



Principals' Managerial Skills in Integrating Local Wisdom into School Culture and Character Education

*Siti Nurjannah¹, Edi Chandra²

^{1,2}Magister Pendidikan, Universitas Muhammadiyah Pringsewu, Pringsewu, Indonesia

E-mail: 1sitinur2404@gmail.com *Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

The integration of local wisdom into school culture has become an essential strategy for strengthening character education in increasingly globalized educational contexts. This study explores how principals' managerial skills contribute to the effective integration of local wisdom values into school culture and their implications for student character development. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, questionnaires, and document analysis involving principals, teachers, students, and community stakeholders. Thematic analysis was applied to examine managerial practices across key functions, including planning, organizing, directing, and supervising. The findings indicate that principals with strong managerial leadership are able to align school vision and mission with local cultural values, facilitate teacher collaboration, adapt curriculum and extracurricular programs, and actively engage community participation. These practices support the institutionalization of local wisdom within daily school activities and learning processes. As a result, schools demonstrate notable improvements in student character indicators, particularly discipline, responsibility, respect, collaboration, and participation in cultural activities. However, the study also identifies persistent challenges, such as limited resources, uneven teacher commitment, and varying levels of stakeholder support, which require adaptive leadership and continuous evaluation. This study contributes to the educational leadership literature by providing empirical insights into the role of managerial leadership in sustaining culturally responsive school environments. The findings highlight the importance of strategic leadership, stakeholder engagement, and systematic monitoring in embedding local wisdom as a foundation for holistic character education across diverse school contexts.

Keywords: *managerial leadership; school culture; local wisdom integration; character education; educational leadership*



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INTRODUCTION

Education remains a cornerstone in the advancement of any nation, serving as a principal mechanism for fostering human resource development, societal transformation, and national identity. Schools, as fundamental institutions within educational systems, play a pivotal role not only in transmitting academic knowledge and skills but also in shaping students' character and values, preparing them to navigate and contribute positively to an increasingly complex global landscape (Wahyudi, 2025). In this context, the cultivation of students' moral and ethical development is equally vital as the acquisition of cognitive competencies, especially as societies confront the dual pressures of globalization and modernization, which often threaten to erode indigenous values and cultural heritage (Indrawati & Widiastuti, 2021).

The preservation and integration of local wisdom in school culture have gained growing importance in the discourse on educational reform and curriculum innovation. Local wisdom refers to the body of knowledge, ethical norms, traditions, and cultural practices inherited from previous generations, forming the collective identity and social fabric of a community (Astuti & et al., 2020). These values—ranging from respect for elders and communal cooperation to environmental stewardship—provide a vital foundation for holistic character education. The transmission and revitalization of local wisdom within formal educational settings are increasingly recognized as essential for fostering cultural resilience, social cohesion, and a sense of belonging among students (Kusumastuti & et al., 2020).

School principals, as instructional and organizational leaders, occupy a strategic position in integrating local wisdom into the fabric of school culture. The effectiveness of this integration is closely linked to the managerial skills of principals, including their capacity to enact transformational leadership, mobilize resources, and cultivate a shared vision among teachers and stakeholders (Herawati & et al., 2022; Winataputra & et al., 2020). Transformational leadership, characterized by inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and the encouragement of innovation, has been shown to significantly enhance the implementation of culturally grounded education and the internalization of local values within school programs (Munastiwi, 2021).

Moreover, the principal's ability to navigate the complexities of curriculum adaptation, teacher empowerment, and stakeholder engagement is crucial for the successful embedding of local wisdom values into both the formal and informal dimensions of school life (Fitriah & Fitria, 2020). This process involves identifying culturally relevant values, integrating them into curriculum content and school rituals, and facilitating professional development for teachers to enable culturally responsive pedagogy (Nuraida & Gunawan, 2023). Research demonstrates that when principals exhibit strong managerial and conceptual skills, there is a marked improvement in teacher professionalism, organizational culture, and the overall effectiveness of character education initiatives (Dewi & Setiawan, 2018).

Teachers, as the direct implementers of educational policy, also play an instrumental role in contextualizing learning experiences to reflect local wisdom. Strategies employed by teachers include the adaptation of instructional materials, the use of culturally relevant examples, and the facilitation of inquiry-based activities that encourage students to engage with their cultural heritage (Sari & Handayani, 2022). Collaborative efforts between school leaders and teachers can thus



create a learning environment that not only transmits academic knowledge but also fosters the appreciation and practice of local values.

