PITUTUR LUHUR–BASED CHARACTER EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL LIFE

Suwadi[1]
[1] *Universitas PGRI Wiranegara*

Corresponding Author: Suwadi, E-mail: suwadi.adiansyah@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Character education programs often struggle to translate moral ideals into everyday social practice. Pitutur luhur—local moral sayings and guidance—offers culturally grounded resources for shaping students' social conduct. Objective: This study explores how pitutur luhur values are internalized in school-based character education and how the process relates to students' social life. Method: Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected through classroom and school observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, and document review of lesson plans and school programs. Data were analyzed through iterative reduction, display, and theme development, supported by triangulation and member checking. Findings: Three main pathways supported internalization: (1) integration into classroom learning through contextual discussion and reflection; (2) habituation routines that repeatedly practice respect, responsibility, and cooperation; and (3) teachers' exemplification as daily models of polite communication and fairness. Participants reported improvements in peer interaction, tolerance, and collaborative problem-solving, although limited instructional time and uneven initial awareness remained constraints. Conclusion: Embedding pitutur luhur in both instruction and school culture can strengthen students' social life while sustaining local cultural heritage; continued school–family–community collaboration is essential for consistency.

1. INTRODUCTION

Character education has become a central concern in contemporary schooling as communities face increasing social fragmentation, incivility, and declining empathy in everyday interaction. Schools are expected not only to develop academic competence but also to cultivate social dispositions that enable learners to live with others—respectfully, responsibly, and cooperatively. Yet character education can easily become a set of slogans or disconnected lessons; the practical challenge is to translate values into daily habits, interaction norms, and decision-making.

One promising pathway is to ground character education in locally meaningful moral resources. In Javanese cultural contexts, pitutur luhur refers to inherited moral guidance expressed through advice, maxims, and culturally valued ways of speaking and behaving. As a form of local wisdom, pitutur luhur carries norms of respect (unggah-ungguh), care for others, self-restraint, honesty, responsibility, and mutual cooperation. When these values are treated as cultural practices rather than abstract principles, they become teachable, discussable, and practicable in school life.

Studies on local-wisdom-based character education generally report positive links to prosocial behavior and school climate. However, the literature still provides limited, practice-oriented descriptions of how value internalization is organized across classroom instruction, school routines, and teacher–student interaction, and how these elements work together as a coherent socialization system. Understanding this "how" matters because it helps educators operationalize local wisdom into teachable practice and clarifies which mechanisms support sustained behavior change.

This study examines the internalization of pitutur luhur values within school-based character education and explores how the internalization process relates to students' social life. The study is guided by three questions: (1) How are pitutur luhur values integrated into classroom learning and school programs? (2) Through what processes do students internalize these values? (3) What changes in students' social interaction are perceived to accompany the internalization, and what constraints shape implementation?

By addressing these questions, the paper offers a clear description of implementation pathways and proposes a practical model for culturally responsive character education that strengthens social life while sustaining local cultural heritage.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Character education is commonly understood as an intentional effort to cultivate moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action so that learners develop stable virtues and prosocial dispositions. Frameworks in the field emphasize that effective character education is holistic: values are taught explicitly, practiced repeatedly, and reinforced through a supportive school culture rather than delivered as isolated moral messages (DeRoche & Williams, 2001; Lickona, 2013). Berkowitz, Bier, and McCauley (2017) likewise argue that character education works best when schools combine clear frameworks, coherent implementation, and evidence-informed practices.

In Indonesian contexts, local wisdom (kearifan lokal) has become a key resource for contextualizing character education through ethnopedagogical approaches. Local wisdom provides culturally recognized moral orientations and social norms, which can make character education more meaningful to students because it aligns with community identity and lived experience. Empirical studies indicate that integrating local wisdom into learning activities and school routines can strengthen students' social behavior and nurture national identity through culturally rooted learning (Selasih & Sudarsana, 2018; Sakti et al., 2024).

Pitutur luhur can be understood as a culturally situated form of moral discourse: it is expressed through sayings, advice, and interactional norms that guide how individuals speak and act toward others. As such, pitutur luhur connects moral content (what is considered good) with social practice (how goodness is enacted in relationships). In character education, this link is crucial because students internalize values not only by understanding them cognitively but also by experiencing them as repeated social practices in interaction with peers and teachers.

Value internalization refers to the gradual incorporation of values into one's attitudes and behavior so that they become personally endorsed rather than externally imposed. In schooling, internalization is supported by clear norms and moral language, repeated opportunities to practice, feedback and reflection, and credible role models who demonstrate consistency between words and actions (Battistich, 2005; Reynolds, 2006). When internalization is

successful, students are more likely to show empathy, cooperation, tolerance, and responsibility in daily social life.

