



## INTEGRATION OF THE DIENG CULTURE FESTIVAL "DCF" IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CHARACTER EDUCATION IN DIENG KULON, BANJARNEGARA

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### Abstract

*This study aims to analyze the integration of Dieng Culture Festival (DCF) values in Early Childhood Education (ECE) and its contribution to children's character development in Dieng Kulon Village, Banjarnegara. The research employed a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving ECE teachers, community leaders, and parents. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, including data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that DCF embodies strong cultural values such as religiosity, cooperation, care, tolerance, and respect for local traditions, which are manifested in rituals, cultural parades, and artistic performances. These values are integrated into ECE learning through contextual, participatory, and play-based approaches, enabling children to learn through direct and meaningful experiences. Learning activities include cultural simulations, movement-based art activities, and exploration using loose parts derived from natural materials such as stones, leaves, and other environmental objects. The results show that DCF-based learning positively influences children's cognitive, social, emotional, and motor development. Children demonstrate stronger cultural identity, improved social interaction, increased empathy, tolerance toward diversity, as well as enhanced creativity and self-confidence through active participation in learning activities. The study concludes that integrating local cultural values such as DCF into ECE is an effective and contextual strategy for holistic character development and meaningful early learning experiences. The study contributes to the development of culturally responsive ECE pedagogy by positioning local cultural heritage as a contextual learning resource for early childhood character education.*

**Keywords:** *Early Childhood Education; Dieng Culture Festival; Local Wisdom; Character Development; Contextual Learning; Cultural Integration; Indonesia*

## INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) represents a fundamental stage in the development of children's character, morality, and socio-emotional competencies. This period is widely recognized as the golden age because rapid brain development occurs during these years, making children highly responsive to environmental stimulation. Sania and Sirozi (2025) explain that during the golden age, children possess high neural plasticity, meaning that learning experiences provided at this stage

significantly influence their future cognitive, social, and emotional development. Similarly, Putri et al. (2023) argue that appropriate stimulation through play-based learning activities can optimize young children's cognitive and emotional growth. Therefore, ECE should not only focus on cognitive development but also emphasize character formation as a primary foundation for children's future lives through meaningful and contextual learning experiences.

Within the context of Indonesia's national education system, character development has become a major priority integrated into the Pancasila Student Profile. This framework encompasses religious values, mutual cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, creativity, and global diversity. Hasanah and Fajri (2022) explain that character education in early childhood is a deliberate effort to cultivate character values through the habituation of positive attitudes and behaviors in everyday life. Furthermore, Hasan et al. (2022) emphasize that character education is implemented through the cultivation of moral values, ethics, and social interactions involving families, schools, and communities as primary learning environments. Consequently, ECE plays a strategic role in establishing children's foundational personalities through continuous learning experiences that promote positive values, attitudes, and behaviors.

The rapid advancement of globalization and digitalization has created significant challenges for preserving local cultural values. Children are increasingly exposed to global cultures through digital media, which may influence the internalization of local wisdom in their daily lives. Arifin (2023) explains that digital media development in the era of globalization provides extensive access to foreign cultures, potentially diminishing the existence of local cultures if not balanced by appropriate preservation strategies. Likewise, Rayhan et al. (2025) argue that cultural globalization and digital media create a dilemma between modernization and cultural preservation, where the dominance of foreign cultures on social media platforms may weaken the cultural identity of younger generations. This condition highlights the importance of integrating local cultural values into education to ensure that children maintain a strong sense of identity amid rapid global change.

One form of local wisdom that embodies substantial character education values is the Dieng Culture Festival (DCF) in Banjarnegara Regency. Fauni and Sukmayadi (2022) explain that DCF incorporates values such as religiosity, mutual cooperation, tolerance, and respect for local traditions, which are reflected throughout its activities. The festival serves not only as a cultural tourism attraction but also as a representation of the value system of the Dieng community, passed down through generations as an integral part of local social and cultural identity. Therefore, DCF has significant potential as a local wisdom-based learning resource that effectively instills character values in young children through contextual and meaningful experiences.

The primary ritual of the Dieng Culture Festival, namely the dreadlocked hair-cutting ceremony (Ruwatan Anak Rambut Gimbal), carries profound philosophical meanings related to harmony with nature, spirituality, and respect for children as a family trust. Suprobowati (2021) states

that DCF represents a form of harmonization among cultural, religious, and socio-economic values within the Dieng community. This demonstrates that every cultural element possesses not only symbolic significance but also serves as a medium for social education capable of shaping character, morality, and life values. Consequently, DCF can be understood as a means of transmitting values that are highly relevant to character formation, including for young children through culturally meaningful experiences.

