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PROVERB-BASED PICTURE STORYBOOKS FOR STRENGTHENING THE PANCASILA LEARNER PROFILE IN ELEMENTARY LITERACY

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Abstract : *The implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka emphasizes the Pancasila Learner Profile as the foundation of character education; however, there remains a lack of culturally responsive literacy materials that integrate local wisdom into early-grade learning. This study aims to develop and evaluate a proverb-based picture storybook grounded in Sumbawanese local wisdom to support elementary students' literacy and character development. Adopting a design-based research approach, the study involved needs analysis, iterative design and development, expert validation, and classroom trials in four elementary schools. The findings demonstrate that eighteen selected proverbs were systematically transformed into a structured literacy product consisting of denotative explanations, illustrated narratives, connotative interpretations, guided questions, and a teacher guide; the materials were validated as culturally relevant, instructionally feasible, and effective in promoting student engagement and emerging moral understanding. This study presents a validated design model that integrates local proverbs into illustrated literacy materials and offers practical implications for implementing culturally responsive literacy and character education within the Pancasila framework in primary education.*

Keywords : *Local Wisdom; Proverb-based Storybook; Character Education.*

Abstrak : *Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka menempatkan Profil Pelajar Pancasila sebagai landasan utama pendidikan karakter; namun, masih terdapat keterbatasan bahan literasi yang responsif secara budaya dan mampu mengintegrasikan kearifan lokal dalam pembelajaran pada jenjang awal sekolah dasar. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengembangkan dan mengevaluasi buku cerita bergambar berbasis peribahasa yang berakar pada kearifan lokal Sumbawa guna mendukung pengembangan literasi dan karakter siswa sekolah dasar. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan design-based research yang meliputi tahap analisis kebutuhan, perancangan dan pengembangan secara iteratif, validasi ahli, serta uji coba di empat sekolah dasar. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa delapan belas peribahasa terpilih berhasil ditransformasikan secara sistematis menjadi produk literasi terstruktur yang mencakup penjelasan makna denotatif, narasi bergambar, interpretasi konotatif, pertanyaan terpandu, serta panduan guru; bahan ajar ini tervalidasi relevan secara budaya, layak secara instruksional, dan efektif dalam meningkatkan keterlibatan siswa serta pemahaman moral awal. Penelitian ini menghasilkan kontribusi berupa model desain tervalidasi yang mengintegrasikan peribahasa lokal ke dalam bahan literasi bergambar, serta menawarkan implikasi praktis bagi implementasi literasi dan pendidikan karakter yang responsif terhadap budaya dalam kerangka Profil Pelajar Pancasila jenjang pendidikan dasar.*

Kata Kunci : *Kearifan Lokal; Buku Cerita Bergambar; Pendidikan Karakter.*

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* since 2022 places the Pancasila Learner Profile at the center of Indonesian education reform, emphasizing character formation alongside academic competence (Kemdikbudristek, 2021). The profile articulates six dimensions (faith and noble character, global diversity, cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creativity) which are expected to be cultivated through classroom learning, school culture, and community engagement. At the regional level, this national mandate is reinforced by local policies, such as Regent Regulation Number 33 of 2021 in Sumbawa Regency (2021), which explicitly calls for the integration of local cultural values into character education.

Despite these strong policy foundations, translating the Pancasila Learner Profile into concrete, age-appropriate, and culturally grounded classroom practices remains a significant pedagogical challenge, particularly in early elementary literacy learning. One major challenge lies in the limited availability of literacy materials that simultaneously support early-grade reading development and embed local wisdom aligned with national character values (Holifah & Sholehah, 2024; Mahtum et al, 2023). Existing literacy programs in elementary schools often rely on generic texts that are culturally distant from students' lived experiences, thereby reducing engagement and meaning-making. This gap is especially visible in regions with strong local languages and traditions, such as Sumbawa, where children grow up immersed in indigenous expressions that are rarely represented in formal schooling. As a result, literacy learning risks becoming decontextualized, while character education is often delivered in abstract forms that are not meaningfully connected to students' sociocultural realities, contradicting the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy and the *Kurikulum Merdeka*'s emphasis on contextual learning.

Local wisdom has long been recognized as a powerful foundation for character education. It encompasses traditional knowledge, values, and practices transmitted across generations and serves as a moral, social, and cultural guide within a community (Wahyuni, 2019; Agung et al, 2024)). Studies show that integrating local wisdom into education strengthens cultural identity, enhances moral development, and encourages community participation in the educational process (Hatima, 2025; Ilham & Rahman, 2024; Mansur & Sholeh, 2024; Sakti et al., 2024). Moreover, local wisdom–based education has been shown to provide an ethical foundation for addressing contemporary social problems, such as corruption and juvenile delinquency (Jayanti & Wulandari, 2024). Within the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy, such integration enables learners to connect academic content with their lived experiences, thereby enhancing both engagement and meaning-making in literacy learning (Kelly et al., 2021).

