati et al., 2024; Niman et al., 2020). To address this problem, many teachers take the initiative to develop their own instructional materials that are better suited to the local culture of their students. Instead of relying solely on centrally provided textbooks, they create worksheets and adapt lesson plans to meet the needs of their students, as the main textbooks often lack context. In this case, this initiative reflects the creativity and commitment of teachers to provide more meaningful learning experiences (Crawford-Garrett et al., 2015; Keller et al., 2018; Rospigliosi, 2024; Sheridan & Gigliotti, 2023). Additionally, some teachers also engage in conversations with cultural leaders. Collaboration among teachers also proves to be an effective solution, as they share resources and experiences in integrating local culture into Social studies learning. Integral to the problem in question is the limited time teachers have to provide culturally relevant materials, which presents another challenge. Teachers are compelled to select and organize their teaching materials strategically due to the limited time allocated for each subject. Teachers nevertheless try to maximize the time allotted by incorporating aspects of local culture into various lesson subjects. This is consistent with an interdisciplinary approach to education, which enables the integration of local culture into many topics, such as social studies (Trinter & Hughes, 2021).

These findings have pedagogical implications that teachers should take the initiative to seek learning materials that fit the local context. When textbook content is irrelevant to students' lives, they need to be more inventive in their problem-solving. Without sacrificing the essential knowledge that so-called learning indicators require students to acquire, teachers should also be able to adapt lesson plans and instructional materials to fit the cultural context of their students better (Opoku-Amankwa et al., 2011). To provide more varied and relevant teaching materials, teachers must also encourage collaboration with colleagues and community cultural leaders, given the constraints of time and resources (Bevins & Price, 2014; Keogh et al., 2010).

The ultimate objective of incorporating local culture into social studies learning is for students to develop strong moral character based on local values in addition to gaining academic information (Carroll et al., 2020; Darong et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2024; Shapira & Amzalag, 2025; Yang et al., 2018; Zhu et al., 2021). Students' motivation and understanding will be improved more successfully by teachers who can provide contextualized and relevant learning experiences. For students to become both cognitively aware and proud of their cultural background, teachers must continue to be creative and innovative in integrating local culture into the classroom. As such, teachers can use a variety of strategies, even if integrating local culture presents many challenges. Teachers can overcome these obstacles and provide students with more relevant and meaningful learning experiences by collaborating, adopting a context-based approach, and creating contextualized instructional materials.

Despite the difficulties posed by a lack of resources, such as non-contextual textbooks, incorporating local culture into social studies learning in elementary schools can improve students' comprehension of the material and strengthen their sense of cultural identity. Teachers can overcome these obstacles by adapting their lesson plans (Tecedor & Cabo, 2020), incorporating folktales and regional legends, and engaging students in activities that directly relate to their culture, such as field studies and conversations with cultural leaders, as observed in this study. In addition to strengthening cultural knowledge itself, which raises their motivation and participation in the classroom, incorporating local culture into lesson plans seeks to develop students' social values and moral character, as outlined in the learning indicators set in the lesson plans in question.

Taken together, it takes a more contextual and real-world approach to incorporate local culture into social studies in elementary schools. One new concept that can be applied is the Contextual Cultural Integration Based on Local Wisdom and Collaborative Learning. This idea aims to integrate local cultural values with classroom instruction, enabling students to experience culture firsthand in their social environment, in addition to learning about it as a form of knowledge. As a result, this idea provides a comprehensive strategy that enhances students' comprehension and promotes their character development. At the core of the concept in question is contextual learning (Pinariya & Sutjipto, 2021; Yeh et al., 2022). This implies that the curriculum must be grounded in regional culture, which is genuinely present in the daily lives of the students. Likewise, textbooks that usually highlight more dominant cultures (Chu, 2017; Niman et al., 2020; Roberts, 2014) should no longer be the only resource used by teachers. Instead, teachers are encouraged to identify, investigate, and develop educational resources tailored to students' needs. This strengthens the emotional bond between students and the subject matter by making learning more relevant and relating it to prior knowledge.

