



Integrating Sundanese Cultural Digital Storybooks to Instill Tolerance in Pancasila and Civic Education: A Case Study in Indonesian Primary School

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Abstract. Significant pedagogical dissonance arises from the gap between the imperative of instilling tolerance values and conventional Pancasila and Civic Education learning methods that are no longer relevant for students in the digital age. While new policy paradigms in Indonesia, such as the current National Curriculum of Indonesia (*Merdeka Curriculum*), encourage innovation, there is a substantial empirical gap regarding how digital media based on local culture can be practically implemented. This study examines the pedagogical strategies and implementation processes employed by fifth-grade teachers to promote tolerance through Sundanese culture-based digital storybooks. Frameworked by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), this qualitative case study used semi-structured interviews and classroom observations as primary data sources. The results showed that teachers' pedagogical strategies, manifested in Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and Project-Based Learning (PjBL) approaches, can instill tolerance values in students. Sundanese cultural digital storybooks serve as symbolic mediation instruments that help students translate abstract values of tolerance into more concrete understandings. In conclusion, the combination of digital media innovation and local wisdom is a relevant approach for character education centred on meaningful social interactions.

Keywords: *Digital Storybooks, Sundanese Culture, Tolerance, Social Constructivism, Civic Education.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In its constitution, Indonesia is home to a diverse population, united by the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (unity in diversity). However, the reality on the ground often tells a different story. Report after report, including those from the Setara Institute, reveals a trend that is difficult to ignore: the seeds of intolerance are becoming increasingly fertile within society¹. Amid these concerns, much hope is pinned on the world of education. This hope is realised in new policies such as the *Merdeka Curriculum*, which seeks to reinstate the value of "Global Diversity" as the DNA of future generations². This step aligns with the global pulse, responding to the United Nations' call in SDG 4 to create an education system that values diversity³.

A major irony looms over the world of education in Indonesia: on the one hand, national policies, such as the *Merdeka Curriculum* vigorously promote tolerance education, but on the other hand, classroom practices often stagnate. Subjects like Civic Education (also known as PPKn in Indonesian abbreviation), which should be a space for fostering empathy and social skills, have historically remained trapped in the "teaching as information transfer" model. This rigid classroom landscape is confirmed from various angles. PISA 2018 data show a lack of dialogue in our schools⁴, and more specific research confirms that lectures and memorisation still dominate Civics learning⁵. The impact of this outdated model is deeply worrying. A 2021 survey by PPIM UIN Jakarta revealed that many Generation Z students exhibit a high potential for intolerance, despite the formal education they receive⁶. It leads to a bitter conclusion: schools may have succeeded in having students memorise the definition of tolerance but have failed to facilitate their development into tolerant individuals.

The root of the failure of character education in schools can be traced to a persistent "pedagogical gap": the disparity between the curriculum's aspiration to shape well-rounded citizens and the reality of teaching practices that remain focused on information transfer. Criticism of this outdated practice was voiced a century ago by John Dewey, who reminded us that true education is born from experience, not memorisation⁷. Unfortunately, in Indonesia, the teaching model Dewey criticised has been institutionalised for years through a standardised assessment system that

prioritises cognitive scores, effectively sidelining character development⁸. This legacy continues to produce learning that feels alien to students, creating shallow understandings that fail to change behaviour. Ultimately, this legacy practice poses a significant obstacle to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum vision and the SDG 4 mandate, which calls for engaging and meaningful learning.

The critical integration of technological innovation presents a promising approach to addressing the identified pedagogical dissonance. The use of digital media in character education, particularly narrative formats, presents a duality: it carries both significant benefits and significant risks. On the one hand, empirical evidence confirms its positive impact on student motivation and learning outcomes^{9,10,11}. On the other hand, there is an inherent risk that digital representations can lead to cultural appropriation and the reduction of cultural meaning to mere superficial aesthetics¹². Therefore, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of digital media as a learning tool does not lie in the technology itself but rather depends heavily on the solidity of the pedagogical framework that underpins it.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy offers a fundamental framework for maximising the affirmative potential of digital media while mitigating its appropriative risks. Pioneered by Gloria Ladson-Billings, this paradigm is defined as a transformative practice that transcends cultural tokenism. Its goal is to integrally foster academic achievement, cultural competence, and critical sociopolitical awareness in students¹³. Its implementation in this study—through the adaptation of Sundanese narratives into a digital format—aims not to exoticise, but to validate students' sociocultural identities and make them a learning modality. Therefore, the convergence between the engagement facilitated by digital media and the depth of meaning offered by cultural pedagogy is the most solid bridge to overcome pedagogical dissonance and produce authentic and significant value learning.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory provides the theoretical basis for the values learning design in this study. Its central principle is that higher-order cognition does not develop individually, but rather through social mediation using cultural tools¹⁴. In this model, a Sundanese-based digital storybook serves as a cultural tool that mediates understanding, while the teacher acts as a facilitator. The teacher actively designs strategic learning support (scaffolding) to enable students to operate effectively within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The success of this scaffolding approach within the ZPD has been extensively documented in modern educational literature¹⁵. Therefore, Vygotskian analysis focuses on the interactive triad between students, teachers, and learning media as the locus where authentic and meaningful learning experiences are constructed.