However, the integration of local wisdom into school culture is not without challenges. Principals often encounter obstacles such as limited awareness and understanding of local wisdom among staff and students, insufficient resources, resistance from stakeholders who may prioritize standardized curricula, and the lack of institutional support for innovative practices (Marini & et al., 2019). Addressing these barriers requires not only robust managerial skills but also the ability to advocate for culturally responsive policies and to build strong networks with the broader community (Hasanah & et al., 2023).

Given the increasing recognition of local wisdom as a critical dimension of educational quality, research into the managerial skills of school principals in this domain is both timely and relevant. This study aims to deepen the understanding of how principals integrate local wisdom values into school culture and the impact of such practices on student character formation. By elucidating effective strategies and identifying challenges, the findings of this research can inform policy and practice, ultimately contributing to the creation of school environments that nurture cultural identity, social responsibility, and character development among students. It is expected that the insights generated will support principals in building harmonious, inclusive, and culturally responsive educational settings that empower students to appreciate diversity and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research methodology designed to explore the managerial skills of school principals in integrating local wisdom values within school culture. A qualitative approach is considered most appropriate for uncovering complex social phenomena and understanding participants' perspectives in natural settings, enabling the researcher to obtain rich, in-depth data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Wulandari & et al., 2021). This methodological framework is aligned with contemporary educational research, which increasingly recognizes the need for contextual and interpretative insights to address the dynamic interplay of leadership, culture, and educational practice (Hakim & et al., 2018).

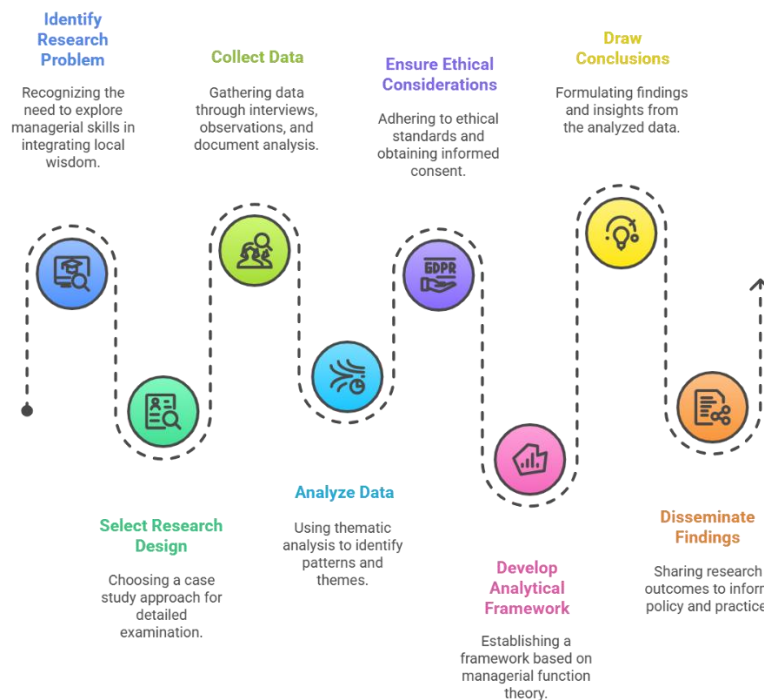


Figure 1. Research Methodology Sequence

Research Design

A case study design was selected, focusing on several schools that have implemented initiatives to incorporate local wisdom values into their cultures. The case study approach allows for a holistic and detailed examination of processes, practices, and outcomes within real-world contexts (Nugroho & Pramono, 2022). Data were collected from multiple sources to ensure triangulation and enhance the credibility of the findings, as recommended by (Suryadi & et al., 2020).

Data Collection Techniques

Three primary data collection techniques were employed: in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis.

1. **In-depth Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with school principals, teachers, students, and other relevant stakeholders such as school committee members. The interview protocol was developed based on a review of literature on school leadership and local wisdom integration (Herawati & et al., 2022; Kurniawan & Rahmah, 2022). Questions explored planning, implementation, supervision, challenges, and perceptions regarding the embedding of local wisdom within the school environment. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy and authenticity.
2. **Observations:** Systematic non-participant observations were undertaken during routine school activities, ceremonies, and classroom processes to capture direct evidence of local wisdom integration. Observation checklists were informed by key indicators, including the visibility of cultural symbols, participatory traditions, and the enactment of local values in daily school life (Amin & et al., 2021).



