

Integrating Local Cultural Values in Elementary Social Studies Learning: A Case Study of Meaningful Classroom Interactions

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Abstract

This research is motivated by the low level of meaningful classroom teaching in Social studies learning in elementary schools, which tends to be dominated by conventional methods and minimal contextualization of local culture. The purpose of this study is to examine how the integration of local cultural values can create meaningful classroom interactions in elementary social studies learning. This research used a qualitative approach with a case study design, involving classroom observation, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and learning documentation in one of the elementary schools that integrates local culture in the teaching process. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns of interaction that emerged from the application of local culture in learning. The findings show that the integration of local cultures not only strengthens the relevance of teaching materials to students' lives but also increases active participation, emotional engagement, and two-way communication between teachers and students. This study confirms that local culture can be an effective pedagogical instrument to build meaningful classroom interactions, as well as make a theoretical contribution to the development of social studies learning models based on cultural contexts.

Keywords: *Teaching, local culture, social studies learning, elementary school*

Introduction

Education has a big challenge in forming students who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also have strong character, love the nation's culture, and are able to interact socially effectively. One of the subjects that plays an important role in strengthening character and understanding of national values is Social Sciences. At the elementary school level, social studies are designed to equip students with basic knowledge about social, cultural, economic, and political life in the surrounding environment and the wider scope. However, in the context of elementary social studies learning in Indonesia classroom practices are still often dominated by textual and

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theoretical approaches. Based on preliminary observations, teachers tend to rely heavily on lecture methods and textbook-oriented instruction, with limited integration of students' local cultural context. As a result, learning activities are less interactive and provide minimal opportunities for students to connect the material with their everyday experiences. This condition leads to low student participation, limited two-way classroom interaction, and a lack of meaningful learning experiences. Although previous studies have highlighted similar issues in broader contexts (Dietrich & Evans, 2022; Hirsh et al., 2022; Nilawati & Sukadari, 2022; Ssemugenyi, 2023; Wang, 2022), there is still limited understanding of how these problems manifest in specific elementary classroom settings and how they can be addressed through the integration of local cultural values. This condition shows that there is a need for innovation in the social studies learning approach, especially in terms of building meaningful classroom interactions. One potential approach to strengthening student engagement is through the integration of local cultural values into learning. Local culture is an important part of the community's identity and contains noble values such as mutual cooperation, tolerance, deliberation, and hard work, which are very relevant to the social studies learning objectives. The integration of local culture in social studies learning can not only enrich the content of the material, but also become an effective medium to develop students' character and love for the nation's cultural heritage (Darong et al., 2021; Revilla Bueloth et al., 2025). In the context of primary education, a local culture-based approach allows students to learn through experiences that are contextual, close to everyday life, and socially relevant. This supports the paradigm shift of learning from teacher-centered to student-centered.

Classroom interaction is an essential element of the learning process because it facilitates the exchange of ideas, experiences, and knowledge between teachers and students as well as among students themselves. Classroom interaction refers to the two-way communication and social exchanges that occur during teaching and learning activities, including questioning, discussion, feedback, collaboration, and other forms of verbal and non-verbal communication. In social studies learning, classroom interaction is particularly important because students are expected not only to acquire knowledge about social life but also to develop communication skills, social awareness, cooperation, and democratic attitudes through active participation in learning activities.

The significance of classroom interaction is supported by sociocultural learning theory proposed by Vygotsky (1978), which emphasizes that learning occurs through social interaction and collaboration. Through dialogue and interaction with teachers and peers, students construct

knowledge and develop higher-order thinking within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In addition, Flanders (1970) argues that classroom learning quality is strongly influenced by patterns of teacher–student interaction. According to Flanders’ Interaction Analysis System, classrooms characterized by active student participation, questioning, discussion, and feedback tend to create more meaningful learning experiences than classrooms dominated by teacher talk. These perspectives suggest that effective classroom interaction is a key factor in promoting active learning and student engagement.