Among the various forms of local wisdom, proverbs occupy a distinctive position. Proverbs are concise, metaphorical expressions that encapsulate a community's collective

experiences, social norms, and moral lessons (Diniarti, 2017; Rusbiyantoro, 2016). They function not only as linguistic artifacts but also as cultural instruments that guide behavior and transmit ethical principles (Akihary, 2012). Proverbs often portray both positive and negative human traits; while negative portrayals serve as warnings, they require critical interpretation to extract moral lessons (Effendi, 2017; Sawitri et al., 2019). In educational contexts, however, the uncritical use of negative proverbs may pose risks, particularly for young children who have not yet developed the cognitive maturity to interpret implied meanings (Bukuluki et al., 2017; Lutzker et al., 1981). Conversely, research indicates that positive proverbs can foster resilience, moral development, and holistic growth in children (Arega, 2017). This dual nature highlights the need for careful pedagogical transformation of proverbs to ensure developmental appropriateness and instructional clarity in early-grade literacy contexts.

The relevance of proverbs to character education in Indonesia is further strengthened by their close relationship with Pancasila values. Pancasila itself is widely understood as a crystallization of Indonesian local wisdom, shaped by diverse cultural traditions across the archipelago (Ratnawati et al., 2024; Tamami et al., 2024). Recent studies demonstrate that local proverbs from various regions contain values congruent with the dimensions of the Pancasila Learner Profile and can serve as culturally grounded vehicles for instilling national character values (F. Fauziah et al., 2018; Handayani et al., 2022; Seno et al., 2022). In the context of Sumbawa, previous research has identified and thematically grouped Sumbawanese proverbs according to the key elements of the Pancasila Learner Profile, confirming their strong conceptual alignment (Jazadi & Widari, 2024). However, these studies remain largely descriptive and conceptual, with limited attention to how such proverbs can be systematically transformed into pedagogically sound literacy materials and empirically implemented in classroom settings.

Another critical consideration is the mode of delivery for character-based literacy materials for children in Phases A and B of elementary education. Research on literacy pedagogy consistently highlights the effectiveness of picture- and story-based materials in supporting early reading, vocabulary development, comprehension, and motivation (Hartanto et al., 2014). When combined with culturally relevant content, such materials can bridge home and school experiences, making abstract values more concrete and accessible (Johnson, 2013; Mutonyi, 2016). The integration of proverbs with illustrations and narratives has also been shown to enhance language proficiency, cultural awareness, and higher-order thinking skills, as students are encouraged to interpret meanings, draw connections, and apply moral lessons to real-life situations (Babazade, 2024; Hanapi & Zakaria, 2019; Holden & Warshaw, 1985; Muhsinin et al., 2024). From a multimodal literacy perspective, the

combination of verbal and visual elements plays a crucial role in supporting meaning-making among early readers, particularly in interpreting abstract moral concepts.

Despite these promising insights, a critical research gap remains. Existing studies have not yet produced a validated design model that systematically integrates several things, such as; 1) the selection of culturally appropriate proverbs, 2) their pedagogical transformation into developmentally appropriate literacy materials, and 3) their empirical validation through classroom implementation. In particular, there is a lack of research that connects the conceptual alignment of local wisdom with the Pancasila Learner Profile to the actual design, use, and evaluation of literacy materials in real classroom contexts. This gap is especially evident in Sumbawa Regency, where local cultural resources are abundant but remain underutilized in formal literacy instruction.

Responding to this gap, the present study aims to develop and evaluate a proverb-based picture storybook grounded in Sumbawanese local wisdom and aligned with the Pancasila Learner Profile for elementary students in Phases A and B. Rather than presenting discrete research questions, this study examines the selection and transformation of proverbs into literacy materials, the characteristics of the resulting product, and its implementation and evaluation in classroom learning.

This study offers three novel contributions such as; 1) a systematic framework for selecting and transforming local proverbs into developmentally appropriate literacy materials, 2) a validated design model integrating denotative–connotative scaffolding with visual narratives, and 3) empirical evidence of classroom implementation within the *Kurikulum Merdeka* context. Collectively, these contributions position the study not only as a product development effort but also as a theoretically informed and empirically grounded model for integrating culturally responsive literacy and character education in primary schooling.