3. Document Analysis: Relevant documents such as school vision-mission statements, curriculum outlines, teaching materials, school regulations, and records of cultural activities were collected and analyzed. Document analysis provided historical and contextual background, supplementing and validating data obtained through interviews and observations.

To complement qualitative data, a questionnaire was distributed to students to assess their understanding, internalization, and perceptions regarding the values of local wisdom promoted in the school. The questionnaire included both open-ended and closed questions, enabling the collection of both quantifiable and narrative responses (Sugiarti & et al., 2022).

Sampling and Respondent Selection

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who possess rich knowledge and direct experience relevant to the research focus (Sugiyono, 2019). The study involved school principals (as key decision-makers), teachers (as implementers), students (as beneficiaries), and other stakeholders involved in the school's cultural programs. The number of participants was determined by the principle of data saturation, where additional data no longer yield new information (Fitria, 2020).

Research Indicators and Analytical Framework

The analytical framework in this study is grounded in the managerial function theory, encompassing four primary indicators: planning, organizing, directing/controlling, and supervising (Hasanah & et al., 2023).

- Planning: Examines how school principals strategize the integration of local wisdom values into the curriculum, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities.
- Organizing: Assesses the extent to which principals coordinate human, material, and financial resources to support these initiatives, including collaboration with teachers, parents, and local community leaders.
- Directing/Controlling: Focuses on how principals provide leadership, guidance, and motivation, as well as strategies used to overcome obstacles and resistance in the integration process.
- Supervising: Involves monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness and sustainability of local wisdom integration, including assessment mechanisms, feedback systems, and continuous improvement efforts.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the steps of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification as outlined by (Miles et al., 2014).

- Data Reduction: Transcribed interviews, observation notes, and documentary evidence were coded and categorized based on the predefined indicators and emerging themes.
- Data Display: Coded data were organized into matrices and charts to facilitate pattern recognition and inter-theme comparison.
- Verification: Triangulation across data sources and methods was conducted to ensure validity and reliability (Moleong, 2019). Peer debriefing and member checking were



also applied, allowing participants to review and confirm the interpretation of their statements.

Ethical Considerations

All research procedures adhered to ethical standards for educational research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. The study received approval from the institutional ethics review board, and participation was voluntary (Wahyuni & et al., 2020).

Expected Outcomes

Through this comprehensive and rigorous qualitative approach, the research aims to produce a nuanced understanding of the managerial competencies required for effective integration of local wisdom into school culture. The findings are expected to inform policy development, guide professional development programs for school leaders, and contribute to the broader literature on educational leadership and cultural revitalization in schools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The School Vision, Mission, and Cultural Commitment

The findings of this study indicate that the school's vision and mission are fundamentally oriented toward the integration of local wisdom values as an essential foundation for holistic student development. The principal and educators firmly believe that education should not only aim for academic excellence, but also prioritize character formation rooted in cultural values. This perspective aligns with the contemporary educational paradigm that balances cognitive skills and ethical development, ensuring students are prepared to face global challenges without losing their local identity (Lestari & Suparman, 2021). In practice, the vision and mission statements are operationalized through daily learning, school rituals, and schoolwide communication, reinforcing the importance of values such as mutual cooperation, tolerance, and simplicity among students and staff.

Strategic Planning for Local Wisdom Integration

The research reveals that the school has devised a comprehensive strategic plan to systematically integrate local wisdom values throughout its curriculum and extracurricular programs. This plan includes three major strategies:

- a) **Curriculum Development:** The integration of local wisdom begins at the curriculum level, where core subjects such as Indonesian language and history incorporate local folklore, customs, and ethical teachings. This approach is not only effective for character education, but also fosters a sense of belonging and cultural pride (Ayu & et al., 2022).
- b) **Extracurricular Activities:** The school organizes various programs, such as traditional dance clubs, regional music ensembles, and handicraft workshops. These activities serve as a bridge between formal learning and cultural preservation, engaging students in active participation and skill development (Babeni & Sri, 2023).
- c) **Community Involvement:** Local community leaders, elders, and cultural practitioners are routinely invited to school events as speakers, mentors, and resource persons.



Their involvement provides students with authentic learning experiences and strengthens the relationship between school and community (Mohamad & et al., 2023).