Although the literature examining the impact of technology in school environments is quite extensive^{16,17,18,19}, a significant research gap remains. Studies tend to evaluate general effectiveness predominantly ('if it works'). In contrast, in-depth qualitative studies exploring 'how' teachers translate and adapt complex pedagogical innovations—such as the integration of digital media and local content—in the context of Civic Education under the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) are still very limited. This study was specifically designed to address this gap. It focused on analysing and articulating the pedagogical strategies used by a fifth-grade teacher in implementing a Sundanese culture-based digital storybook as a Vygotskian medium for instilling the value of tolerance. Through this analysis, this study aims to provide two fundamental contributions: at the theoretical level, deepening the understanding of cultural pedagogical practices in the digital era, and at the practical level, presenting an implementable work model that can serve as a reference for education practitioners in translating noble policies such as the Independent Curriculum and SDG 4 into authentic and meaningful classroom practices.

2. METHODS

Understanding how a pedagogical innovation is brought to life in practice, amid the complexities of classroom dynamics, requires an in-depth and contextual approach. Based on these considerations, this research employed a qualitative case study design²⁰, which enables a rich exploration of the process in its natural setting. The primary focus of this case study is the implementation of a specifically designed intervention model, PEBASKAL (a Local Wisdom-Based Learning Approach). This model was implemented over five sessions, with each session exploring an aspect of Sundanese local wisdom through a unique digital storybook medium: *Angklung*, *Wayang Golek*, *Ngabotram*, *Munggahan*, and the *Seren Tain* Ceremony. The learning flow in each session followed the following structured pedagogical steps:

Table 1. Steps of PEBASKAL Model

No.	Phase	Activity
1	Introduction	Begin with a prayer, followed by singing the national anthem and local traditional songs.

2	Preparation	The teacher introduces contextual learning by presenting local conditions related to nature, socio-economic, and sociocultural environments.
3	Grouping	The teacher asks students to form groups for discussion.
4	Exploration	Students search for and explore information about local culture by reading digital storybooks based on Sundanese wisdom.
5	Analysis	Students analyse the philosophical and meaningful aspects of Sundanese local wisdom in the storybooks.
6	Presentation	Students present their group discussion results to the class, beginning with a traditional poem (<i>pantun</i>).
7	Conclusion	Students conclude that Sundanese culture should be studied and preserved as part of Indonesia's cultural heritage.

To gain a rich and in-depth understanding, this research focused on a fifth-grade classroom in a West Java elementary school. This location was selected through purposive sampling to capture an authentic portrait of how teachers and students interact with a new learning method²¹. To obtain a comprehensive picture, data collection was conducted through a triangulation approach²². Classroom observations were used to record learning dynamics directly, while semi-structured interviews were employed to explore teachers' perspectives and students' experiences. Document analysis served to strengthen the findings from the other two methods. All collected data were then analysed thematically²³ to identify key patterns related to implementation strategies and student responses. To ensure the validity of the findings, member checking with teachers was conducted to verify that the researcher's interpretations aligned with the participants' experiences. The researcher also practised critical reflexivity to recognise her own role in the research process²⁴.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents a critical analysis of research findings on the implementation of the Local Wisdom-Based Learning (PEBASKAL) model in promoting tolerance values through Sundanese culture-based digital media. In accordance with the problem formulation, the discussion focuses on articulating the pedagogical strategies used by teachers. The findings are presented thematically and interpreted through dual theoretical lenses, namely the Vygotskian framework and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), to provide comprehensive answers to the research questions.

A. Using Student Experience as a Starting Point for Learning

The most fundamental and consistent finding from the observations was the teacher's strategy of building contextual bridges at the beginning of each lesson. Facing a culturally heterogeneous fifth-grade class (*Sundanese, Betawi, Javanese, Minang, and Makassarese*), the teacher did not immediately present the material. Instead, she consistently implemented the "Preparation" stage of the PEBASKAL model by asking provocative questions that touched on the students' universal experiences. This pattern was clearly visible in each session: before discussing *Munggahan*, students were invited to share family traditions; before *Ngabotram*, they were invited to reflect on the meaning of togetherness at mealtimes; before *Angklung*, a discussion began on the importance of teamwork; before *Wayang Golek*, they were invited to talk about heroic figures; and before *Seren Taun*, they were invited to reflect on gratitude. Each of these questions successfully opened up space for students to share personal stories. The teacher carefully validated each story before positioning the lesson material as an example of the collective experience that had been built in the classroom.