In elementary social studies classrooms, meaningful interaction ideally includes discussions of social issues, sharing experiences related to community life, collaborative problem-solving, questioning activities, and reflection on social and cultural phenomena. Such interaction enables students to connect academic content with their everyday experiences and social realities. However, preliminary observations in the present study indicate that classroom interaction remains predominantly teacher-centered. Teachers generally dominate classroom discourse through explanation and information delivery, while opportunities for student-to-student interaction, collaborative discussion, and dialogue based on local cultural experiences are still limited. Consequently, students tend to participate passively and have fewer opportunities to construct understanding through social interaction. This condition highlights the need for learning approaches that can simultaneously strengthen classroom interaction and utilize local cultural values as meaningful learning resources.

Previous studies on social studies learning in elementary schools have shown the importance of innovation in learning methods and strategies to improve student understanding and engagement. Research by Bordeos (2021), Ojer-Osmangazi et al., (2022) and Yew and Goh (2016) found that the application of the Problem-Based Learning method in social studies subjects can improve the critical thinking skills of elementary school students. Meanwhile, a study of Astawa and Widiana (2025) and Ruto et al., (2021) have shown that a contextual approach in social studies is able to strengthen the linkage between subject matter and students' daily experiences. Similar results were found by Jinna et al., (2024) who revealed that the use of a Jigsaw-type cooperative learning model can improve students' cooperation and understanding of social issues. Research by Amalia & Hapsari (2018) have emphasized the importance of using visual media in social studies learning as a tool to increase students' attraction and retention of the material. In addition, studies of Begum et al., (2023), Larmer (2018) and Samsiyah et al., (2020) have underlined that project-based

learning in social studies can foster social care attitudes and reflective thinking skills in elementary school students. Likely, despite the obstacles, the integration of local culture in thematic learning in elementary schools is of benefit for understanding the cultural values to be taught (Catya et al., 2025; Munawir et al., 2024). In addition, the interactions built in the classroom are often still one-way and do not involve active student participation (Mezieobi et al., 2014).

On the other hand, research on local culture in the context of primary education has also shown significant results on strengthening students' values and character. The introduction of local culture through folklore can strengthen the understanding of moral and social values, tolerance and multicultural awareness in elementary school students (Eliyanti et al., 2024). In addition, the integration of local cultural practices into subject matter can increase a sense of belonging, involvement, and pride in regional identity (Aulia et al., 2024, Niman & Darong, 2026). Furthermore, a study by Rachmadyanti (2021) confirms that the integration of local cultural elements in learning makes a positive contribution to character formation and understanding of social values, although it has not highlighted much aspects of social interaction in the classroom. Although previous studies have explored innovative approaches in social studies learning and the integration of local culture in elementary education, these studies generally discuss local culture in broad terms and do not specifically examine how particular local cultural values are enacted in classroom interaction. In the context of this study, conducted at an elementary school in Indonesia, particularly in Manggarai East Nusa Tenggara, preliminary observations indicate that teachers have attempted to incorporate local cultural elements such as local traditions, oral narratives, or community practices], but their use remains superficial and has not been systematically linked to the development of meaningful classroom interaction. As a result, classroom communication is still largely one-way, and opportunities for dialogue, collaboration, and value exchange are limited. Therefore, the main problem addressed in this study is the lack of a clear pedagogical model for integrating specific local cultural values into classroom interaction processes in social studies learning. Furthermore, while previous studies have demonstrated the benefits of local culture integration for character development, cultural awareness, and learning outcomes (Aulia et al., 2024; Catya et al., 2025; Munawir et al., 2024; Rachmadyanti, 2021), limited attention has been given to how specific local cultural values function as resources for fostering meaningful classroom interaction. Consequently, there remains insufficient understanding of how local cultural values can shape teacher–student and student–student interactions in elementary social

studies classrooms. Addressing this gap is important not only for advancing the theoretical understanding of culture-based learning but also for providing practical guidance for teachers in developing more interactive, contextual, and culturally responsive social studies instruction.

Based on this problem, this study focuses on analyzing how particular local cultural values are integrated into classroom practices and how they shape patterns of interaction between teachers and students. Accordingly, the research question is formulated as follows: What local cultural values are represented in classroom interaction during elementary social studies learning and how are these local cultural values enacted by teachers and students in classroom learning activities? This study is expected to contribute to the development of a more context-specific and culturally grounded model of social studies instruction, particularly by clarifying the role of local cultural values in shaping interactive learning processes.