METHOD

This study adopts a Design-Based Research (DBR) framework to develop, validate, and evaluate a proverb-based picture storybook grounded in Sumbawanese local wisdom and aligned with the Pancasila Learner Profile. DBR is particularly suitable for this study because it integrates product development with iterative testing in real classroom contexts, allowing for continuous refinement based on empirical evidence (Anwar, 2021; Habibi et al., 2022). Unlike conventional research and development approaches, DBR emphasizes the interaction among design, implementation, and theory-building, making it well-suited to generating both practical and theoretical contributions in educational settings. The development process followed an iterative sequence consisting of needs analysis, design, development, validation, implementation, and revision. Each stage produced specific outputs that informed subsequent stages, ensuring both contextual relevance and pedagogical effectiveness.

Participants in this study included collaborators and student participants who were purposively selected based on their relevance to the development and trial of the literacy materials. The collaborators included two researchers, one professional illustrator, one Sumbawa cultural expert, one educational expert (elementary school supervisor), four classroom teachers who conducted the trials, eight senior elementary school teachers who evaluated the materials and the learning process, and one representative from the Sumbawa Regency Education and Culture Office. Classroom trials were conducted in four public elementary schools located in villages surrounding Sumbawa Besar. These schools were purposively selected because their students predominantly used Sumbawanese in daily communication, ensuring cultural relevance, while still representing varied school contexts in terms of location and learning conditions. Student participants consisted of elementary school students in Grades I–IV (Phases A and B). A total of 58 students participated in the classroom trials, enabling observation of literacy engagement and comprehension across early-grade levels.

Building on this foundation, the design stage focused on constructing a pedagogical blueprint for the literacy materials. This included establishing criteria for selecting developmentally appropriate proverbs, aligning content with the dimensions of the Pancasila Learner Profile, and determining the structure of each instructional unit. Each unit was designed to consist of the original proverb, its denotative meaning, an illustrated narrative, a connotative interpretation, guided questions, and a concise teacher guide, ensuring both linguistic and pedagogical coherence. The development stage involved producing draft versions of the proverb-based picture storybook in collaboration with a professional illustrator. At this stage, visual and textual elements were integrated to support meaning-making, particularly for early-grade learners who rely on multimodal representations. The drafts were then subjected to a validation process, in which cultural experts and educational practitioners reviewed the materials to ensure cultural accuracy, linguistic appropriateness, and instructional feasibility. Feedback from this stage informed revisions to both the content and visual design of the materials. The revised materials were implemented in classroom literacy activities across four elementary schools. This implementation phase aimed to examine the usability of the materials, as well as students' engagement and participation during learning activities. Observations of classroom interactions and teacher practices provided empirical insights into how the materials functioned in authentic educational settings. The final stage involved revision and evaluation, in which data from classroom observations and teacher evaluations were systematically analyzed to refine the product. This iterative refinement resulted in a validated proverb-based picture storybook that integrates local wisdom with literacy learning and character education, demonstrating both pedagogical feasibility and contextual relevance.

Data were collected across multiple stages of the development process, employing qualitative techniques to facilitate data triangulation. During the needs analysis stage, documentation and open-ended interviews were used. Document analysis included previous research findings, published collections of Sumbawa proverbs, and unpublished manuscripts of local proverbs. Open interviews with senior Sumbawa cultural figures were conducted to support accurate interpretation of proverb meanings. During the design and development stages, researcher reflection was employed to document design rationales and decision-making processes (Lamb, 2013), ensuring transparency in the transformation of proverbs into literacy materials. Draft materials were validated by educational practitioners and cultural experts, who provided qualitative feedback on content relevance, cultural accuracy, linguistic suitability, and instructional feasibility.

Data were analyzed qualitatively to address the research questions. The analysis began with data familiarization through repeated reading and listening to all data sources, including interview notes, validation feedback, observation records, photographs, and transcripts, to understand context and emerging patterns. The analysis proceeded through three systematic stages. *First*, the data were coded using a combination of deductive codes derived from the study focus, such as proverb selection, material design, and student engagement, and inductive codes that emerged from the data. *Second*, the resulting codes were grouped into broader categories representing key themes, including cultural relevance, instructional feasibility, visual support, and meaning construction. Finally, these categories were further refined into overarching themes, which were interpreted to identify patterns across data sources and to explain how the findings relate to the development process and classroom implementation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of developing and implementing a proverb-based picture storybook grounded in Sumbawanese local wisdom and aligned with the Pancasila Learner Profile. The findings are organized thematically according to the study's major outcomes. Each subsection presents empirical results supported by data displays and explanations derived from document analysis, expert validation, and classroom trials. After all results are presented, an integrated discussion is provided to interpret the findings in relation to relevant theories and previous studies.