Table 1. Strategic Steps for Integrating Local Wisdom Values

Strategic Area	Key Actions
Curriculum	Embedding local stories, proverbs, and ethics in lessons
Extracurricular	Traditional arts clubs, craft workshops, local festivals
Community Engagement	Involving elders, field trips to cultural sites, guest talks

Table 1 outlines the primary strategic areas and key actions undertaken by the school to integrate local wisdom values into the educational process. The table is structured to highlight three main pillars of the integration strategy: curriculum, extracurricular activities, and community engagement.

In the curriculum domain, the school embeds local stories, proverbs, and ethical teachings directly into various subjects. This approach ensures that cultural values are not only taught explicitly, but also become an integral part of daily lessons, fostering continuous exposure and understanding among students. The inclusion of these materials in subjects such as history and language enhances both academic relevance and character education.

The extracurricular strategy focuses on providing students with practical opportunities to experience and practice local wisdom through involvement in traditional arts clubs, craft workshops, and participation in local festivals. These activities go beyond classroom learning, allowing students to develop specific cultural skills, express creativity, and cultivate a sense of community through shared experiences.

Community engagement serves as the third strategic pillar, emphasizing collaboration with local elders, field trips to cultural sites, and inviting guest speakers from the community. This approach bridges the gap between formal education and local society, enabling students to learn directly from cultural bearers and deepen their appreciation for indigenous knowledge and practices.

Collectively, the strategic actions listed in Table 1 illustrate a holistic and sustainable approach to integrating local wisdom values in schools. By simultaneously addressing curriculum content, extracurricular involvement, and community collaboration, the school creates a robust environment where local culture is celebrated, preserved, and transmitted to future generations. This multi-faceted strategy not only enriches the educational experience but also reinforces the school's role as a vital center for cultural preservation and character development.

Teacher and Stakeholder Engagement

The integration process is supported by the active involvement of teachers, parents, and students. Teachers participate in professional development workshops to enhance their understanding of local wisdom and its pedagogical application (Sayni et al., 2023). They collaborate to design learning materials that reflect local values and to identify indicators for character growth. Parents and community members are included in school planning meetings,



cultural events, and feedback sessions, fostering a shared commitment to the school's cultural vision (Mohammad & et al., 2023).

Implementation through School Culture

Daily school life reflects the institutionalization of local wisdom values. Morning assemblies include local songs and rituals; classroom management incorporates communal practices; and the school environment is adorned with traditional art and artifacts. These tangible and intangible cultural elements cultivate a sense of respect, responsibility, and pride among students, in line with evidence that school culture significantly shapes students' attitudes and behavior (Ayu & et al., 2022; Lestari & Suparman, 2021).

Program Evaluation and Monitoring

The school implements a systematic monitoring and evaluation process to measure the effectiveness of local wisdom integration. Evaluation methods include:

- a) Direct Observations: School leaders and teacher teams observe classes and activities to assess student engagement and the visibility of cultural values.
- b) Questionnaires and Interviews: Students, teachers, and parents provide regular feedback on the perceived impact of programs, their challenges, and suggestions for improvement (Sugiarti et al., 2022).
- c) Assessment of Student Outcomes: Changes in students' discipline, responsibility, and participation in cultural events are tracked and analyzed.

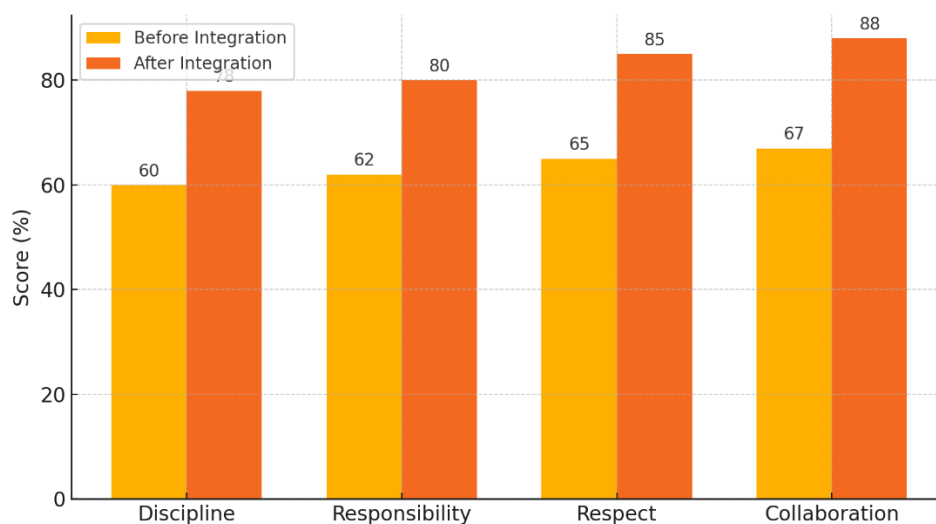


Figure 2. Improvement in Student Character Indicators After Local Wisdom Integration