The findings of this study are expected to enrich the educational literature on local culture-based learning strategies and the role of classroom interaction in creating meaningful learning. For elementary school teachers, this study provides insight into how to develop more interactive and contextual social studies learning by utilizing local culture as a learning resource. Teachers can acquire practical strategies for creating classroom teaching that are effective and relevant to students' social contexts. In addition, the results of this research can be used as a reference in the preparation of learning policies that prioritize local wisdom as part of strengthening character education.

Theoretical Framework

Social Sciences is a subject that has an important role in shaping students' understanding of social, cultural, economic, and political life in their environment. At the elementary school level, social studies learning aims not only to transfer knowledge but also to instill social values and shape students' character as responsible members of society. In the context of the modern educational paradigm, learning is expected to emphasize not only cognitive achievement but also the development of soft skills, critical thinking, and hidden curriculum values such as responsibility, cooperation, and social awareness. Therefore, social studies learning should integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains in a holistic manner through activities that are relevant to students' real lives (Mahayanti et al., 2024). This perspective aligns with Meaningful Learning, which highlights the importance of connecting new knowledge with students' prior experiences. In addition, considering that elementary school students are still at the stage of concrete thinking,

learning strategies should be designed to be contextual, active, and engaging. Learning that is oriented toward students' daily lives not only facilitates understanding of concepts but also supports the development of critical thinking and meaningful learning experiences.

Research by Astawa & Widiana (2025), Farida (2017), and Tohariah (2021) have shown that contextual approaches such as Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) can improve students' understanding of social concepts by linking learning materials to real-life experiences. This approach emphasizes students' active involvement in constructing meaning and utilizing the surrounding environment as a learning resource. Similarly, studies by Bulan et al. (2025) and Alfianiawati et al. (2019) demonstrate that Problem-Based Learning (PBL) can enhance elementary students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills in social studies learning. In practice, social studies learning is still often dominated by lecture-based and textual approaches that limit student participation and interaction (Angela, 2014). As a result, students tend to be passive, less engaged, and experience difficulties in understanding abstract social concepts. Although collaborative approaches, such as the Jigsaw model (Jinna et al., 2024), have been shown to increase student participation and social understanding, these approaches still do not explicitly explain how local cultural values can function as a basis for shaping classroom interaction patterns, such as dialogue, collaboration, and mutual exchange of ideas.

Classroom interaction is a fundamental component of social studies learning because it enables students to construct knowledge through communication, discussion, collaboration, and the exchange of experiences (Chimbunde et al., 2023; Steyn & Vanyoro, 2023; Sun et al., 2025). Classroom interaction refers to the communication and social exchanges that occur between teachers and students as well as among students during the learning process. In social studies education, such interaction is particularly important because students are expected not only to acquire knowledge about social life but also to develop communication skills, social awareness, cooperation, and democratic attitudes through active participation. The importance of classroom interaction is supported by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes that learning occurs through social interaction and collaborative meaning-making. According to Vygotsky (1978), knowledge is constructed through dialogue and interaction with teachers and peers within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Likewise, Flanders (1970) argues that the quality of classroom interaction significantly influences student participation and learning outcomes. Classrooms characterized by active questioning, discussion, feedback, and student participation tend to create

more meaningful learning experiences than classrooms dominated by teacher talk. In addition, Mayer's Social Agency Theory (2021) provides further support for the role of interaction in learning. Mayer explains that social cues, such as a conversational language style, human voice, eye contact, and gestures, can create a sense of social partnership between instructors and learners, which in turn enhances the learning process. These social cues encourage learners to become more cognitively engaged and actively participate in classroom activities. Consequently, effective classroom interaction is not only a means of exchanging information but also a process of fostering meaningful social relationships that facilitate learning. Therefore, classroom interaction serves as an important mechanism through which students construct social understanding, engage meaningfully in learning activities, and develop the communication and collaboration skills necessary for active participation in classroom interactions.