1. Alignment of Sumbawa Proverbs with the Pancasila Learner Profile

The first result concerns the identification and alignment of Sumbawanese proverbs with the key elements of the Pancasila Learner Profile. From an initial corpus of Sumbawa proverbs collected from documented sources and cultural experts, eighteen proverbs with positive moral orientation were selected. Proverbs that primarily conveyed negative traits or required complex inferential reasoning were excluded to ensure suitability for elementary students in Phases A and B. Each selected proverb was

analyzed at two levels: denotative meaning, its literal semantic content, and connotative meaning, its moral, social, and pedagogical interpretation. This alignment was derived from document analysis and subsequently confirmed through expert validation involving cultural and educational specialists. The analysis demonstrates that Sumbawanese proverbs embody comprehensive moral values that correspond closely with all six dimensions of the Pancasila Learner Profile, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Alignment of Sumbawa Proverbs with the Pancasila Learner Profile

No	Pancasila Profile Element	Sumbawa Proverb	Core Pedagogical Meaning
1	Faith in God	*Tingi olat sai ka tamuk, dalap lit sai ka uruk*	Awareness of divine power and human limitation
2	Personal morals	*Jaran tu enti' tali, tau tu enti karante*	Integrity and responsibility for one's words
3	Morals to others	*Ulir na tarik tali, betak na beang kapate'*	Balanced, empathetic social conduct
4	Environmental morals	*Lamin tutu sayang kemang…*	Sustainability and environmental care
5	Civic morals	*Tingi teming, tingi panyember*	Humility and responsibility in social roles
6	Cultural awareness	*Sai po lamin no kita*	Cultural preservation responsibility
7	Intercultural skills	*Mana tau barang kayu…*	Tolerance and inclusivity
8	Collaboration	*Yam pat ke pamukel*	Teamwork and complementarity
9	Care	*To ete bungkak*	Proactive social sensitivity
10	Sharing	*Betak sang kanan sorong sang kiri*	Reciprocity and generosity
11	Self-awareness	*Nonda tau layar bangka dengan*	Personal responsibility
12	Self-regulation	*Tana roa ling punti sang*	Adaptive self-management
13	Information seeking	*Boe pero sisi tenga'*	Curiosity and exploration
14	Evaluation	*Kasena kita pang dengan…*	Reflective reasoning
15	Reflection	*Rang ai', puti geresik*	Emotional regulation
16	Decision-making	*Bengkok bengkok…*	Ethical judgment
17	Creative thinking	*Patinang lempo*	Idea generation
18	Creative production	*Rezeki gagak no si ete leng pekat*	Originality and self-worth

Across the dimension of faith, piety, and noble character, the selected proverbs consistently emphasize moral awareness, personal responsibility, and social ethics. For example, the proverb "*Jaran tu enti' tali, tau tu enti karante*" was interpreted by teachers as

emphasizing accountability for one's words, while "*Ulir na tarik tali, betak na beang kapate'*" was associated with balanced interpersonal behavior (teacher evaluation data). These findings indicate that moral values are conveyed through familiar expressions that are accessible to young learners.

Within the dimension of global diversity, proverbs were found to promote cultural awareness and inclusivity. For instance, "*Sai po lamin no kita*" reflects collective responsibility for cultural preservation, while "*Mana tau barang kayu…*" highlights acceptance of differences. These interpretations were consistently identified in both document analysis and expert validation, suggesting alignment with intercultural competence. Proverbs related to mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) emphasize teamwork, care, and reciprocity. Teachers reported that students associated "*Yam pat ke pamukel*" with working together in classroom tasks, while "*Betak sang kanan sorong sang kiri*" was linked to sharing and helping peers (classroom observation and teacher feedback).

In the dimension of independence, the proverbs highlight self-awareness and self-regulation. For example, "*Nonda tau layar bangka dengan*" was interpreted as emphasizing individual responsibility, while "*Tana roa ling punti sang*" reflects the importance of adapting to suitable contexts for growth. These meanings were identified through document analysis and confirmed during expert validation. For critical reasoning, the selected proverbs reflect processes of inquiry, reflection, and decision-making. Proverbs such as "*Boe pero sisi tenga'*" and "*Kasena kita pang dengan…*" were associated with curiosity and reflective thinking, as observed in classroom discussions where students were encouraged to interpret meanings and relate them to personal experiences (observation data). Finally, in the dimension of creativity, proverbs such as "*Patinang lempo*" and "*Rezeki gagak no si ete leng pekat*" highlight idea generation and individual potential. Teachers noted that these proverbs prompted students to express their ideas during guided discussions and follow-up activities (teacher evaluation).

Putting together, the findings indicate that the selected Sumbawanese proverbs collectively represent all six dimensions of the Pancasila Learner Profile. Rather than functioning as isolated moral statements, the proverbs provide a culturally grounded framework for integrating character values into literacy learning, as evidenced by their consistent interpretation across document analysis, expert validation, and classroom observations.