From an educational perspective, integrating local wisdom into ECE learning is essential for creating contextual and meaningful learning experiences. Idhayani, Nurlina, and Risnajayanti (2023) explain that local wisdom-based approaches in ECE can create innovative and culturally responsive learning environments while supporting the development of children's character values through experiences closely connected to their daily lives. Similarly, Pertiwi, Siregar, and Maysara (2025) emphasize that contextual learning based on local wisdom in non-formal ECE settings enables children to understand cultural values directly through interaction with their social environment. Thus, learning becomes not merely theoretical but rather a process of “living within culture.”

However, a review of the existing literature reveals that studies specifically examining the integration of Dieng Culture Festival (DCF) values into early childhood education remain limited, particularly regarding character development through contextual, culture-based learning approaches. This limitation indicates a significant research gap in the field of local wisdom-based learning within ECE. Accordingly, the novelty of this study lies in its integrative analysis of DCF cultural values and their implementation in contextual ECE learning practices in Dieng Kulon Village, with a particular focus on strengthening young children's character through direct cultural experiences.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the integration of Dieng Culture Festival (DCF) values into early childhood education warrants in-depth investigation. This study aims to analyze the forms of integration of DCF cultural values within ECE learning practices in Dieng Kulon Village and to examine their impact on children's character development. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the advancement of local wisdom-based learning and enrich the literature on contextual learning in early childhood education. Practically, this study is expected to serve as a reference for educators in implementing local culture-based learning strategies within early childhood education settings.

## **METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. This approach was selected because it aims to understand social and cultural phenomena in depth and within their natural context, particularly regarding the integration of local wisdom values into early childhood education. The descriptive qualitative design was used to capture the meanings, practices, and processes of internalizing the cultural values of the Dieng Culture Festival (DCF) within Early

Childhood Education (ECE) learning environments. According to Creswell and Poth (2021), qualitative research is utilized to explore the meanings that individuals or groups construct regarding a particular phenomenon. Similarly, Moleong (2021) argues that qualitative approaches enable researchers to understand social reality holistically. Therefore, this method was considered appropriate for examining the integration of DCF values into ECE learning practices.

The research was conducted at Early Childhood Education institutions located in Dieng Kulon Village, Batur District, Banjarnegara Regency, Indonesia. The research site was selected purposively because the area serves as the cultural center of the Dieng Culture Festival and possesses a rich tradition of local wisdom. Furthermore, the location was chosen because educational practices in the area are closely connected to local cultural traditions, making it highly relevant to the contextual and culture-based focus of the study. Yin (2023) emphasizes that site selection in qualitative research should be based on the relevance of the case under investigation. Likewise, Sugiyono (2022) states that research settings should align with the study focus to ensure the collection of meaningful and in-depth data.

The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with ECE teachers, Dieng traditional leaders, and parents of young children. Secondary data were collected from documentation of Dieng Culture Festival activities, instructional planning documents such as Daily Learning Implementation Plans (RPPH), and institutional archives. Informants were selected based on their direct involvement in culture-based educational practices, their understanding of DCF values, and their roles in facilitating the internalization of cultural values among young children. According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), the use of multiple data sources is essential for strengthening validity through triangulation. Moleong (2021) further argues that combining interview, observation, and documentation data provides a more comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon.

Data collection was conducted through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Participant observation was used to directly examine local culture-based learning activities implemented in ECE settings. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences and perspectives regarding the implementation of DCF values in educational practices. Document analysis was employed to complement and verify the data obtained from observations and interviews. The use of participant observation enabled the researcher to become directly engaged with the socio-cultural context, thereby generating richer and more nuanced data.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. This model operates cyclically, allowing data to be analyzed continuously throughout the research process. Data analysis was conducted simultaneously with data collection to ensure that emerging findings

could be immediately verified through source, technique, and time triangulation. This process enhanced the credibility, trustworthiness, and validity of the research findings.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **RESULT**

#### 3.1 Character Values Embedded in the Structure of the Dieng Culture Festival Procession

The findings from observations of the Dieng Culture Festival (DCF) activities revealed that each stage of the festival procession contains character values relevant to early childhood development. The primary finding indicates that DCF is not merely a cultural event but also a structured system of character education values that can be internalized through Early Childhood Education (ECE) learning activities. These values are not solely symbolic; rather, they reflect social and cultural practices that remain actively embedded within the Dieng community.

