

Early Childhood Education Based On Local Wisdom: Learning Innovations To Shape Children's Cultural Character

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Abstract

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) plays a vital role in shaping the foundation of children's personalities, moral values, and character from an early age. In an era of globalization that poses challenges to cultural identity, integrating local wisdom into the PAUD learning process is an innovative, relevant, and strategic approach. This article discusses how early childhood education based on local wisdom can be an effective means of shaping children's cultural character. This approach emphasizes the importance of promoting local values such as mutual cooperation, mutual respect, love for the environment, and honesty through contextual learning media, such as folk tales, traditional games, regional songs, and cultural practices adapted to the children's age. This research uses a literature review method on various scientific works and educational practice reports in the field, particularly in early childhood education institutions in various regions of Indonesia. The results of the study show that the local wisdom-based learning approach not only increases children's interest in learning but also fosters a love for the homeland, appreciation for diversity, and builds a strong foundation for noble character. Furthermore, family and community involvement in education becomes more intensive through this approach. Therefore, it is important for educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders to encourage the development of an early childhood education curriculum that is adaptive to local values in order to support sustainable and culturally sensitive character education

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Local Wisdom, Cultural Character, Learning Innovation, Cultural Identity.

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Introduction

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is the main foundation in the process of developing quality and sustainable human resources (Putri, 2024; Andriani, 2024; Silvia, 2025). During early childhood, children are in their golden age, which is crucial in shaping their personality, mindset, and behavior in the future. Brain development during this period occurs at an extremely rapid pace, enabling children to absorb information and shape their character through daily experiences. Cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects develop simultaneously and influence one another, making this period a strategic window for instilling foundational life values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and social empathy. Thus, the quality of education provided at the PAUD level will determine the quality of Indonesian citizens in the future, not only intellectually but also morally and socially (Zubaidah, 2016;



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Agung, 2018; Kalsum, 2023). In practice, the PAUD learning system in Indonesia still faces various structural and cultural challenges. One of the main challenges is the lack of a contextual, integrative learning approach that can instill character values in a holistic manner in line with the social and cultural realities of children. Character education, as currently implemented in the national curriculum, tends to be normative, formalistic, and often disconnected from children's daily lives. Values such as cooperation, environmental awareness, and respect for parents are often taught verbally and abstractly, without being linked to real-life experiences or local cultural practices familiar to children. This results in an suboptimal internalization of values, as it does not address the social and cultural context in which children grow and develop.

Early childhood education that does not make full use of local potential also contributes to children's weak understanding of their own cultural identity (Wahyuni, 2024). In many cases, children are more familiar with global popular culture obtained from digital media than with their own regional cultural heritage. However, local wisdom that is alive in the community, such as folk tales, traditional games, customs, and cultural arts, contains noble values that are highly relevant to character building. The lack of integration between formal education and local culture causes a dissonance between what is taught in school and what is lived in the social environment, which ultimately hinders the effectiveness of character education as a whole. Considering these challenges, innovation is needed in the approach to early childhood education that is not only focused on academic results but also on character building rooted in local wisdom. Integrating local culture into the early childhood education curriculum is believed to create more meaningful learning experiences, build children's emotional connection with their social environment, and strengthen their sense of identity and pride in their own culture. This approach also serves as a strategy to preserve national culture from an early age while nurturing a younger generation with a strong moral foundation capable of competing globally without losing their identity.

Amidst these challenges, local wisdom emerges as a strategic alternative to strengthen early childhood education (Alfiah, 2017; Quranita, 2024; Suhendra, 2025). Local wisdom encompasses various values, norms, practices, and traditions that have developed within a particular community and are passed down through generations. Values such as mutual cooperation, politeness, respect for elders and nature, and a spirit of togetherness are important aspects in character development that can be integrated into learning activities. The use of folk tales, traditional games, local songs, and local cultural practices in the educational process allows children to learn in a fun, familiar, and meaningful way. Unfortunately, despite Indonesia's rich local wisdom, this potential has not yet been systematically optimized in the curriculum and learning practices of early childhood education.

There is a research gap in the literature examining the integration of local wisdom into early childhood education. Most studies focus more on cognitive and methodological aspects of learning, without considering the local cultural context as a source of character building. On the other hand, studies on local culture are often not directly linked to concrete learning strategies in formal early childhood education. Therefore, research is needed to bridge these two aspects, namely how local wisdom can be practically and effectively applied in early childhood education to shape children's cultural character. This innovation has the potential to encourage active involvement of parents and the community in supporting the educational process, as local wisdom stems from values that are alive within the community. Thus, education is no longer viewed as the sole responsibility of educational institutions but as a collective effort involving families, communities, and culture.