2. Characteristics of the Proverb-Based Picture Storybook as a Literacy Product

The second result concerns the characteristics of the proverb-based picture storybook developed as a literacy product for elementary students in Phases A and B (see

Table 2). The product consists of a structured set of components that integrate cultural content, visual elements, and guided literacy activities.

Table 2: Components of the Proverb-Based Picture Storybook and Their Pedagogical

No	Component	Description	Pedagogical Function
1	Sumbawa proverb	Original proverb presented in authentic wording	Introduces local wisdom and cultural identity
2	Denotative meaning	Literal explanation using simple language	Supports basic comprehension and vocabulary development
3	Illustrated story	Short narrative contextualizing the proverb	Transforms abstract values into concrete experiences
4	Illustrations	Full-color visuals aligned with story events	Supports visual literacy and meaning inference
5	Connotative meaning	Moral interpretation derived from the story	Facilitates character value internalization
6	Guided questions	Comprehension and reflection prompts	Encourages discussion, reflection, and literacy practice
7	Teacher guide	Objectives, steps, and assessment indicators	Assists teachers in structured classroom implementation

Structurally, the book is organized into a sequence of self-contained learning units, each centered on one selected Sumbawanese proverb. Each unit follows a consistent pattern . This structure was consistently identified across all developed units (document analysis). The unit begins with the original Sumbawa proverb, written clearly and prominently to familiarize students with authentic local expressions. This is followed by the denotative meaning, which explains the proverb's literal sense in simple, concrete language appropriate for early-grade comprehension.

After the denotative explanation, the unit presents a brief illustrated story that contextualizes the proverb in everyday situations familiar to children, such as interactions at home, at school, or in the community. The stories were designed with short, linear narrative structures, as confirmed by the product drafts and validation feedback. The story section is intentionally brief and linear, with a limited number of characters and events to ensure readability for early-grade students.

Illustrations play a central role in the product's design. Each story is accompanied by full-color illustrations that depict key moments in the narrative. The illustrations consistently represent characters, actions, and contexts described in the text, as confirmed during product validation and classroom observation data. Following the story, each unit includes a section that explains the proverb's connotative meaning. This section presents a simplified interpretation of the proverb's meaning using age-appropriate language, as evaluated by educational practitioners during validation.

To reinforce literacy skills and reflective thinking, each unit concludes with guided questions. The questions include comprehension and reflection prompts, as

indicated in the product design and teacher evaluation data. In addition to student-facing content, the book includes a teacher guide at the end. The teacher guide contains learning objectives, instructional steps, and assessment indicators aligned with the Pancasila Learner Profile, as confirmed through document analysis and teacher evaluation. Thus, the developed storybook demonstrates a consistent structure across units, integrating the presentation of proverbs, explanation, narrative context, visual representations, and guided activities. These components were identified through document analysis, expert validation, and classroom implementation as key features of the literacy product.

3. Teachers' Evaluation of the Proverb-Based Picture Storybook in Classroom Trials

The third result concerns teachers' evaluation of the proverb-based picture storybook when implemented in classroom literacy activities (see Table 3). This evaluation was conducted during limited classroom trials in four elementary schools and involved eight senior elementary school teachers who observed and used the materials in teaching practice. Teachers were asked to provide qualitative feedback focusing on content relevance, instructional feasibility, student engagement, and alignment with character education objectives.

Table 3: Summary of Teachers' Evaluation of the Proverb-Based Picture Storybook

No	Evaluation Aspect	Teachers' Responses
1	Cultural relevance	Content reflects students' local culture and daily experiences
2	Content clarity	Sequential structure supports comprehension and moral interpretation
3	Role of illustrations	Visuals assist understanding and student participation
4	Instructional feasibility	Easy to integrate into regular literacy lessons
5	Character education	Moral values are conveyed naturally through stories
6	Teacher guide	Practical, concise, and flexible for classroom use
7	Suggested improvement	Addition of optional follow-up activities

Overall, teachers' responses indicate generally positive evaluations across all assessed aspects (teacher evaluation data). One prominent aspect highlighted by teachers was the cultural relevance of the materials. Teachers noted that the use of Sumbawanese proverbs and familiar social contexts facilitated students' engagement with the stories. For example, one teacher stated, "*The children were very responsive because the stories felt close to their lives*" (Teacher 2, evaluation sheet). Another teacher noted that students were able to connect story events with their own experiences at home (Teacher 5, evaluation sheet). Teachers also emphasized the clarity and sequencing of the content. The

consistent structure, beginning with the proverb, followed by denotative meaning, a story, a connotative explanation, and guided questions, was considered helpful in guiding instruction. Teachers reported that students were able to follow the sequence of activities during lessons, particularly when moving from denotative to story-based understanding (Observation notes, School C).