Figure 2 illustrates the improvement in key student character indicators—namely discipline, responsibility, respect, and collaboration—before and after the integration of local wisdom values within the school's curriculum and daily practices. The data show a significant positive shift across all measured aspects. For instance, students' discipline scores increased from 60% before integration to 78% after the program's implementation. Similarly, responsibility improved from 62% to 80%, respect from 65% to 85%, and collaboration from



67% to 88%. These substantial increases highlight the effectiveness of embedding local wisdom values in nurturing positive behaviors and strengthening students' overall character. The visual representation of these results underscores the transformative impact of culturally rooted educational interventions, suggesting that integrating local wisdom can meaningfully enhance both individual and collective student development.

Table 2. Student Participation in Cultural Activities

Year	Traditional Dance (%)	Handicraft Workshops (%)	Local Festival Participation (%)
2021	40	35	50
2022	55	50	68
2023	75	72	85

Table 2 presents the progression of student participation rates in various cultural activities, namely traditional dance, handicraft workshops, and local festival involvement, over three academic years (2021–2023). The data indicate a steady and noteworthy increase in student engagement. Participation in traditional dance activities rose from 40% in 2021 to 75% in 2023. Handicraft workshop involvement saw similar growth, increasing from 35% to 72%. Participation in local festivals also surged from 50% to 85% over the same period. These trends reflect the school's successful efforts in fostering cultural appreciation and engagement among students through consistent programming and active stakeholder involvement. The rising rates of participation are indicative not only of growing student interest but also of the school's capacity to create meaningful, sustainable cultural learning experiences.

Together, Figure 1 and Table 2 provide compelling evidence that strategic integration of local wisdom values and cultural activities into the educational environment leads to tangible improvements in both student character and cultural engagement. These outcomes support the premise that schools, by honoring and revitalizing local traditions, play a crucial role in shaping well-rounded, culturally aware, and ethically grounded future generations.

Challenges and Continuous Improvement

Despite the positive impact, several challenges persist, including limited resources, varying levels of teacher commitment, and occasional resistance from stakeholders unfamiliar with the importance of local wisdom (Sugiarti & et al., 2022). To address these challenges, the school prioritizes ongoing communication, regular training, and continuous feedback. Recognition programs for cultural achievement and annual school cultural festivals help sustain motivation and foster a culture of continuous improvement (Babeni & Sri, 2023).

Synthesis and Implications

Overall, this study demonstrates that the intentional integration of local wisdom values through curriculum innovation, extracurricular programming, and stakeholder involvement leads to measurable improvements in student character and cultural awareness. The process requires a strategic approach, ongoing collaboration, and adaptability to context-specific challenges.



These findings support previous research indicating that the cultivation of local wisdom in schools not only enriches student learning experiences but also strengthens the school's role as a center for cultural transmission and community development (Sayni et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that principals' managerial leadership is a critical mechanism for embedding local wisdom into school culture and advancing character education. The findings demonstrate that managerial leadership operationalized through integrated functions of planning, organizing, directing, and supervising enables local wisdom to move beyond symbolic representation and function as an institutionalized driver of character formation. When aligned with school vision, collaborative teaching practices, and community engagement, local wisdom contributes systematically to the development of core student character attributes.

Theoretically, this study advances educational leadership scholarship by conceptualizing local wisdom as an organizational resource that is activated through managerial leadership rather than as a contextual add-on. The results underscore the role of managerial leadership as a mediating structure linking cultural values, school governance, and character outcomes. Practically, the study highlights that culturally responsive leadership requires inclusive planning, sustained stakeholder collaboration, and continuous evaluation to ensure durability and coherence of character education initiatives.

The study is limited by its qualitative, context-specific design. Future research should extend this model through comparative and mixed-method studies to test its transferability and to examine mediating variables such as school climate, teacher agency, and student engagement. Overall, the findings emphasize that culturally grounded managerial leadership is central to achieving holistic education that integrates academic quality, character development, and cultural sustainability.

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