Local culture or local wisdom refers to the values, norms, customs, and traditional knowledge that develop within a community and are transmitted across generations. In the context of this study, local cultural values specifically refer to local folklore and community-based practices in Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. These values are embedded in students' daily social lives and reflect patterns of cooperation, respect, and collective responsibility. In education, such local cultural values can function as contextual learning resources that connect learning materials to students' real-life experiences. The integration of local culture in elementary learning has strong potential to instill moral, social, and cultural values from an early age (Moremoholo, 2023; Uthaisa et al., 2024). Relevant education should be rooted in the local community's culture and use it as a foundation for shaping students' identity and character. Through the integration of these values, students not only learn about norms and values but also actively engage with their social environment and cultural heritage. This is in line with the principles of character education, which emphasize the internalization of societal values in the learning process (Aulia et al., 2024; Muhammad et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the use of folklore as a learning medium in elementary school can strengthen students' character values, such as honesty, hard work, and empathy. Folklore also provides a local feel that makes it easier for students to understand the message conveyed because it suits their cultural background and increases students' appreciation of cultural diversity and strengthens their own cultural identity and awareness (Hidayah et al., 2025; Suastika et al., 2019; Zikri et al., 2024; Zhunussova & Ryspayeva, 2025). As such, the social studies module based on local culture has

succeeded in improving students' ability to understand the concept of society and social interaction. Students become more emotionally engaged because they feel that the learning is close to their daily lives (McCallops et al., 2019). However, in practice, integrating local culture into learning still faces a number of obstacles. One of them is the lack of teachers' understanding of local cultural values that can be raised in learning, as well as the limited local-based learning resources (Avcu, 2025). This results in local culture-based learning not being optimally implemented in many elementary schools. Some teachers also still consider local culture to be an additional material rather than an integral part of the curriculum that can strengthen students' social interaction and understanding.

Meaningful social studies learning depends not only on learning methods or instructional models but also on teachers' ability to create interactive and reflective classroom environments. Good classroom interaction creates opportunities for discussion, exchange of experiences, collaboration, and mutual respect between teachers and students as well as among students themselves (Claessens et al., 2016). From a sociocultural perspective, local cultural values can function as cultural tools that mediate interaction and meaning-making in the classroom. When students discuss, interpret, and reflect upon cultural values that are familiar in their daily lives, they are more likely to participate actively and construct understanding collaboratively. In this sense, local culture serves not only as learning content but also as a foundation for organizing classroom interaction and encouraging dialogue, cooperation, and shared meaning-making. Based on these theoretical perspectives, this study assumes that local cultural values function as contextual and sociocultural resources that shape classroom interaction in elementary social studies learning. Through teacher–student and student–student interaction, local cultural values are enacted, negotiated, and interpreted collectively, thereby contributing to the creation of meaningful learning experiences.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive case study design. The primary aim of this design was to provide an in-depth description of meaningful classroom interactions through the integration of local cultural values in Social Sciences learning at the elementary school level. In addition to its descriptive nature, the study also serves an illustrative purpose by highlighting how local cultural values are implemented in classroom practices to support

contextual and participatory learning. A qualitative case study approach was considered appropriate, as it enables the researcher to understand learning dynamics contextually within natural classroom settings.

Participants

The research was conducted in three private elementary schools located in Manggarai Regency, an area known for its rich and well-preserved local culture. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their active involvement in the implementation of local culture-based learning. The participants consisted of three Social Studies teachers from Grades III, IV, and V; students who were directly involved in the learning process; and school principals who served as supporting informants. The selection was aimed to capture diverse perspectives regarding the integration of local cultural values in classroom learning.

Instruments

To ensure systematic data collection, several research instruments were developed and utilized. An observation guide was employed to record classroom interactions, focusing on the integration of local cultural values into Social Sciences learning and the ways in which students engaged during the process. A semi-structured interview guide was designed to explore the experiences, perceptions, and meanings constructed by teachers, students, and principals regarding the learning process. In addition, a document analysis protocol was used to examine relevant documents, such as lesson plans, student worksheets, teaching media, and photographs of classroom activities, which served to complement and strengthen the primary data.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through participatory observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Participatory observation enabled the researcher to directly observe the dynamics of classroom interaction, while interviews provided deeper insights into participants' experiences and interpretations. Document analysis supported the data by providing concrete evidence of instructional practices. These techniques were applied in a triangulated manner to obtain rich, comprehensive, and in-depth data.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2012). The analysis began with familiarization through repeated reading of the data,