Another aspect positively evaluated was the role of illustrations in supporting comprehension. Teachers observed that illustrations helped students infer meaning, recognize emotions, and follow story events even when their reading ability was still developing. This was reflected in classroom observations, where students pointed to images when explaining story events or answering questions (Observation data, School B). One teacher commented, "*The pictures help them understand without needing long explanations*" (Teacher 6, evaluation sheet).

In terms of instructional practicality, teachers reported that the materials were easy to integrate into existing literacy lessons without requiring extensive preparation. Teachers noted that the materials could be used within regular lesson time and did not require additional preparation (Teacher 3, evaluation sheet). The teacher guide was described as "*clear and practical*" for classroom use (Teacher 7, evaluation sheet). Teachers also evaluated the book's contribution to character education positively. Teachers reported that students were able to provide examples of behaviors, such as helping peers and keeping promises, during post-reading discussions (observation notes, School A). The guided questions were used to prompt these responses during classroom interaction.

Despite the generally positive evaluation, teachers also provided constructive suggestions. Some teachers suggested adding optional follow-up activities, such as simple role-play or drawing tasks, to further reinforce comprehension and expression. Others noted that repeated use across several lessons would be more effective in strengthening value internalization than a single exposure. These suggestions were consistently noted across multiple evaluation sheets, particularly regarding the addition of follow-up activities (as noted in teacher evaluation data). Taken together, the evaluation data indicate that the developed materials are perceived as culturally relevant, instructionally feasible, and supportive of classroom literacy activities, as reflected in consistent responses from participating teachers across the four trial schools.

4. Students' Engagement and Understanding in Literacy Learning Activities

The fourth result describes students' engagement and understanding during literacy learning activities using the proverb-based picture storybook, as summarized in Table 4. Classroom observations were conducted across four public elementary schools, involving a total of 58 students from Phases A and B. Students' engagement was examined using observable indicators, including attention to the text and illustrations, participation in classroom interaction, and responsiveness to teacher questions.

Table 4: Levels of Students' Engagement in Literacy Learning Activities

No	School	Very Actively Involved	Actively Involved	Barely Involved	Not Involved
1	A	1	9	4	0
2	B	1	12	0	0
3	C	7	6	3	0
4	D	0	13	2	0
	Total	**9**	**40**	**9**	**0**
	Percentage	**15.5%**	**69.0%**	**15.5%**	**0%**

During classroom implementation, students demonstrated observable engagement with the learning materials. Observation data indicate that most students maintained visual attention on the book during reading sessions, frequently alternating between the text and the illustrations (Observation notes from Schools A and B). Students' participation was evident in verbal responses during guided questioning: some students referred directly to story events, while others pointed to illustrations to explain their answers (Observation data, School B).

Quantitative data indicate that 49 of 58 students (84.5%) were categorized as actively or very actively involved in learning activities. Specifically, 40 students (69.0%) were categorized as actively involved, and 9 students (15.5%) as very actively involved. These categories were based on observed participation, responsiveness, and attention during classroom activities. Meanwhile, 9 students (15.5%) were categorized as barely involved, characterized by limited verbal participation but continued visual attention to the materials (observation data). Notably, no students were categorized as not involved during the observed sessions.

Levels of engagement were generally consistent across the four participating schools, although some variation was observed. Observation data indicate that higher levels of engagement were more frequently observed during shared reading and discussion activities, particularly those involving visual interaction with illustrations (Observation notes across schools). Students' understanding of the denotative meanings of the proverbs was generally strong. Observation records show that many students were able to restate denotative meanings in simple terms or identify examples from the stories after the teacher's explanation (Observation notes, School C). Understanding of connotative meanings emerged through guided discussion, as indicated by students' responses to teacher questions about characters' actions and outcomes (Observation data, School D). Analysis of classroom interaction transcripts indicates that meaning construction occurred through teacher–student dialogue, particularly during guided questioning sequences. Students responded to prompts by describing events, identifying actions, and occasionally building on peers' responses.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the proverb-based picture storybook effectively supported student engagement and facilitated basic moral understanding in early-grade literacy activities. The high proportion of students categorized as actively or

very actively involved suggests that integrating local wisdom, visual storytelling, and guided questioning created a learning environment conducive to participation and comprehension.

The findings of this study demonstrate that Sumbawanese proverbs, when systematically selected and pedagogically transformed, can function as a culturally grounded mechanism for integrating linguistic development and character formation in early-grade literacy learning. The alignment of Sumbawa proverbs with all six dimensions of the Pancasila Learner Profile confirms that local wisdom is not merely compatible with national character frameworks but is, in fact, a foundational source of them. This finding reinforces previous arguments that Pancasila values are deeply rooted in Indonesia's diverse local cultures rather than imposed as abstract moral ideals (Ratnawati et al., 2024; Tamami et al., 2024).