Taken together, the literature indicates that pitutur luhur offers a theoretically and practically rich foundation for character education aimed at strengthening social life. What remains essential is an empirically grounded description of how pitutur luhur is operationalized through school practices and how implementation conditions enable or hinder internalization. This study addresses that need by examining the pathways through which pitutur luhur is integrated into instruction and school culture.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to capture how pitutur luhur values were enacted and learned in a natural school setting. A qualitative approach is appropriate when the goal is to describe practices, meanings, and processes from participants' perspectives and in context (Bradshaw, Atkinson, & Doody, 2017).

The study was conducted at [school type] in [city, province], Indonesia, where character education is implemented through classroom learning and school programs. Participants included teachers and students who were directly involved in these activities. Participants were selected purposively to ensure that those interviewed and observed had direct experience with pitutur luhur–based practices.

Data were gathered through (1) observations of classroom learning, school routines, and student interactions; (2) semi-structured interviews with teachers and students to explore perceptions and experiences; and (3) document review (e.g., lesson plans, school policies, and records of character education activities) (Juharyanto et al., 2020). The combination of methods enabled triangulation across sources and supported a richer description of implementation practices.

Analysis followed an interactive process of organizing and reducing data, displaying patterns, and developing themes. Field notes, interview transcripts, and documents were coded to identify recurring strategies of value internalization and perceived changes in students' social behavior. Themes were refined through constant comparison across data sources until a coherent description of the internalization process emerged.

Credibility was strengthened through methodological triangulation (observation– interview–document), source triangulation (teachers–students–documents), and member checking in which preliminary interpretations were discussed with participants for accuracy (Birt et al., 2016).

Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from participants (and from parents/guardians where applicable). Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing names and identifiers. Research permission/ethics clearance was obtained from [authority/institution], in accordance with local requirements.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study organized the empirical data into 25 pitutur luhur items, each paired with a contemporary "milenial/modern" rephrasing and linked to a specific social indicator. The indicators were assessed before and after the internalization process. Overall, the baseline pattern

showed low to moderate social dispositions (16/25 indicators rated low; 9/25 rated moderate), while the post-internalization pattern shifted consistently to positive dispositions (21/25 rated good, 3/25 very good, and 1/25 high).

4.1 Recontextualizing pitutur luhur into contemporary moral talk

The data show that internalization did not rely on memorizing traditional aphorisms alone. Instead, teachers and students worked with "meaning-equivalent" expressions in everyday youth register. This recontextualization reduced distance between cultural heritage and students' communicative habits, turning pitutur into short, repeatable moral reminders that could be used during interaction.

Examples include Ajining diri saka lathi reframed as "Kalau ngomong pakai hati, bukan pakai emosi" (polite speech), Tepa slira as "Hargai perbedaan, kita nggak hidup sendirian" (tolerance), and Rukun agawe santosa as "Solid bareng lebih keren daripada jago sendiri" (cooperation). Such reframing makes pitutur function as practical interactional guidance rather than distant moral doctrine.

4.2 Pattern of change in students' social indicators

Across the 25 indicators, every item moved upward at least one level after internalization. Most indicators improved by two levels (19/25), while the rest improved by one level (6/25), producing an average gain of 1.76 levels on the study's ordinal scale.

The strongest visible shifts clustered around cooperative and prosocial behaviors (e.g., cooperation and solidarity moving to very good) and around communication norms (polite speech moving to high). In practical terms, the data suggest that social life strengthened through (1) more respectful communication, (2) more willingness to collaborate and help peers, and (3) more controlled emotional responses during disagreement.

Table 1. Distribution of social indicator levels before and after internalization

Level	Before (n)	After (n)
Low	16	0
Moderate	9	0
Good	0	21
Very good	0	3
High	0	1

4.3 Thematic interpretation of the pitutur–indicator links

The 25 pitutur items form several coherent social-life domains. First, communicative civility and social etiquette were supported by aphorisms emphasizing speech restraint and respect (e.g., Ajining diri saka lathi; Tata krama luwih utama; Mikul dhuwur mendhem jero). Second, prosocial cohesion was reinforced through tolerance, cooperation, and mutual assistance (e.g., Tepa slira; Rukun agawe santosa; Gotong royong; Tulung tinulung; Urip iku urup). Third, self-regulation and conflict management were strengthened through messages about awareness, patience, and de-escalation (e.g., Eling lan waspada; Ojo kagetan, ojo gumunan; Sura dira jayaningrat lebur dening pangastuti; Wani ngalah luhur wekasane; Ngluruk tanpa bala).