This study is expected to contribute to the development of an adaptive, participatory, and contextual early childhood education curriculum. By incorporating elements of local wisdom into teaching and learning activities, early childhood teachers can create a learning environment that is relevant to children's daily lives. This is believed to enhance children's engagement in the learning process, strengthen their understanding of moral and social values, and build a strong, tolerant, and

loving character toward the nation's culture. In an era marked by significant global influence, strengthening local identity through education becomes increasingly important so that Indonesian children grow up to be cultured, morally upright individuals who can compete globally without losing their cultural roots.

Methodology

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with library research as the main technique to explore and analyze the integration of local wisdom in early childhood education (PAUD). This approach was chosen because it provides researchers with the flexibility to explore theoretical concepts, empirical findings, and cultural-based educational practices that have been implemented in various regional contexts across Indonesia. Qualitative research is exploratory and interpretative, enabling researchers to understand cultural-based character education phenomena from a contextual and in-depth perspective. Data collection was conducted by reviewing various secondary sources, including relevant national and international scientific journals, academic reference books, previous research reports, dissertations and theses, government policy documents, and articles from scientific conferences and publications from institutions engaged in early childhood education and cultural preservation. These sources were collected purposively based on their relevance to the three main research focuses: (1) character education in early childhood education, (2) local wisdom as a source of learning, and (3) pedagogical innovations relevant to the local context.

The analysis process was conducted using a thematic analysis approach, in which researchers identified key themes from each source studied, such as the types of cultural values integrated into learning, the forms of media or learning methods used, community involvement in the educational process, and the obstacles and strategies for implementing local wisdom-based learning. Information from various references was categorized based on main topics, compared, and synthesized to identify common patterns as well as variations across regions and approaches. Researchers also conducted cross-source comparisons to ensure the validity of findings and avoid interpretive bias. By comparing various references, both from conceptual sources and field case studies, a more objective understanding of the effectiveness and challenges of local wisdom-based learning in early childhood education was obtained. This method aims not only to describe existing realities but also to propose a conceptual framework for innovative learning that can serve as a model or reference for the development of a more contextual, participatory, and locally-rooted early childhood education curriculum. Thus, this study is expected to provide conceptual and practical contributions to efforts to strengthen cultural character in young children through an educational approach based on local wisdom values

Result and Discussion

The results of studies from various literature indicate that early childhood education that integrates elements of local wisdom has a significant positive impact on the holistic character development of children (Rahma, 2024). This approach not only plays a role in developing children's cognitive aspects through culturally-based enrichment materials, but is also highly effective in shaping affective dimensions such as empathy, concern, respect, and social responsibility. From a psychomotor perspective, culturally-based activities such as traditional games and regional art practices also stimulate children's gross and fine motor skills through enjoyable and meaningful physical activities. In other words, local wisdom becomes a learning resource that is not only contextual but also naturally integrated into children's life experiences (Holilah, 2016; Lestari, 2018; Tohri, 2022). The noble values embedded in local culture, such as mutual aid, tolerance, etiquette, and love for the environment, become relevant and easily accepted teaching materials for children because they are closely tied to their daily lives (Sakti, 2024). For example, in folk tales passed down through generations, there are often moral messages about the importance of honesty, courage, and loyalty. When children hear or play roles in

these stories, they not only learn about the characters or plot but also indirectly absorb the values contained within them. Similarly, traditional songs or regional tunes often contain moral teachings, life advice, and calls to respect nature and others, making the learning process emotionally engaging and touching the children's hearts.

The use of locally-based learning media also increases children's engagement and active participation in the learning process (Tanu, 2016; Lestarinigrum, 2019; Anggreni, 2025). Children feel more enthusiastic and comfortable because the material presented feels familiar and has emotional closeness. This is different from learning approaches that are too abstract and not in line with the context of children's lives, which often make it difficult for children to relate the material taught to the reality they experience. Learning based on local wisdom can create a more inclusive, enjoyable, and meaningful learning environment, while strengthening the relationship between children and their environment (Syamsi, 2021). Not only does this approach impact children, but it also creates broader opportunities for collaboration between teachers, parents, and the community in supporting the educational process. When local cultural elements are incorporated into learning, the community feels a sense of responsibility in transmitting these values to the younger generation. Parents' involvement in reading folk tales at home, teaching local songs, or introducing traditional games is a tangible form of character education that begins in the child's immediate environment. Thus, early childhood education based on local wisdom is not only an academic tool but also a social movement involving all elements of society in the effort to cultivate a generation that is intelligent, cultured, and moral.