More importantly, this finding suggests that local wisdom operates not only as content but as an epistemic foundation through which moral knowledge becomes accessible, meaningful, and socially situated for young learners. In this sense, the study extends existing perspectives by demonstrating how culturally embedded expressions can mediate the transition from abstract moral principles to lived learning experiences. Building on this foundation, the study goes beyond merely confirming the relevance of local wisdom in education by explicitly demonstrating the pedagogical mechanisms by which these values can be transformed into developmentally appropriate literacy materials. Rather than positioning the findings as simply consistent with prior research, this study expands existing understanding by showing how proverb selection, semantic scaffolding, and narrative contextualization function together as an integrated instructional model.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the understanding of semantic scaffolding in early literacy by highlighting the importance of distinguishing between denotative and connotative meanings. This distinction can be conceptualized as a pedagogical bridge that supports learners in moving from literal comprehension to moral interpretation, thereby linking understanding of figurative language with value internalization. In this regard, the study enriches existing frameworks of literacy and character education by demonstrating how meaning construction can be systematically structured rather than left to implicit inference (Hartanto et al., 2014; Holden & Warshaw, 1985). The epistemological significance of the Sumbawa context further strengthens this contribution. Rather than treating local culture as supplementary content, the study demonstrates that culturally embedded knowledge systems provide a framework that makes learning more contextualized, comprehensible, and socially meaningful. This aligns with perspectives in culturally responsive pedagogy that emphasize the role of learners' cultural backgrounds in shaping meaningful learning experiences (Johnson, 2013; Mutonyi, 2016).

The results extend earlier studies that conceptually identified moral values in local proverbs (Diniarti, 2017; Effendi, 2017; F. N. Fauziah et al., 2023) by demonstrating how such values can be sequenced and scaffolded for instruction and development in young learners. This extension is particularly evident in the study's operationalization of semantic scaffolding as a structured instructional strategy, enabling learners to progressively construct meaning from literal understanding to moral interpretation. The design characteristics of the literacy product further illuminate how local wisdom can be transformed into an effective learning medium. From a multimodal literacy perspective, the integration of illustrations, narrative context, and guided questions can be understood as a coordinated system of meaning-making resources that support comprehension and engagement in early readers (Johnson, 2013; Mutonyi, 2016). This configuration demonstrates how visual and textual elements jointly facilitate interpretive processes, particularly in culturally grounded learning materials.

Teachers' evaluations provide further evidence of the product's pedagogical feasibility and contextual relevance. Teachers consistently perceived the materials as culturally meaningful, instructionally practical, and flexible for classroom use. This supports prior research indicating that teachers are more likely to adopt and sustain instructional innovations when materials align with local culture and existing classroom practices (Ilham & Rahman, 2024; Mansur & Sholeh, 2024). Importantly, teachers emphasized that moral values were conveyed "naturally" through stories rather than explicitly imposed, a quality that aligns with recommendations for effective character education that prioritizes modeling, discussion, and reflection over prescriptive instruction. The high levels of student engagement observed across the four schools further strengthen the study's contribution. Rather than merely indicating participation, this engagement reflects the role of dialogic and visual interaction in facilitating meaning construction and supporting perspectives on interactive learning and meaning negotiation in early literacy contexts (Anderson et al., 2025; Anggraini et al., 2025; Rowland et al., 2014).

This study offers several contributions to the field of literacy education and character development by advancing the integration of local wisdom into classroom-based learning materials. Rather than merely adapting existing approaches, the study develops and empirically validates a structured model for transforming local proverbs into literacy resources aligned with the Pancasila Learner Profile. In terms of theoretical contribution, the study extends existing work on local wisdom–based education by demonstrating how cultural knowledge can be operationalized within a multimodal literacy framework. While previous studies have emphasized the importance of local wisdom in character education (Hatima, 2025; Ilham & Rahman, 2024; Mansur & Sholeh, 2024; Sakti et al., 2024; Wahyuni, 2019), they have largely remained conceptual or descriptive. This study advances the field by providing a concrete design model that integrates proverb selection, pedagogical transformation, and classroom implementation into a coherent framework. The integration of cultural content within structured literacy materials aligns with evidence that culturally

responsive instructional design improves literacy outcomes and meaning-making processes (Sinclair, 2025).

More specifically, the novelty of this study lies in three key aspects. First, it proposes a systematic framework for selecting and transforming local proverbs into developmentally appropriate literacy materials, addressing the challenge of adapting metaphorical expressions for young learners. Second, it introduces a validated design model that integrates denotative and connotative scaffolding with illustrated narratives, thereby linking linguistic comprehension with moral interpretation. Third, it provides empirical evidence of classroom implementation in the context of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, demonstrating how culturally grounded materials can function effectively in real educational settings.