followed by the generation of initial codes. These codes were then organized into potential themes, which were subsequently reviewed, refined, and clearly defined. Finally, the themes were named and systematically reported to capture key meanings related to the integration of local cultural values and the creation of meaningful classroom learning experiences.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several criteria were applied. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement in the field, triangulation of data sources, methods, and timing, as well as member checking with participants to confirm the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations. Transferability was addressed by providing rich, detailed descriptions of the research context, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other settings. Dependability was ensured through a transparent and consistent research process, while confirmability was maintained by grounding the findings in the data and minimizing researcher bias.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng. The researcher ensured that all participants were treated with respect and that their dignity, privacy, and confidentiality were fully protected through the use of pseudonyms and secure data storage. Special attention was given to the involvement of students as minors to ensure that their participation did not disrupt the learning process or cause any psychological discomfort. Informed consent was obtained from all participants: teachers and school principals provided written consent, while students participated with parental or guardian consent in addition to their own verbal assent. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the data collection procedures, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Findings

Based on the results of data collection through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, the study identified several patterns regarding the representation and enactment of local cultural values in classroom interaction during elementary Social Sciences learning. The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-step thematic analysis procedure. During

the familiarization stage, observation notes, interview transcripts, and supporting documents were reviewed repeatedly. Initial codes such as mutual cooperation, village deliberation, folklore, local stories, cultural media, student participation, discussion, and cultural pride were generated and subsequently organized into broader categories. Through an iterative process of reviewing, refining, and defining themes, three major themes and several sub-themes were identified. These themes directly address the research questions concerning the local cultural values represented in classroom interaction and the ways these values are enacted by teachers and students. In addition to the thematic findings, several illustrative classroom cases are presented to provide a richer description of how local cultural values were represented and enacted in classroom interaction.

Table 1*Themes and Sub-Themes Derived from Thematic Analysis*

Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Findings
Local Cultural Values Represented in Classroom Interaction	Mutual cooperation; Village deliberation; Folklore; Collective responsibility	Teachers connected social studies content with local cultural values embedded in community life
Enactment of Local Cultural Values in Classroom Learning Activities	Deliberation simulation; Storytelling activities; Use of cultural media; Sharing family experiences	Local cultural values were enacted through classroom activities and learning resources
Classroom Interaction Emerging from Local Cultural Values	Teacher–student dialogue; Student collaboration; Question-and-answer interaction; Exchange of experiences	Local cultural values encouraged active participation, collaboration, and meaningful interaction

The first theme concerns the specific local cultural values represented in classroom interaction. The findings revealed that several local cultural values were consistently represented in classroom learning activities, namely mutual cooperation, village deliberation, folklore, and collective responsibility. Teachers frequently linked social studies content with cultural practices that students encountered in their daily lives. One classroom activity involved a discussion about community cooperation in village life. During the lesson, students shared examples of mutual cooperation practices they had observed in their neighborhoods. Similarly, village deliberation was introduced through discussions about community decision-making processes. Folklore was also used as a source of learning content, allowing students to connect social studies concepts with

local narratives and cultural experiences. This pattern was reflected in the following teacher statement:

“I always relate social studies topics to mutual cooperation, village deliberation, and local folklore so students realize that these values exist in their daily environment.”

The second theme relates to the enactment of local cultural values in classroom learning activities. The findings showed that local cultural values were enacted through various classroom activities, including village deliberation simulations, storytelling activities, the use of cultural media, and the sharing of family experiences related to community traditions.

One illustrative case was observed in a Grade IV Social Studies classroom at one of the participating schools. The lesson focused on community decision-making and local governance. To introduce the topic, the teacher organized a village deliberation simulation based on the local tradition of collective discussion commonly practiced in the Manggarai community. Twenty-three students participated in the activity and were assigned different roles, including village leaders, community elders, and local residents.

The teacher began the lesson by presenting a hypothetical community problem related to environmental cleanliness in the village. Students were then asked to discuss possible solutions through a deliberation process that reflected local community practices. During the activity, students expressed opinions, responded to one another's ideas, and attempted to reach a collective agreement. Observation notes indicated that most students actively participated in the discussion and frequently referred to examples from their family and community experiences.