A fourth domain concerns humility and moral self-positioning (Andhap asor; Aja dumeh; Aja adigang adigung adiguna), which helps prevent status competition and social friction. Finally, reflective and ecological orientations (Ngundhuh wohing pakarti; Nrimo ing pandum; Sangkan

paraning dumadi; Memayu hayuning bawana) expand "social life" beyond peer relations toward self-awareness and responsibility to the environment.

Table 2. Selected pitutur items, contemporary rephrasing, and observed change

Pitutur luhur	Contemporary rephrasing (youth register)	Social indicator	Before	After
Ajining diri saka lathi	*Kalau ngomong pakai hati, bukan pakai emosi.* (Speak with your heart, not your emotion)	Polite	Low	High
Tepa slira	*Hargai perbedaan, kita nggak hidup sendirian.*(Respect differences, because we don't live on our own)	Tolerance	Moderate	Good
Rukun agawe santosa	*Solid bareng lebih keren daripada jago sendiri.* (it's cooler to stand united than to shine alone)	Coorperation	Moderate	Very good
Gotong royong	*Bareng-bareng lebih ringan.* (Mutual coorperation)	Solidarity	Moderate	Very good
Tata krama luwih utama	*Sopan itu memiliki dampak yang besar.* (Politeness has a significant impact)	Social ethics	Low	Good
Sura dira jayaningrat lebur dening pangastuti	*Tenang itu lebih kuat daripada marah.* (Calmness is stronger than anger)	Emotional-self control	Low	Good
Tulung tinulung	*Saling membantu.*(Mutual help)	Mutual help	Moderate	Very good

Becik ketitik ala ketara	*Yang benar terlihat benar, yang salah terlihat salah.* (Let what is right be seen as right, and what is wrong be seen as wrong)	Truthfulness	Moderate	Good
Memayu hayuning bawana	"Bumi bukan warisan, tapi titipan. (To nurture the world's harmony)	Environmental awareness	Low	Good
Sangkan paraning dumadi	*Kenal diri sendiri itu penting.* (The beginning and the end of all beings)	Self-awareness	Low	Good

4.4 Discussion: why rephrasing and routinization mattered

Taken together, the data point to a mechanism in which traditional moral discourse becomes effective when it is (a) linguistically accessible and (b) socially routinized. By translating pitutur into brief "modern" lines, educators created prompts that students could repeat, quote, and apply in everyday talk. These prompts then worked as interactional resources: they were used to remind peers to speak politely, accept differences, de-escalate conflict, and help others. The observed post-internalization shift toward good or above across all indicators suggests that culturally grounded moral language can function as a practical social technology—shaping how students interpret situations and how they act within peer groups.

Importantly, the strongest gains appeared in cooperative and prosocial indicators (cooperation, solidarity, and helping behavior), indicating that pitutur-based character education is particularly powerful when implemented as collective practice rather than as individual moral advice. This aligns with the view that social life is strengthened when moral values are enacted in shared routines, making virtue visible and learnable through daily interaction

5. CONCLUSION

This study indicates that internalizing pitutur luhur values in school-based character education can strengthen students' social life. Values were transmitted not only through classroom instruction but also through habituation routines and teachers' daily exemplification, enabling students to practice respect, empathy, responsibility, cooperation, and tolerance in concrete interactions.

Practically, the study suggests three implications. First, character education should embed pitutur luhur in learning tasks that require interaction (discussion, collaboration, peer feedback), not only in moral messages. Second, habituation routines should be designed as consistent,

56

school-wide practices linked to explicit value language. Third, teacher development should support reflective role modeling and culturally responsive communication so that moral messages remain credible in everyday practice.

Future research should examine diverse school contexts and incorporate longitudinal or mixed-method designs to assess the stability of social behavior changes over time. With sustained collaboration among schools, families, and communities, pitutur luhur–based character education can contribute to social harmony while maintaining cultural heritage.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR(S)

Suwadi is an educator and researcher with academic interests in character education, local wisdom–based learning, and social development in educational contexts. His research focuses on the integration of cultural values into teaching practices to enhance students' moral and social competencies. He is actively involved in educational development activities and has participated in various academic forums related to curriculum innovation and character education. He is affiliated with an educational institution in Indonesia and continues to pursue scholarly work in the fields of educational philosophy, cultural pedagogy, and qualitative research. His recent works emphasize the importance of indigenous values, particularly pitutur luhur, in strengthening social life through character education. He is committed to contributing to educational research and practice that promotes culturally responsive and socially responsible learning environments.

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