In practice, several early childhood education institutions in various regions of Indonesia have successfully adopted a local wisdom-based approach in their daily learning activities in creative and contextual ways. The application of local cultural values in learning activities is not merely symbolic but has become an integral part of the early childhood education process (Wahab, 2020; Asfiati, 2025; Herman, 2016). For example, in Bali, the concept of Tri Hita Karana, which teaches harmony between humans and God, fellow humans, and nature, is applied through daily activities such as planting trees together, praying together before learning, and sharing food in class activities. This concept not only introduces spiritual and ecological values but also strengthens social bonds between children, teachers, and families. In Java, wayang stories such as the tales of the Pandavas and Kauravas are used in the form of fairy tales and children's plays to instill values of honesty, loyalty, courage, and the importance of upholding truth. Children are encouraged to role-play as characters in the stories, which not only develops language skills and imagination but also implicitly instills moral understanding. Additionally, teachers connect the story's content to children's daily behavior, such as helping friends, not lying, and respecting teachers and parents.

In Sulawesi, traditional games such as engklek and ma'raga are used as part of structured physical activities in learning. These games not only train motor coordination and balance, but also teach cooperation, sportsmanship, and fair play. By incorporating local cultural elements into play activities, children not only learn cognitively and physically, but also absorb important social values in community life. Additionally, in regions like West Sumatra, local early childhood education centers utilize traditional activities such as basalamak or manambang in language and art development programs. Children are introduced to Minangkabau poems rich in advice and ethics, which are then turned into songs or poems they perform in class forums. This builds self-confidence, trains emotional expression, and strengthens mastery of the mother tongue. Similar practices are also found in East Nusa Tenggara, Papua, and Kalimantan, where ritual activities, local crafts, and dance are used as a medium for introducing cultural values and identity to children.

These practices prove that integrating local cultural values into early childhood education activities can enrich children's learning experiences in multiple dimensions (Winarso, 2022). Children not only gain knowledge but also values, attitudes, and skills rooted in their local identity. This approach also provides teachers with the space to innovate and develop learning strategies that are appropriate to

the local socio-cultural context. Therefore, the development of early childhood education based on local wisdom needs to be continuously supported and expanded so that it becomes a sustainable and adaptive national education movement that embraces Indonesia's cultural diversity. The local wisdom-based learning approach does not only focus on children as individual learners but also plays an important role in building an educational ecosystem that synergistically integrates the roles of early childhood education institutions, families, and communities. This model creates a more integrative relationship between educational institutions and children's social environments, so that learning is no longer limited to formal classrooms. Children gain richer learning experiences because they interact directly with the values that are alive in their communities. In this case, education is not only the responsibility of teachers at school, but also a shared responsibility involving parents, communities, and local cultural figures.

The role of the family becomes more prominent when early childhood education adopts elements of local culture (Suratmi, 2024). Parents, as the main figures in a child's life, can be actively involved in introducing cultural values that have been passed down from generation to generation. Activities such as storytelling folk tales at school, teaching local songs at home, or helping children wear traditional clothing for thematic activities provide contextual learning experiences while strengthening the emotional bond between children and their families. This is an effective form of values education, as children learn through example and direct engagement with the culture they experience daily. Community involvement is also a crucial component of this approach. Traditional leaders, local artists, cultural figures, and even traditional craftsmen can serve as authentic learning resources for children. They can be invited to schools to introduce various cultural practices such as making crafts, playing traditional musical instruments, performing regional dances, or explaining local traditional philosophies that contain moral values. In addition to enriching children's experiences, these activities also encourage the community to participate in the educational process, fostering a sense of collective responsibility and strengthening the role of culture in character development.

This participatory approach also fosters a sense of ownership of local culture among children. When children are introduced to and directly involved in activities rooted in local traditions, they not only understand the culture as knowledge, but also feel it as part of their identity (Grimshaw, 2022). This contributes to fostering pride in one's own cultural heritage, which in turn serves as a moral and psychological bulwark against the homogenizing pressures of global culture that tend to erode local uniqueness. Thus, early childhood education based on local wisdom serves not only as a pedagogical strategy but also as a social instrument that strengthens solidarity among community members, connects the younger generation with their cultural roots, and preserves the sustainability of local values in modern life (Yetti, 2024). This approach positions education as a living and dynamic cultural process that grows from and for its community.

From the teacher's side, the implementation of local wisdom-based learning demands more than just teaching skills, it requires pedagogical creativity, cultural sensitivity, and a commitment to contextualized education. Teachers no longer act as one-way information conveyors, but as learning designers and facilitators who are able to bridge between local cultural values and national education goals (Qin, 2025). For this reason, teachers need to have a deep understanding of the local culture, including the traditions, language, beliefs, arts and social practices that live in the children's environment. By understanding the local context, teachers can develop learning strategies that are more relevant, meaningful and rooted in children's real experiences. The role of the teacher in this context becomes increasingly complex and challenging. Teachers are required to align local cultural values with the basic competencies set out in the curriculum, while ensuring that learning activities remain fun, age-adaptive and appropriate to the child's stage of development. For example, in introducing the concept of numeracy, teachers can use traditional songs or regional counting games such as *congklak*, traditional dice, or *tembang* counting. This not only helps children understand numbers and patterns, but also fosters children's interest in their own culture. In science lessons, children can be invited to observe traditional

medicinal plants in the surrounding environment, understand the harvest planting cycle through farmer folklore, or recognize local animals while learning about ecosystems.