Throughout the simulation, the teacher acted primarily as a facilitator by guiding the discussion and encouraging equal participation rather than providing direct answers. Students demonstrated various forms of interaction, including questioning, negotiating, explaining, and agreeing on shared decisions. The activity concluded with a collective reflection in which students discussed similarities between the classroom simulation and deliberation practices they had witnessed in their villages.

In addition to deliberation simulations, teachers incorporated storytelling activities based on local folklore. These stories were used to introduce social values and encourage discussion among students. Cultural media such as pictures of traditional houses, traditional clothing, and regional songs were also utilized to support classroom learning.

One teacher explained:

“I use local stories, pictures of traditional houses, traditional clothing, and regional songs as learning media to make lessons more engaging.”

Another commonly observed practice involved students sharing family experiences related to community traditions during group discussions. This activity enabled students to connect classroom learning with their own cultural backgrounds. A teacher stated:

“I encourage students to share family experiences about community traditions during group discussions.”

Students also described how these activities influenced their participation in learning:

“I feel more enthusiastic when social studies lessons discuss traditions that I see in my village. When we discuss local folklore in groups, I understand the topic faster and feel confident sharing my ideas.”

The third theme concerns the forms of classroom interaction that emerged from the integration of local cultural values. Observation data showed frequent teacher–student dialogue, student collaboration, question-and-answer interaction, and exchanges of personal experiences. During group discussions, students actively shared their views and responded to their classmates’ ideas. In several observed lessons, students referred to family traditions and community experiences when discussing social issues. These interactions created opportunities for collaborative learning and knowledge sharing.

Students reported positive experiences regarding these interactions:

“Learning about our local culture makes me proud and more respectful of differences.”

Teachers also described the contribution of local cultural values to classroom interaction:

“Integrating local cultural values into social studies supports the formation of students’ responsibility and mutual respect.” At the school level, principals confirmed the implementation of these practices:

“We encourage teachers to use local stories and cultural media so learning becomes more contextual and meaningful.”

“Since local culture has been incorporated into lessons, we observe greater student participation and stronger collaboration.”

Overall, the findings show that local cultural values represented in classroom interaction included mutual cooperation, village deliberation, folklore, and collective responsibility. These values were enacted through deliberation simulations, storytelling activities, cultural learning media, and the

sharing of personal experiences. The integration of these cultural values was accompanied by various forms of classroom interaction, including dialogue, collaboration, questioning, and exchanges of experiences among teachers and students within elementary Social Sciences learning contexts.

Discussion

This study sought to identify the specific local cultural values represented in classroom interaction, examine how these values were enacted by teachers and students during classroom learning activities, and understand how they contributed to meaningful classroom interaction in elementary Social Sciences learning. Drawing on thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2012), the findings reveal that the integration of local culture is not incidental or symbolic, but systematically embedded within classroom practices through identifiable patterns across observation, interviews, and document analysis. The themes generated, namely integration of local cultural values, contextual learning strategies, student response, social interaction, and character education, collectively illustrate a process-oriented model of how culturally grounded learning reshapes classroom interaction.

The first research question focused on identifying the specific local cultural values represented in classroom interaction. The findings demonstrate that values such as mutual cooperation, village deliberation, folklore, and collective responsibility were consistently embedded in classroom learning activities. Rather than appearing as supplementary cultural content, these values became part of the interactional process through which teachers and students discussed social issues, exchanged experiences, and interpreted social realities. The presence of these values in classroom communication indicates that local culture serves as a meaningful social reference shared by participants in the learning process (Niman, 2025).

At the level of implementation, the integration of local cultural values occurs through pedagogical transformation of cultural practices into interactive learning activities. Teachers do not merely introduce cultural concepts as examples, but actively reconstruct them into classroom tasks such as group discussions, storytelling, and simulation of community-based practices like village deliberation. This is evident from both observational data and teacher narratives, where practices such as mutual cooperation and deliberation are enacted as part of the learning process. In this sense, local culture functions as a pedagogical structure that organizes interaction, rather than as

static content. This finding aligns with the social constructivist perspective of Vygotsky (1978), as discussed in Almulla (2023) and Topçiu & Myftiu (2015), which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through social interaction within a cultural context. However, this study extends that perspective by demonstrating that local culture does not merely provide context, but acts as a trigger and medium for interaction, shaping how students participate, respond, and construct meaning collectively.