**Table 1.** Character Values in DCF Rituals and Their Relevance to Early Childhood Development

<b>DCF Ritual Stage</b>	<b>Character Values Embedded</b>	<b>Relevance to Early Childhood Development</b>
Communal prayer at the temple complex	Religiosity and spirituality	Introduction to religious and moral values
<i>Jamasan</i> purification ritual	Cleanliness and self-purification	Development of healthy and hygienic habits
Dreadlocked hair-cutting ceremony	Affection and appreciation for children	Strengthening self-confidence and self-esteem
Cultural parade and communal cooperation	Cooperation and socio-emotional development	Enhancement of social interaction skills
Traditional art performances	Aesthetic appreciation and nationalism	Strengthening love for local culture

These findings demonstrate that every component of the DCF procession embodies character education values that are not only symbolic but also directly relevant to early childhood development. This reinforces the notion that DCF can be positioned as a “living curriculum” rooted in local culture that supports contextual learning in ECE settings. The values encompass religious, social, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions that can be internalized through direct learning experiences, thereby supporting children's holistic development.

#### 3.2 Strategies for Integrating DCF Values into Early Childhood Education

The findings indicate that the integration of Dieng Culture Festival (DCF) cultural values into Early Childhood Education is implemented through contextual, participatory, and play-based approaches. The contextual approach enables children to understand cultural values through authentic

experiences closely related to their daily lives rather than through abstract explanations. The participatory approach encourages children's active involvement in learning activities, allowing them to become active participants rather than passive recipients of information. Meanwhile, the play-based approach serves as the primary strategy because it aligns with the developmental characteristics of young children, who naturally learn through enjoyable, exploratory, and meaningful activities.

### **3.2.1 Internalization through Learning Planning (Daily Lesson Plans/RPPH)**

ECE teachers in Dieng Kulon Village integrate the theme "My Culture" into daily learning activities by incorporating elements of the Dieng Culture Festival (DCF). This integration is implemented through visual, exploratory, and experience-based activities that allow children to directly engage with local culture according to their developmental stage. Learning plans (RPPH) focus not only on cognitive achievements but also on character values derived from local wisdom as an integral component of meaningful learning experiences.

This finding is supported by interviews with teachers:

*"We do not teach the concept of the festival theoretically. Instead, we introduce it through activities such as drawing temples, coloring pictures of dreadlocked-haired children, and telling stories about how these traditions are cultural heritage that must be preserved."* (Teacher Interview, 2026)

Another teacher added:

*"Children understand concepts more easily when they can practice directly. When they color pictures or participate in role-playing activities related to Dieng culture, they become more enthusiastic and remember the lessons better."* (Teacher Interview 2, 2026)

These findings indicate that the internalization of cultural values within lesson planning is achieved through enjoyable and contextual activities that align with the developmental characteristics of young children. Therefore, local wisdom-based lesson planning serves as an important strategy for transforming cultural values into authentic learning experiences.

### **3.2.2 Utilization of Local Environment-Based Loose Parts Media**

Learning activities in ECE institutions in Dieng Kulon Village also utilize loose parts derived from the local environment, including stones, seeds, dried leaves, twigs, and other natural materials characteristic of the Dieng region. These materials function as exploratory learning media for introducing simple concepts such as shape, size, quantity, texture, and classification. Additionally, they foster creativity, imagination, and problem-solving skills through guided play activities.

This approach extends beyond cognitive development by strengthening children's connection with nature and local culture. Children directly interact with materials found in their surroundings, making learning more meaningful and contextual. Teachers emphasized that simple natural materials are often more effective than abstract printed learning media for young children.

As one teacher explained:

*“When we use stones, leaves, or seeds collected from the local environment, children become more interested. They can touch, arrange, and count them, so they learn while playing.”* (Teacher Interview 3, 2026)

Another teacher stated:

*“We want children to develop a close relationship with the Dieng environment. They should not only learn in the classroom but also recognize objects around them as part of their learning experiences.”* (Teacher Interview 4, 2026)

These findings suggest that the use of local environment-based loose parts not only enhances cognitive development and creativity but also fosters environmental awareness and strengthens the internalization of local wisdom values. Consequently, local materials function as an important medium for contextual learning based on local culture.