From the perspective of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), this strategy is a concrete manifestation of the principle of validating students' identities and sociocultural backgrounds¹³. By making students' worlds the foundation, teachers effectively build the pillars of cultural competence and create conditions for academic success for all. This practice transforms the classroom into an inclusive space where each child's cultural capital is recognised as a valuable asset. When analysed through the lens of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, this same practice can be seen as a skilful scaffolding process. Leading questions serve as diagnostic tools to map students' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) related to universal themes¹⁴. With this understanding, teachers can "pick up" students and guide them toward new understandings, an approach whose effectiveness has been proven in the literature¹⁵.

The relationship between CRP and Vygotsky, as discussed above, directly addresses the research gap identified previously. These findings not only test whether a method is effective^{16,17} but also describe how a teacher translates theory into nuanced classroom practice. Furthermore, this practice serves as an essential foundation for inquiry-based learning approaches, such as Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and Project-Based Learning (PjBL). By creating an inclusive foundation (CRP) and providing targeted support (Vygotsky), teachers establish the fundamental prerequisites for students to connect existing knowledge with new challenges, enabling authentic value-learning experiences that align with the vision of the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

B. The Active Role of Teachers Using Digital Storybooks

The findings indicate that teachers actively mediate digital storybooks, transforming them from passive texts into multisensory learning events through three key strategies: visual mediation, narrative mediation, and conceptual mediation. Teachers' mediation practices can be analysed multidimensionally. First, visual and narrative mediation serve as effective Vygotskian scaffolding^{14,15}. Teachers use images to create accessible entry points into students' ZPD and employ pause techniques to facilitate the co-construction of meaning. Second, by validating students' personal interpretations, these practices align with the core principles of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), which emphasises the validation of cultural identity and competence¹³. Third, by transforming the storyline into a series of dilemmas that provoke predictions, teachers implicitly apply the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) framework, which encourages students to become active problem solvers.

The orchestration of these three strategies comprehensively addresses a research gap. These findings provide empirical evidence on how teachers can concretely maximise the potential of digital media^{9,10} while mitigating the risk of shallow learning¹² through planned pedagogical interventions. This series of activities can be viewed as a "mini-meaning project," aligning with the spirit of Project-Based Learning (PjBL), where digital artefacts are transformed into functional cultural mediation tools.

At the macro level, the observed pedagogical practices represent a concrete implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum philosophy. The shift in the teacher's role to facilitator, the use of diverse media leading to differentiated learning, and the focus on critical dialogue demonstrate the embodiment of student-centred learning. More specifically, this practice directly fosters two key dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile: "Critical Reasoning" (through prediction and analysis) and "Global Diversity" (through the use of local content to discuss universal values). This practice serves as an example of how education policy can be effectively translated into inspiring classroom action.

C. Discussion Strategies for Understanding Tolerance

Following the digital exploration phase, research findings revealed a crucial pedagogical shift. The teacher's role transformed from a presenter of information to an architect of a dialogue space. Consistently, the teacher refrained from delivering "moral lectures" or pre-determined conclusions. Instead, she systematically created an intellectual arena for students to grapple with meaning, negotiate understanding, and ultimately internalise the value of tolerance together. At the heart of this facilitation strategy was the use of contextual dilemmas. Instead of asking, "What is the moral of the story?", the teacher posed a hypothetical problem relevant to the students' real world. The most powerful example occurred after the *Ngabotram* session, where the teacher posed a scenario about a *Minang* friend who brought *rendang* to a communal meal. This question successfully sparked authentic debate, encouraging students to apply the abstract concept of "togetherness" to a real and ambiguous social situation.

Methodologically, this approach is the essence of Problem-Based Learning (PBL). Teachers do not transfer knowledge, but rather present authentic "problems" that require students to think critically and collaborate. From Vygotsky's perspective, these dilemmas serve as sophisticated scaffolding for moral reasoning, pushing students beyond their ZPD. By refusing to provide answers, teachers encourage a co-constructed understanding of tolerance through dialogue. Furthermore, this practice manifests the third pillar of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), namely cultivating critical consciousness¹². Students not only learn about tolerance, but are trained to act as tolerant individuals.

