



Implementation of Character Education through Project Activities Expo in the Emancipated Curriculum Based on Sundanese Culture at Junior High Schools

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Abstract: This research aims to explore and analyze the implementation of character education through the emancipated curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) project activities expo based on local Sundanese culture at Junior High Schools (SMP). The research method used a phenomenological approach with interpretive qualitative research that looks and hears more closely and in detail from individual explanations and understanding of their experiences. Participants in this research include students and teachers involved in project activities expo. Data was collected through observation, interviews, and document analysis. The findings show that the effectiveness of the emancipated curriculum expo project is rooted in local Sundanese cultural wisdom in implementing character education in junior high schools. Developing projects, assigning roles, and exhibiting students' work is essential to holistic character formation. In addition, these activities strengthen students' cultural identity and increase their involvement in the learning process. The implications of these findings emphasize the importance of integrating locally based character education in the school curriculum to strengthen students' cultural and moral awareness in the era of globalization. This research contributes to advancing knowledge by highlighting the significance of culturally rooted character education initiatives in enhancing students' holistic development in educational contexts. As a result, students can work together in teams, reason critically, be creative, have a sense of diversity, and respect opinions.

Keywords: character education, expo project, Sundanese culture, emancipated curriculum

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INTRODUCTION

The government always strives to improve the quality of education in Indonesia. One of the efforts made is the implementation of the applicable curriculum. The function and aim of National Education is to develop abilities and shape the character and civilization of a nation that has dignity to make the nation's life more intelligent. Education is critical because it aims to build human knowledge, skills, and personality, as well as develop the potential of students so that they become human beings who believe and are devoted to God Almighty, have a noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent and can become democratic and responsible citizens (Aziizu, 2015; Reimers & Chung, 2016; Sumarsih et al., 2022). Apart from that, one of the paradigms outlined in the 2015-2019 Ministry of Education and Culture Strategic Plan is that education forms character, so one of the goals of national education is to develop character and human resources (Hidayat et al., 2022; Hidayat, 2019; Ulandari & Dwi, 2023; Zurqoni et al., 2018).

Times continue to develop with an increasingly dynamic society. As a result, the education system in Indonesia is also transforming to adapt to the globalization that is occurring (Rokhman et al., 2014). In line with that, the curriculum is essential in every form and model of education (Wahyuni, 2015; Mubarak et al., 2021; Setyorini et al., 2023). The curriculum in Indonesia's education system has changed eleven times since Indonesia's independence (Sumarsih et al., 2022). It started in 1947 (Alhamuddin, 2014; Abdullah, 2007) with a simple curriculum. It aims to focus on mind and character education as Indonesian Citizens (WNI) to arrive at the Emancipated Curriculum, which is very popular today. The curriculum changes continuously until the main focus is on increasing competence and more complex character (Suparjoto, 2022; Gumilar et al., 2023).

From time to time, the field of education always develops into a polemic for individuals if significant policies are not established. Policies continue to be implemented by making changes. Every change that occurs always reaps various reactions from the community. Technological developments have influenced human life, so they have significantly impacted how humans think and behave. This condition is one of the foundations for changes in policy and curriculum in education (Mubarak et al., 2021). The foundation for curriculum development has a significant role. If the curriculum does not have a strong foundation, then the curriculum will easily be swayed, and what will be at stake are the humans (students) who will be produced by the education itself (Mubarak et al., 2021). Currently, several policies have been issued by the government, which have resulted in discussions emerging in the public sphere, which are related to the "Emancipated Curriculum

(Kurikulum Merdeka)". This new curriculum policy has created confusion among educators regarding the procedures and stages that must be followed in practice (Marisa, 2021). Indonesia has National Education Standards, which function as a basis for planning, implementing, and supervising education to achieve quality national education. National Education Standards continue to be refined in a planned, directed, and sustainable manner following the changing demands of local, national, and global life (Wahyuni, 2015). Curriculum as a learning plan is an educational program and plan that is adapted to teach students. With the programs and plans made, students then carry out learning activities to develop and change behavior to suit the goals set (Wahyuni, 2015). The curriculum regulates the teaching and learning process not only in terms of the transfer of knowledge but also as a lifelong learning process to form good character, develop individual potential and talents, as well as strengthen intellectual power and thought, as well as instill an independent spirit with a spirit of self-reliance (Thijs & Akker, 2010; Young, 2014). In this case, the curriculum is designed to provide learning experiences and develop students' life skills. The curriculum as a learning experience implies that learning activities do not always have to occur in the classroom but can also be held outside the classroom. This means that teaching and learning activities can be carried out using any method and style that interests students.