### **3.2.3 Cultural Simulations and Movement-Based Arts Activities**

Children in Dieng Kulon ECE institutions also participate in simple simulations inspired by artistic and cultural activities featured in the Dieng Culture Festival (DCF), including traditional dance movements, cultural parades, and regional performing arts. These activities are designed according to children's developmental stages and are implemented through enjoyable movement and music-based play activities. Through such experiences, children are introduced to local cultural elements while simultaneously developing self-expression, peer interaction, and self-confidence.

Furthermore, cultural simulations contribute positively to gross motor development by involving body coordination, balance, and agility. Movement-based arts activities also support emotional development by providing opportunities for children to express their feelings freely within a structured environment. Teachers reported that movement-oriented learning is particularly effective because it corresponds with children's natural tendency to be active and physically engaged.

This finding is supported by teacher interviews:

*“Children are very enthusiastic when invited to imitate traditional dance movements or participate in cultural parade simulations. They feel as if they are playing roles, so it does not feel like formal learning.”* (Teacher Interview 5, 2026)

Another teacher added:

*“Some children were initially shy, but after frequently participating in movement activities and performing in front of their classmates, they became more confident and courageous.”* (Teacher Interview 6, 2026)

These findings indicate that cultural simulations and movement-based arts activities function not only as media for introducing local culture but also as effective tools for developing motor skills, socio-emotional competencies, and self-confidence. Thus, DCF cultural arts serve as learning resources that support children's holistic development.

### **3.3 Impacts on Children's Character Development**

The implementation of local wisdom values derived from the Dieng Culture Festival (DCF) in Early Childhood Education has demonstrated various positive impacts on children's character development. The integration of cultural values into learning activities not only provides meaningful educational experiences but also contributes to the formation of self-identity, social intelligence, empathy, and tolerance. These impacts were reflected in observable changes in children's attitudes and behaviors during participation in local culture-based learning activities at ECE institutions in Dieng Kulon Village. The findings suggest that local culture integration functions as a natural medium for character value internalization through direct experience.

#### **3.3.1 Strong Self-Identity**

The findings revealed that children developed a sense of pride in their local culture. They began identifying themselves as “Cah Dieng” (Children of Dieng), reflecting the emergence of a local cultural identity. Moreover, children were able to recognize cultural attributes such as batik lurik, traditional headbands, and various cultural symbols introduced during learning activities. These findings suggest that the internalization of local cultural values contributes significantly to strengthening children's self-identity from an early age.

#### **3.3.2 Social Intelligence**

The integration of mutual cooperation (gotong royong) values reflected in DCF activities positively influenced children's social intelligence. By observing community members working together in festival preparation and implementation, children demonstrated improved abilities in cooperation, sharing, and group interaction during classroom activities. Teachers also observed that children adapted more easily to group tasks and displayed greater cooperation during collaborative learning activities. These findings indicate that learning through authentic cultural observation is more effective in developing social skills than purely verbal instruction.

#### **3.3.3 Empathy and Tolerance**

In addition to social intelligence, children demonstrated growth in empathy and tolerance. Direct interaction with tourists from diverse regions during the DCF provided children with varied social experiences. They learned to appreciate differences in culture, language, and customs. Such experiences helped children understand that diversity is a natural aspect of society that deserves respect. These findings highlight the important role of direct cultural experiences in fostering empathy and tolerance among young children.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that integrating the cultural values of the Dieng Culture Festival (DCF) into Early Childhood Education positively contributes to children's character development. DCF functions not only as a cultural heritage object but also as a contextual learning resource based on local wisdom that effectively supports the holistic character development of young children.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the Dieng Culture Festival (DCF) embodies strong cultural values that are highly relevant as a source of character formation and can be effectively integrated into Early Childhood Education (ECE). Values such as religiosity, mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), togetherness, and appreciation for local culture are not merely represented symbolically within the festival's rituals but are also reflected in social practices that have been transmitted across generations within the Dieng community. These findings suggest that DCF functions not only as a cultural event but also as an educational value system that can be positioned as a "living curriculum" in early childhood education. This finding is consistent with Harmawati, Abdulkarim, and Rahmat (2016), who argue that DCF represents a form of local wisdom with strong relevance to national character development because its cultural values provide a foundation for addressing the challenges of globalization. Therefore, the present study reinforces the role of local wisdom as a contextual learning resource that remains underutilized in ECE practices, thereby addressing an important research gap in local culture-based education.