The second research question examined how local cultural values were enacted by teachers and students during classroom learning activities. The findings indicate that enactment occurred through culturally grounded pedagogical practices, including storytelling, group discussion, sharing of community experiences, and village deliberation simulations. These activities transformed cultural values into lived classroom experiences rather than abstract concepts. The illustrative case of village deliberation observed in this study demonstrates how students actively engaged in culturally familiar decision-making processes, negotiated ideas, exchanged opinions, and collectively constructed solutions to social problems.

Furthermore, the integration process is reinforced through the use of culturally mediated instructional tools, as identified in the theme of contextual learning strategies. Teachers utilize local stories, traditional houses, clothing, and regional songs not only to illustrate content but to create shared symbolic references within the classroom. Document analysis confirms that these elements are deliberately embedded in lesson plans, while classroom observations show that they stimulate discussion and engagement. When students encounter familiar cultural artifacts, they are more inclined to interpret, question, and connect ideas, which in turn increases the intensity and quality of interaction. This supports the principles of contextual learning (Mahayanti et al., 2024; Niman & Ntelok, 2026; Ruto et al., 2021), yet the findings go further by indicating that contextualization operates at an interactional level, reducing barriers to participation and enabling students to engage more confidently in dialogue.

The impact of this integration becomes particularly visible in the theme of student response. Across multiple data sources, students demonstrate heightened enthusiasm, active participation, and improved confidence when engaging with culturally relevant material. Statements such as “I feel more enthusiastic when lessons discuss traditions in my village” and “I understand the topic faster when we discuss folklore in groups” illustrate that familiarity with the content reduces cognitive distance and enhances engagement. Importantly, this engagement is not limited to individual

motivation but manifests as interactive participation, where students initiate responses, contribute ideas, and engage in peer dialogue. This suggests that meaningful classroom interaction is not simply the result of effective teaching strategies, but emerges when students perceive learning as connected to their lived realities. In addition, this study concerns how local cultural values influence the formation of meaningful classroom interaction. The findings reveal that the integration of local culture contributes to the development of dialogic, collaborative, and participatory interaction patterns. Classroom interaction was characterized by the active exchange of ideas, discussion of shared cultural experiences, peer collaboration, and collective meaning-making. These findings indicate that local cultural values function not only as learning content but also as social resources that facilitate communication and participation within the classroom.

In addition to increasing participation, the integration of local cultural values significantly transforms the structure and dynamics of classroom interaction, as reflected in the theme of social interaction. Observational findings indicate a shift from teacher-centered instruction to a more dialogic and collaborative interaction pattern. Students are actively involved in exchanging perspectives, sharing personal experiences, and responding to peers, particularly during group discussions and storytelling activities. As noted in prior studies (Darong, 2022b; Darong & Menggo, 2021; Mezieobi et al., 2014; Vettorel, 2015), such interaction supports the co-construction of knowledge. However, this study provides a more nuanced understanding by showing that local culture serves as the interactional foundation that sustains dialogue. Because students share a common cultural background, interaction becomes more fluid, inclusive, and meaningful, allowing for deeper engagement and mutual understanding.

These findings also resonate with classroom interaction theories, particularly the work of Flanders (1970), which emphasizes the importance of classroom communication patterns in shaping learning experiences. The present study suggests that culturally grounded interaction encourages greater student talk, peer response, and collaborative engagement, thereby creating richer opportunities for knowledge construction and participation. In this context, meaningful interaction emerges not merely from the frequency of communication but from the cultural relevance and shared understanding embedded within that communication.

Moreover, the integration of local cultural values contributes to the formation of multi-dimensional learning experiences, encompassing cognitive, social, and affective domains. Cognitively, students demonstrate improved comprehension as abstract concepts are grounded in familiar cultural

practices. This is consistent with previous findings (Farida, 2017; Tohariah, 2021), yet this study highlights that cognitive gains are closely linked to the quality of interaction. Socially, students develop communication skills and collaborative abilities through participation in culturally grounded discussions, supporting findings by Aulia et al. (2024) and Eliyanti et al. (2024). At the affective level, students express emotional engagement and cultural pride, indicating that learning is experienced as personally meaningful.