The ideal concept of education is the essence of a mental revolution based on the development of people with strong character, advanced thinking, a modern outlook, and good behavior as the embodiment of good citizens (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, 2019). Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 23 of 2005 concerning the Development of Good Character states that cultivating a child's good character is through habituation and consistent training to become character and culture. Thus, education and culture have a dynamic interaction to help internalize character in society at large (Hidayat, 2019). Indonesia has cultural diversity that characterizes its people. The essence of character education in the context of education in Indonesia is values education, namely education with noble values that originate from the culture of the Indonesian nation itself, to develop the personality of the younger generation so that they can be independent in globalization (Budiwibowo, 2016; Muassomah et al., 2020; Winanto, 2021). The culture of our society is starting to be disturbed by the sharing of foreign cultures, so local character and wisdom are increasingly eroded by the system of capitalism and leadership with an employer-labor pattern. This condition clearly shows that there is colonialism by the nation itself (Budiwibowo, 2016).

The educational situations described above provide a conclusion regarding cultural values and students' potential and competencies. Students are unique creatures, and they have learning styles and interests that are different from each other. For teachers, this should be a primary concern in developing students' talents and increasing their competence in the future. Education is tasked with strengthening the cultural values inherent in students' identities. Several studies on character education, one of which is research by Curren (2017), show that character education can be justified as one of the three aspects of essential development that can equip children for a prosperous life. This can apply if character education is focused on cultivating true virtue. Furthermore, research by Baehr (2017), who discusses intellectual character education with traditional character education, concludes that character education refers to education that emphasizes the development of morals and virtue, generosity, and tolerance. Peterson (2020) also revealed the importance of character education, but the focus was on cultivating individual character in politics. According to him, the political community is a space where character can be cultivated and expressed. In other research, Zurqoni et al. (2018) find that character education has a positive impact on increasing students' character values. In Indonesia, character education, as explained by Susilo et al. (2022), is an educational concept that develops a person's morals and personality. This concept is then combined with government regulations.

The results of the researcher's initial observations at one of the Junior High Schools (SMP) in Bandung found that the school had implemented the Emancipated Curriculum for the first time for class VII students. As one of the Projects for Strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile, the school provides opportunities for students to learn in informal situations using the local wisdom/culture typical of West Java to strengthen various competencies by being happy at school in the Pancasila Student Profile. The world is increasingly globalizing with the emergence of global patterns of social relations, characterized by the increasingly minimal boundaries between countries. Therefore, it is necessary to prepare the young generation to be nationalist-patriotic, intelligent, honest, and responsible through character education that upholds local wisdom and cultural values (Budiwibowo, 2016). Apart from that, character education integrated into the curriculum is also known to be one of the factors that determines the success of the educational process program. Different from several previous studies, this research will discuss the implementation of character education that is integrated into the curriculum called the "Emancipated Curriculum".

METHODS

This research was conducted using the qualitative method of interpretivism, which allows researchers to look and listen more closely and in detail to individual explanations and understandings of their experiences.

Interpretivism means trying to understand individual social actions by aiming to understand aspects of human activity from their perspective (Cresswell, 2007). This study used a phenomenological approach based on the researcher's interest in examining the phenomena experienced by key informants or research subjects more deeply. Phenomenological research aims to describe the meaning of individual experiences related to a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). The goal is to describe and analyze phenomena, social activities, events, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts of people individually or in groups.