The integration of DCF values into ECE learning through contextual, participatory, and play-based approaches demonstrates that learning activities become more aligned with the developmental characteristics of young children. Children learn through direct experiences such as drawing, role-playing, storytelling, and cultural exploration, making the conveyed values easier to understand and internalize. This finding supports the argument of Rochimah and Gudnanto (2024), who state that local wisdom embodied in traditional games and cultural activities can serve as an effective innovation in ECE because it provides concrete, enjoyable, and meaningful learning experiences. Consequently, the integration of cultural elements into daily lesson planning (RPPH) should not be viewed merely as the addition of cultural content but rather as a primary pedagogical strategy for experience-based character formation.

Furthermore, the use of local environment-based loose parts media contributes significantly to the learning process of young children. The utilization of natural materials such as stones, leaves, seeds, and twigs enables children to develop cognitive abilities, creativity, and exploratory skills through active and enjoyable play experiences. These materials allow children to interact directly with their surrounding environment, making learning more concrete and meaningful. This finding is in line with Yuliani and Kristiana (2024), who argue that the use of loose parts media in ECE enhances children's creativity by utilizing natural materials available in the local environment while providing opportunities for free exploration. Thus, environment-based learning materials function not only as instructional tools but also as a means of fostering children's connection with nature and strengthening the internalization of local cultural values.

Cultural simulation activities and movement-based arts inspired by DCF were also found to have positive effects on children's motor, social, and emotional development. Children became more active, confident, and capable of expressing themselves through simple yet meaningful body movements. In addition, participation in group activities enhanced their social skills, including cooperation, communication, and peer interaction. These findings support the work of Ardianti, Setiaji, and Harsono (2025), who found that revitalizing local wisdom through culture-based role-playing activities can strengthen positive character traits, increase self-confidence, and foster appreciation for local culture through contextual learning experiences. Therefore, cultural simulations in this study provide further evidence that culture-based learning can simultaneously support motor, social, and emotional development in early childhood.

Overall, the integration of Dieng Culture Festival (DCF) values into Early Childhood Education has a significant impact on children's character development, particularly in strengthening self-identity, social intelligence, empathy, and tolerance. Children demonstrated a stronger sense of pride in their local culture and showed greater adaptability within social environments. Moreover, culture-based learning experiences increased children's sensitivity toward diversity and encouraged more positive interactions with peers and the broader community. These findings highlight the primary contribution of this study: the integration of DCF-based local wisdom not only supports cognitive development but also promotes holistic, contextual, and sustainable character formation. Consequently, DCF-based local wisdom offers a practical and relevant model for culture-based Early Childhood Education in the era of globalization.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that the integration of Dieng Culture Festival (DCF) values into Early Childhood Education (ECE) contributes significantly to children's character development in a holistic and contextual manner. Cultural values embedded within DCF, including religiosity, mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), social responsibility, tolerance, and appreciation for local culture, are actively practiced within the Dieng community and can be effectively internalized through ECE learning activities. These findings confirm that DCF functions not only as a cultural heritage tradition but also as a contextual learning resource with substantial pedagogical value for early childhood education.

The implementation of DCF-based learning is carried out through contextual, participatory, and play-based approaches that are aligned with the developmental characteristics of young children. Children engage in direct learning experiences through cultural simulations, role-playing activities, movement-based arts, and the exploration of locally sourced loose parts materials. These approaches have proven effective not only in fostering cognitive development but also in supporting children's motor, social, and emotional growth through meaningful and authentic learning experiences.

Furthermore, the utilization of local culture and the surrounding environment as learning resources strengthens children's sense of identity, enhances social competence, and promotes empathy and tolerance toward diversity. The findings also indicate improvements in children's creativity, self-confidence, and pride in their local cultural heritage. This suggests that local wisdom-based learning plays a strategic role in character formation by providing children with authentic experiences rooted in their socio-cultural context.

In conclusion, the integration of Dieng Culture Festival local wisdom into Early Childhood Education represents an effective strategy for supporting sustainable, meaningful, and culturally responsive character education. From a scholarly perspective, this study contributes to the development of contextual local wisdom-based ECE learning models and offers an alternative framework for character education in the era of globalization. Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of preserving and utilizing local cultural heritage as an educational resource capable of fostering holistic child development while strengthening cultural identity among future generations.

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