A particularly significant finding of this study lies in the role of local culture in character formation through interaction, as reflected in the theme of character education values. Values such as responsibility, tolerance, and respect are not transmitted directly, but are internalized through participation in interactive activities that involve cultural reflection. For example, when students discuss folklore or community traditions, they are encouraged to interpret moral messages and relate them to contemporary life. This process enables students to develop ethical awareness and social sensitivity within the context of interaction. These findings are consistent with previous research (Darong, 2022a; Darong, Niman, et al., 2021; Downer et al., 2015), but extend the discussion by demonstrating that character education is most effective when embedded in interactive and culturally meaningful learning processes.

In addition, the study confirms that integrating local culture enhances not only individual learning outcomes but also the overall classroom climate, making it more participatory and inclusive. This is supported by findings from Niman et al. (2020) and Tolosa et al. (2023), which emphasize the importance of culturally relevant content in strengthening student character. However, this study adds a new dimension by showing that such integration directly influences interaction quality, leading to more dynamic and engaged classroom environments (Darong, 2020; Darong & Guna, 2023).

From an innovation perspective, the findings indicate that the integration of local cultural values represents a multi-layered pedagogical innovation. This innovation operates at several levels: (1) at the pedagogical level, through the transformation of cultural practices into learning activities; (2) at the instructional level, through the use of culturally grounded media; (3) at the interactional level, through the creation of dialogic and collaborative communication patterns; and (4) at the value level, through the embedding of character education within learning processes. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on learning outcomes or instructional media, this study highlights that the most significant innovation lies in the reconfiguration of classroom interaction

itself. The findings therefore suggest that local cultural values are not peripheral elements within Social Sciences learning but central mechanisms through which interaction, participation, and meaning-making are organized. By integrating cultural values that are familiar to students, teachers create opportunities for more authentic communication, collaborative learning, and reflective engagement.

Taken together, this study provides a detailed explanation of how local cultural values are integrated into classroom interaction and how they shape meaningful learning experiences. The integration occurs through contextualization, cultural mediation, and dialogic practice, which collectively foster active participation, shared understanding, and value-based engagement. Meaningful classroom interaction, therefore, is not merely characterized by student activity, but by the presence of culturally grounded dialogue, collaborative knowledge construction, and the integration of cognitive, social, and affective dimensions of learning. These findings underscore the importance of positioning local culture as a central component in designing Social Sciences learning that is not only effective but also transformative in elementary education.

Conclusion

This study concludes that specific local cultural values are integrated into classroom interaction in elementary Social Sciences learning through systematic and observable pedagogical processes, namely contextualization, cultural mediation, and dialogic practice. Based on thematic analysis, these values—such as mutual cooperation, village deliberation, and local folklore—are not merely introduced as content, but are transformed into interactive learning activities including group discussions, storytelling, and simulation of community practices. Through these mechanisms, local culture functions as an interactional foundation that shapes how communication occurs in the classroom. The findings show that such integration directly influences the formation of meaningful classroom interaction, which is characterized by active student participation, dialogic and collaborative communication, contextual understanding, and value-oriented engagement. In this sense, meaningful interaction is not only about increased activity, but about the quality of engagement where students construct knowledge collectively, connect learning with lived experiences, and internalize social and cultural values simultaneously.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted in a limited number of schools within a specific cultural context, which may limit the transferability of

the findings to other regions with different cultural characteristics. In addition, the study relies on qualitative data, which provides in-depth insights into interactional processes but does not measure the impact quantitatively. Future research is therefore recommended to involve broader and more diverse educational contexts, as well as to apply mixed-method approaches to examine both interactional processes and learning outcomes. Further studies are also needed to explore the long-term effects of culturally integrated learning on students' academic development, character formation, and social competence. Overall, this study affirms that local cultural values are not peripheral elements in education, but serve as a strategic and transformative foundation for fostering meaningful, interactive, and contextually grounded learning in elementary Social Sciences classrooms.

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