The research was carried out at one of the junior high schools in Bandung, where systematic visits were made for several days. The first visit was carried out as an initial stage to understand the socio-demographic status of the school. On the next visit, researchers observed the preparations and rehearsals for the Expo Project activities. Next, the last visit was when the Expo Project activities were underway. Informants were selected by purposive sampling, namely people with knowledge and experience related to the problem under study and several other people who are directly involved in the Expo Project activities of the Emancipated Curriculum. The subject of this research is the Deputy Head of Curriculum, who is active in formal and non-formal teaching and learning activities at school. Data was collected using qualitative observation techniques, direct interviews, and documentation. Qualitative observation is applied in the context of a natural event, following the natural flow of the observed life (Hasanah, 2017). Then, to ensure the validity of the data, the following efforts were made: 1) extending the data collection period, 2) making continuous and careful observations, 3) triangulating, and 4) involving peers to discuss the data (Sumarsih et al., 2022). Data analysis was carried out using phenomenological procedures according to Punch (2003) which consists of 1) fully describing the experiential phenomena experienced by the research subjects, 2) reducing data and information as a process where assumptions and prejudices about the phenomena are postponed in bracketing to ensure that these prejudices do not contaminate the description of the observations and ensure that the form of description is as the things themselves, 3) looking for the essence in the phenomena as they are by involving the exploration of the phenomena by using the process of free imagination, intuition, and reflection to determine whether a particular characteristic is a vital essence, and 4) showing the dimensionality of the research results by writing the research results as they are following the reality in the field. Direct interviews involved open-ended questions and documentation to support and validate the interview and observation data. This research is expected to explain the benefits of the Emancipated Curriculum Expo Project in strengthening character based on Sundanese cultural local wisdom in students in one of the junior high schools in Bandung City.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Researchers have carried out direct observations at one of the junior high schools in the city of Bandung. The observation process was carried out by the observer himself with full participation in the series of activities of the Emancipated Curriculum Expo Project. The emancipated curriculum aims to develop students' potential. This curriculum is simple and flexible so that learning will be more in-depth. With the existence of the emancipated curriculum, it is hoped that it will be able to develop student competencies. This is a distinct advantage, where this curriculum emphasizes student freedom. In its implementation, teachers, principals, supervisors, and other actors in schools can hold various practical activities, both in the form of seminars and workshops independently (Ristek, 2021). Observers, in this case, are also referred to as pure observers. In implementing the curriculum at one of the junior high schools in Bandung, they chose to hold an Expo Project as a form of practical activity. In practice, the theme chosen is "Local Wisdom/Typical Culture of West Java". The aim is to build curiosity and inquiry skills by exploring the culture and local wisdom of the people of the Sunda region and then developing it to be of high value globally. In implementing this project, students are introduced to various local wisdoms of Sundanese culture, reflected in West Javanese food, drinks, art, dance, crafts, traditional songs, and traditional games. The following table explains the flow of the Emancipated Curriculum Expo Project activities.

Table 1. The flow of activities at the Emancipated Curriculum Project Expo

Activity Stage	Activity Description
Preparatory stage	Socialization of project modules and teaching materials for class VII teachers and students starting one month before the performance,
Contextual stage	Providing material to students according to their respective projects. Group division based on student interest and talent material after the assessment Guidance with the facilitator four times
Action stage	Group presentation Exhibition and display of projects that have been prepared for one month
Reflection and follow-up stage	Discussing the series of activities that have been held along with evaluation with the committee and group facilitator

Researchers have conducted interviews with the deputy head of curriculum and asked about the background of implementing the Expo Project with the theme of West Java's local wisdom. He said this decision was based on the teachers' agreement at the Subject Teachers' Conference (MGMP) throughout Bandung Regency. This agreement is motivated by the needs of teenagers who are starting to be carried away by globalization and modernization. So, quite a few are starting to forget traditions and culture, which are useful in building character. The presence of the Emancipated Curriculum with the Pancasila Student Profile prioritizes its role in improving education quality in Indonesia by prioritizing character formation (Rachmawati et al., 2022). By implementing the Pancasila student profile, it is hoped that students will be able to develop character values so that good behavior is formed and inherent in students. There are six competencies in key dimensions: faith, devotion to God Almighty, noble character, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creativity (Ristek, 2021).