From a practical perspective, the study offers a usable model for teachers and material developers seeking to design culturally responsive literacy resources. The structured format of the storybook, comprising proverb presentation, denotative explanation, narrative contextualization, connotative interpretation, and guided questions, provides a replicable template that can be adapted to other local contexts. This is particularly relevant for educators working within the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, which emphasizes contextual and student-centered learning. At the policy level, the findings support ongoing efforts to integrate the Pancasila Learner Profile into classroom practice by demonstrating how national character values can be grounded in local cultural resources. The study provides an example of how policy directives related to character education can be translated into concrete instructional materials, thereby bridging the gap between curriculum design and classroom implementation.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the broader discourse on culturally responsive pedagogy by illustrating how local knowledge systems can be embedded within formal education without losing their cultural authenticity. By integrating Sumbawanese proverbs into literacy instruction, the study highlights the potential of indigenous cultural resources to enrich both language learning and character development, aligning with global discussions on the role of culture in education (Johnson, 2013; Mutonyi, 2016). The findings of this study are relevant beyond the immediate context of Sumbawa, particularly for educational settings seeking to integrate local cultural knowledge into formal literacy instruction. While the materials developed in this study are grounded in Sumbawanese proverbs, the underlying design principles—namely the integration of local wisdom, multimodal representation, and structured pedagogical scaffolding—can be adapted to other regional and cultural contexts.

The study contributes to global discussions on culturally responsive pedagogy by demonstrating how indigenous knowledge systems can be systematically incorporated into early literacy education. Similar approaches may be relevant in diverse educational contexts where local narratives, oral traditions, or cultural expressions play a significant role in

community life. In this sense, the study aligns with international perspectives emphasizing the importance of connecting learning materials to students' cultural identities to enhance engagement and meaning-making (Johnson, 2013; Mutonyi, 2016).

Despite these contributions, several limitations need to be acknowledged. *First*, the study was conducted in a limited number of schools within a specific cultural and linguistic context. Although the participating schools were selected to represent different local conditions, the findings may not fully capture the diversity of educational settings across regions. *Second*, the number of student participants was relatively small and limited to early grade levels (Phases A and B), which limits the generalizability of the findings to other age groups or educational levels. *Third*, the study focused exclusively on one type of literacy material, namely, proverb-based picture storybooks. As a result, the findings do not account for how other forms of culturally grounded materials or alternative instructional approaches might influence literacy development and character learning. *Fourth*, the implementation phase was limited in duration and did not examine the long-term impact of the materials on students' literacy development or character formation. Future research is therefore needed to investigate the sustained use of such materials and their effects over time.

Future research is recommended to expand the scope of implementation across diverse regions, include larger and more varied participant groups, and explore longitudinal impacts of culturally responsive literacy materials. In addition, further studies could examine how similar design principles can be applied to other forms of local wisdom and integrated into different subject areas.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to develop and examine a proverb-based picture storybook grounded in Sumbawanese local wisdom and aligned with the Pancasila Learner Profile for early elementary literacy learning. The findings confirm that Sumbawanese proverbs can be systematically transformed into developmentally appropriate literacy materials that integrate language learning and character education across all six dimensions of the Pancasila Learner Profile. By distinguishing denotative and connotative meanings and embedding them within illustrated narratives and guided questions, the developed product enabled students to engage meaningfully with both language and character values in culturally familiar contexts.

The results further show that the developed storybook is both instructionally feasible and pedagogically effective, as reflected in positive teacher evaluations, high levels of student engagement, and observable meaning construction during classroom interaction. These findings indicate that embedding moral values within culturally resonant literacy practices enables a more concrete and meaningful implementation of character education in the context of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

This study contributes a validated design model that integrates proverb selection, semantic scaffolding, and multimodal storytelling into a coherent instructional framework. In doing so, it advances existing work on culturally responsive pedagogy by demonstrating how local wisdom can be operationalized as both a cultural and pedagogical resource in early literacy learning. In practice, the study offers a replicable model for teachers and materials developers to design culturally responsive literacy resources aligned with national curriculum goals.

The classroom trials were conducted within a limited geographical area and over a relatively short period, focusing primarily on engagement and initial understanding rather than long-term character development. Future research should examine the longitudinal impact of such materials across broader contexts and diverse learner groups to strengthen generalizability and theoretical development. Thus, this study highlights the potential of culturally grounded literacy design to bridge language development and character education, offering a validated and transferable model for integrating local wisdom into contemporary educational practice.

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