However, teachers cannot carry out local cultural integration on their own. As a result, a crucial element of this idea is also collaborative learning (Darong, 2022; Waloyo et al., 2023). This approach involves teachers from various subjects collaborating to integrate aspects of local culture into multiple lessons. This broadens

students' horizons and offers a more thorough educational experience. Additionally, local communities may be involved in this partnership, providing firsthand knowledge of the ongoing cultural activities. As a result, learning becomes more comprehensive as it involves students' surrounding human resources. Additionally, this idea promotes project-based learning, which enables students to participate directly in cultural activities. In addition to improving students' social and communication skills, the project provides students with a more concrete and contextual grasp of their local culture. It teaches students about culture in both practical and theoretical ways. More importantly, project-based learning fosters critical and creative thinking in students as they solve difficulties that arise throughout activities (Aisyah & Novita, 2025; Barak & Yuan, 2021; Vahey et al., 2018).

Learning becomes more dynamic, engaging, and high-quality when the Contextual Cultural Integration Based on Local Wisdom and Collaborative Learning concept is implemented. Along with learning about their culture, students also take pride in their cultural identity and grow as individuals. Students' emotional connections to the subject matter are strengthened through experience-based and group learning, which increases their motivation and level of engagement (Shapira & Amzalag, 2025; Wattanawongwan et al., 2021). Their academic performance may then improve as a result. Therefore, as facilitators of this kind of learning, teachers are essential in creating learning activities that prioritize emotive and social as well as cognitive components. To make the content more relatable to students' lives, educators must continually create innovative lesson plans and instructional materials that are more relevant to the local environment.

Students who are exposed to local knowledge are better able to identify and value their cultural heritage and develop a stronger feeling of patriotism. This is a crucial step in creating a younger generation that is rich in social and cultural values, while also strengthening their identity and being academically capable. Thus, incorporating local culture into social studies learning in elementary schools through a contextual, locally based, and cooperative approach can be a useful way to make learning more meaningful and relevant. In addition to imparting knowledge, this approach will provide students with a more thorough education that helps them develop their cultural identity and character (McCallops et al., 2019). It is expected that this idea will raise the standard of instruction based on the diversity and depth of regional contexts. This is regarded as a transformative learning experience, where learning is considered in the context of the students' needs.

To date, this research has made a significant contribution to the field of social studies education by providing empirical evidence on the pedagogical value of integrating local culture into elementary-level instruction. By contextualizing abstract social concepts within students' immediate cultural environments, the study enhances the relevance, engagement, and comprehension of social studies content. It offers a culturally responsive teaching model that not only strengthens students' cognitive understanding of civic and societal structures but also fosters a deeper appreciation of their own heritage and identity. Furthermore, the findings bridge theoretical knowledge and classroom practice, offering educators concrete strategies to promote inclusive, values-based learning. As such, the study advances the discourse on localized curriculum development and affirms the role of culture as a powerful pedagogical resource in fostering meaningful and transformative social studies education.

CONCLUSION

The study's findings have confirmed that students' comprehension can benefit from the incorporation of local culture, especially when teaching resources align with the students' cultural background. The idea of Contextual Cultural Integration Based on Local Wisdom and Collaborative Learning effectively identifies a more pertinent and significant approach that enhances students' cultural identity and character, in addition to their cognitive improvement. The key results indicate that teachers effectively integrate local culture into social studies by modifying materials, utilizing local stories, and organizing cultural field studies to enhance student engagement and understanding. Then, applying the research results can significantly improve students' engagement, comprehension, and sense of identity by making social studies content more relatable and culturally meaningful. It also empowers teachers to become curriculum innovators, fostering culturally responsive teaching that supports both academic achievement and character development. However, challenges such as non-contextual textbooks and limited cultural resources push teachers to develop their own materials and collaborate with local figures to ensure relevance and effectiveness. However, this study has several limitations, including a small sample size and a single-region focus, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. The data gathered were more descriptive in nature and lacked depth in evaluating long-term benefits, due to the limited time available for field studies and the implementation of culture-based learning initiatives. The best possible execution of local cultural integration was also hampered by resource and structural constraints in certain schools. As such, to gain a more comprehensive perspective on how local cultural integration is utilized in the teaching and learning process, it is recommended that future research broaden its scope to include additional schools and teachers from diverse regions. The long-term impacts of teaching using culture-based approaches on local students' character and social development should be investigated in future research. To enhance students' educational experiences, more contextual instructional materials and resources should be developed. Additionally, schools and local communities should work more closely together.

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