Researchers found that there was a lot of student creativity exhibited in the expo project activities, namely in the form of: local snack stands (klepon, cilok, cendol, cireng isi, mochi, gehu kuah cuko, seblak, cimol, fried cilok, es mambo, banana aroma, batagor, jackfruit cendol, bajigur, nasi timbel, fried cilok, cipak, shaken noodles, doger ice, chocolate banana, bala-bala, cilor), shalawat, tahfidz, traditional West Javanese dance (jaipong dance, kembang tanjung dance), angklung, kaulinan barudak (oray-orayan, sondah, sapinrong, perepet jengkol, cinggiripit, boy-boyan, and bebentengan), silat, wayang golek, and drama. Before presenting each project, this activity goes through a project activity flow consisting of four stages: 1) preparation stage. Preparations began one month before the project appearance, which began with the socialization of project modules and teaching materials for class VII teachers and students; 2) contextual stage. This stage provides material to students according to their respective projects, followed by dividing groups of five people into each group based on students' interests and talents after going through the assessment stage. Then, guidance was held with the facilitator four times. The facilitator is a teacher the school has determined; 3) action stage. The action stage is the group presentation stage, and the exhibition and display of the project have been prepared one month in advance; 4) reflection and follow-up stage. It is carried out with the committee and group facilitators to discuss the series of activities that have been held along with their evaluation.

The researcher then conducted interviews with several students who were directly involved in this expo project activity. The interviews found that the preparations made by students were very closely related to the use of gadgets and social media. Students must be as creative as possible regarding the products they will display. Class VII students are students who are entering their teens. Teenagers currently live in very rapid technological developments, and it cannot be denied that the first places to ask questions today are Google and YouTube (Arifin, 2016). Interestingly, students can use their gadgets in a more positive direction. One of the things that attracted researchers was a typical West Java snack stand. In preparation, students and their respective groups named the snacks they displayed with unique and interesting names, then continued by creating logo designs that they would put on their snack wrappers. Before continuing to make products, students start by making a proposal and submitting the name and type of product using PowerPoint. Regarding this, the researcher asked each student about who they studied (proposal making, PowerPoint, logo design), and it turned out that the students themselves revealed that all of them learned through Google and YouTube. Meanwhile, they use the Canva application to create designs. There are many variations in making their own products, some of which are learned from parents, siblings, and YouTube.

The conditions above really illustrate the foundation of independent learning, which aims to make students more independent and able to learn without limits; learning can be done at any time and with anyone. Apart from that, students need something that looks different from before. Regarding students' potential, this is not only obtained from learning activities in the classroom but can also be obtained from other learning environments. The competencies intended for students are not individualistic but grow with the surrounding learning environment (Marisa, 2021). Regarding character education, Lickona explained that character relates to three things: moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral behavior. Good character consists of knowing, wanting, and doing good things – habits of thought, heart, and action. These three things are necessary to direct a moral life; These three form moral maturity (Lickona, 1991). Apart from that, President Ir. Soekarno once said, "There is no nation-building without character-building". It will not be possible to build a country if its own character is not built. This indicates how vital character education is in building national identity. Mohammad Solihin, M. M. Pd., Head of the Sukabumi Regency Education Service, stated that "Character education has a main objective, namely how to be a good citizen and how to be a good person." So it is essential to equip students with various knowledge and skills to be able to live a decent and honorable life in society. Heri Puspito Dyah Setiyorini, A. Par, M.M., Lecturer and Researcher at the Indonesian Education University (UPI), said that "Character education is needed to change students' behavior to become better" (Hidayat, 2019).

Intelligent, kind, and virtuous are character traits. However, it is impossible for a student to be virtuous instantly and quickly. It takes time and long steps, so getting used to it is required. Since ancient Greece, the character has been part of normative ethics. Normative ethics is related to moral principles that are considered

good and bad. The character education process is based on psychological totality, which includes all human individual potential (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor) and cultural totality in the context of interactions within the family, educational unit, and society (Amelia & Ramadan, 2021). Product presentation activities at the expo project require students to wear traditional Sundanese clothing (pangsi and kebaya) on the day of the product presentation. This is intended to instill cultural values into students so that they remain embedded in their identity.

Character education through school culture is based on values that will essentially shape children into better traits and in a more positive direction. The cultural atmosphere created can have a good impact on student character. Sundanese culture lives, grows, and develops among the Sundanese people who generally live in the West Java area. In its development, Sundanese culture consists of belief systems, livelihoods, arts, kinship, language, science and technology, and customs. Apart from that, there are also values inherent in the people, which are reflected in the slogans of *silih asih* (loving each other), *silih asah* (mutual improvement), and *silih asuh* (mutual protection) so that it becomes a culture that has its own characteristics among other cultures. Overall, this expo project activity has taught students how to work together in teams, mutual cooperation, mutual respect, and respect for each other's decisions (Madjid et al., 2016).