Ultimately, this strategy is a key mechanism that makes the value of tolerance feel so relevant and accessible to students. As they struggle together to find solutions, the value becomes a conclusion they personally "own," rather than something imposed upon them. This empowering practice is at the heart of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. The teacher successfully facilitated a transformative learning experience, where values were not only learned but also lived and deeply understood by each student.

D. Using Authentic Assessment to Encourage Critical Thinking

The final findings of this study highlight a significant paradigm shift in how teachers evaluate, from assessing learning to assessing for and as part of the learning process itself. At the end of the cycle, teachers consciously abandon conventional tests that measure mere memorisation. Instead, they invite students to enter the final phase of their learning journey through authentic performance tasks designed to hone Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS).

Specifically, students are not tested, but challenged to create: analyse (C4), evaluate (C5), and create (C6). By providing autonomy of choice—such as creating a digital poster about togetherness or composing a pantun about tolerance—teachers convey the message that the most important thing is not to repeat information, but to process understanding into new, personal and meaningful work. This empowering assessment design inherently adopts the principles of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and Project-Based Learning (PjBL). Each assignment is essentially a "problem-solving project" that challenges students to think, "How can I best communicate this value?" The process of producing a "craft" allows teachers to view students' competencies holistically, from understanding to creativity and even application.

Ultimately, this assessment practice becomes a powerful synthesis of various theoretical frameworks. The task of creating a work reflects the process of externalising understanding (Vygotsky), while granting autonomy aligns with the spirit of empowerment in the CRP. Furthermore, this approach fully resonates with the philosophy of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Providing authentic projects with choices is a manifestation of the spirit of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) and differentiated learning. This assessment no longer merely measures but actively fosters the dimensions of creativity and critical thinking. Thus, the learning cycle concludes with an important affirmation: the ultimate goal of the Local Wisdom-Based Learning (PEBASKAL) model is not for students to simply learn about cultural values, but rather for them to be able to think and create creatively as an embodiment of the values they have internalised.

4. CONCLUSION

This research addresses a real challenge in character education in Indonesia: how to ensure that the noble values in the curriculum are not merely dead texts but truly come alive within students. Through a case study of the implementation of the Sundanese Culture digital storybook, a series of strong and interconnected pedagogical practices was discovered. Teachers no longer position themselves as the sole source of truth, but rather as facilitators who skilfully: (1) invite students into their world; (2) invite them to immerse themselves in the story with all their senses; (3) spark their critical thinking with real-life dilemmas (PBL); and (4) give them space to create and express themselves through creative projects (PjBL). At the heart of all this is a fundamental philosophical shift: true value learning does not occur when students passively receive, but when they actively interact, debate, and ultimately construct that understanding from within themselves.

This research makes two fundamental contributions. Theoretically, it presents an in-depth empirical case study, illustrating how Vygotsky's conceptual framework and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy operationalised synergistically in a digital-era Indonesian classroom context. It provides concrete evidence of how abstract principles, such as the ZPD, scaffolding, and cultural validation, can be effectively integrated by practitioners. Practically, it produces the Local Wisdom-Based Learning (PEBASKAL) model, a tested implementation framework. This model, along with its documented strategies, serves as a concrete and inspiring reference for educators in designing and implementing authentic and meaningful values learning.

These findings have several important implications. For practising teachers, this research confirms that competency in the digital age is not simply the ability to operate technology, but rather the ability to be a skilled designer of learning experiences. For Teacher Training Institutions (also known as LPTK in Indonesian abbreviation), there is an urgent need to equip prospective teachers with the skills to design culturally relevant and critical learning experiences. Finally, for policymakers, this research demonstrates that the success of the *Merdeka* Curriculum vision depends heavily on the identification, development, and dissemination of field-tested models of good practice, such as this one.

This study has several methodological limitations that need to be considered. As a qualitative single-case study, the findings are not intended for statistical generalisation. Its external validity is rooted in the concept of transferability, where the presentation of rich contextual data allows readers to critically assess the applicability of the findings to their own professional contexts. Furthermore, the scope of this study is specifically limited to one ethnocultural context (Sundanese) and one value construct (tolerance). Therefore, applying the model to other cultural contexts or values requires further adaptation and validation.

These limitations, however, open up exciting future research opportunities. First, future research is encouraged to bring the spirit of the Local Wisdom-Based Learning (PEBASKAL) model to other rich Indonesian cultures. It would be valuable to see how this model resonates and adapts when brought to life with stories from Banjar, Batak, Papua, and other cultures. Second, to gauge broader impact, a larger-scale study using quantitative or mixed-methods approaches could be designed to examine the model's influence on tolerance scores and civic competence. Finally, a crucial question remains: will the seeds of tolerance planted here continue to grow? A longitudinal study would be beneficial in determining whether positive changes in students' attitudes are sustained over time.

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