Character does not just appear or be possessed by someone; character is formed over time, and changes in thinking and actions taken later can reflect good values. Thus, it can be understood that character is a behavior that is formed, developed, and realized in everyday life. The objectives of character education, according to the Ministry of National Education, are: 1) developing students' heart potential as citizens who have cultural values and national character, 2) developing students' habits and behavior that are commendable, 3) instilling a spirit of leadership and responsibility, 4) developing students into independent human beings who have national insight, and 5) developing the school life environment as a learning environment that is safe, full of creativity and friendship (Judiani, 2010). This school expo project activity provides valuable experience for students and fosters collaboration skills. Through group collaboration, students learn how to coordinate tasks, share responsibilities, and resolve conflicts that arise. This is in line with cooperative learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in learning so that learning becomes quality (Bećirović et al., 2022; Keramati & Gillies, 2022; Van Ryzin et al., 2020). A study by Silva et al. (2021) confirms that cooperative learning, which teaches the development of cooperative relationships, allows students to assume greater responsibility in learning.

In addition, the value of mutual cooperation students demonstrate reflects strong social values. They can learn to help each other and work together to achieve common goals. The students work together to realize the project they have agreed on. Mutual cooperation is a significant cultural value (Argadinata, 2022; Arief & Yuwanto, 2023; Rubingah et al., 2023). In Indonesia, the culture of mutual cooperation has been instilled among students to form characters who care about the community and the surrounding environment from an early age. Research by Chakraborty (2023) shows that students who struggle academically can improve their performance when they are part of a group that encourages effective learning. The form of mutual cooperation applied in this project indicates that students have gone through group learning. This Expo project is also an opportunity for students to appreciate and respect each other (Zitzmann et al., 2022). Students learn to listen to the opinions and ideas of their peers, even when those ideas differ from their own. Accepting ideas and respecting different views is critical to building effective communication and harmonious relationships (Beenen et al., 2023; Solomon & Theiss, 2022). Frey et al. (2019) explain that social skills, emotional regulation, cognitive abilities, and good communication skills are vital in a collaborative learning environment.

The enjoyment felt by students during this expo project activity also shows the importance of variation in teaching methods. Many students feel bored with monotonous classroom learning activities (Dinçer & Atay, 2022; Sekarini, 2022). On one occasion, learning for students also requires strategies to lighten the atmosphere and create a more conducive atmosphere. Research by Devi et al. (2022) shows that ice-breaking activities can increase students' interest in learning who are starting to feel bored. Apart from that, with activities such as the expo project, students can learn in a more interactive and fun way. Varied and interesting learning can increase students' motivation to improve learning outcomes (Pan, 2023). Therefore, schools need to continue to develop innovative and interesting teaching methods.

Lastly, the student's excitement about this expo project activity is because the products they have created will be sold and make a profit, which at the same time educates an entrepreneurial spirit among them. This experience provides an accurate picture of how the business world works, from production to sales (Sobakh et al., 2023). This is very important in developing entrepreneurial skills, which are increasingly needed in the current era of globalization (Bauman & Lucy, 2021; Cooney, 2012). A study by Fayolle and Gailly (2015) confirms that practical experience in entrepreneurship during school can build a strong foundation for developing business skills in the future. Thus, this expo project activity not only enriches students' academic knowledge but also equips them with useful practical skills for their future.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research that has been made by researchers on the Implementation of Character Education through the Emancipated Curriculum Expo Project Activity Based on Local Cultural Wisdom (Sundanese) at a junior high school in Bandung, it can be concluded that the implementation of character education is carried out through activities in schools through several character values, namely integrity, independence, mutual cooperation, nationalism, love of local culture, mutual compassion, mutual care, and compassion. Carrying out expo project activities provides students with much knowledge and experience. The knowledge gained also differs from what is usually learned in class in formal learning. Students can realize their creativity independently and are guided by the teacher accompanying the activity. Students also become more concrete in implementing attitudes of cooperation and mutual cooperation in social environments.

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