Innovative teachers are also able to link moral and social values from local culture into affective learning (Caena, 2022). For example, when discussing the theme “my family”, teachers can invite children to recognize family structures in local customs, introduce kinship calls in local languages, and instill the value of respect for parents through stories or role plays. This approach not only enriches the learning material, but also strengthens children's identity and emotional attachment to their environment. Experience in various PAUDs shows that when teachers relate learning to children's cultural context, children's participation and enthusiasm increase significantly. Children understand concepts more easily because the material is close to their daily lives. Children feel more valued because their culture is recognized in the formal education space. This also improves children's self-confidence, communication skills and sense of ownership of the learning process. To achieve this, teachers also need adequate support in the form of professional training, provision of locally-based teaching materials and curriculum flexibility. Currently, many teachers still face limitations in accessing culture-based learning resources, and not all have received adequate training in designing local wisdom-based learning. Therefore, it is important for the government and educational institutions to strengthen teachers' capacity through continuous professional development programs that focus on cultural integration in ECD learning.

With the right support, teachers are not only teaching agents, but also cultural preservation agents and character builders for future generations (Anisah, 2023). Teachers play an important role in ensuring that education not only educates children intellectually, but also shapes Indonesian people with character, culture and pride in their local identity (Julianto, 2024). The study also identified a number of crucial challenges that hinder the widespread, systematic and sustainable implementation of local wisdom-based early childhood education. One of the main challenges is the lack of complete, accurate and accessible documentation of local culture for educators. In many areas, local wisdom still lives in the form of oral traditions and has not been formally recorded. This makes it difficult for teachers to turn these cultural values into valid and applicable teaching resources. In fact, without adequate documentation support, efforts to integrate local values into learning activities risk being partial, not standardized, and even potentially losing their original meaning. Another obstacle is the absence of explicit and binding national guidelines or regulations regarding the mainstreaming of local wisdom in the ECD curriculum. Although Merdeka Curriculum provides space for the development of contextual learning, not all ECD units have the courage or capacity to implement local content consistently. As a result, local culture integration initiatives are still sporadic, depending on the personal initiatives of teachers, principals, or certain communities. The absence of a systematic framework also makes evaluation and replication of good practices difficult, resulting in uneven development across regions.

Another significant challenge is the low capacity and readiness of ECD teachers in developing local wisdom-based learning. Many teachers have not received specialized training that equips them with pedagogical strategies, micro-curriculum design and culture-based learning media. In addition, conventional approaches in pre-service teacher education tend to focus on the general curriculum and do not encourage exploration of the local socio-cultural context. As a result, the implementation of local wisdom-based learning relies heavily on the personal initiative of teachers with cultural knowledge and innovative spirit, a condition that cannot be relied upon for national education transformation. Equally important, challenges also come from the lack of synergy between educational institutions and local cultural communities. There are still many PAUD institutions that have not established strategic cooperation with traditional leaders, cultural leaders, or local cultural preservation institutions. In fact, this collaboration is very important to bridge learning needs with authentic sources of wisdom. Without community involvement, efforts to preserve culture through education will be difficult to root firmly in daily practice.

Globalization and the dominance of global popular culture also pose a challenge (Fahma, 2024; Fitri, 2025; Syakhsiyyah, 2025). Children in the current digital era are very familiar with outside culture through television, the internet and social media, while local culture tends to be considered outdated, uninteresting or less “modern”. If not balanced with creative learning approaches and modernization of the presentation of local culture, the values of one's own culture will be increasingly marginalized in the minds of the younger generation, including among early childhood. Facing these challenges requires a joint commitment between the government, educational institutions, local communities and the wider community to create a learning ecosystem that supports the strengthening of cultural values through ECD education. Without this cross-sector collaboration, local wisdom-based learning will be difficult to develop fairly, equitably and sustainably throughout Indonesia.

The lack of local content that is creatively and competitively packaged in digital media. Many folktales, folk songs, or traditional games are not visually documented, not adapted into educational applications, or not available in child-friendly multimedia formats. As a result, local culture loses out in attracting children's attention, especially when juxtaposed with characters from abroad that appear more interactive, colorful, and connected to the vast virtual world. This imbalance contributes to the decay of local cultural identity, as children tend to be more familiar, even more emotionally attached, to foreign cultures than to their own. If this condition is left without targeted intervention, there is a risk of breaking the chain of intergenerational cultural inheritance. Children who are not introduced to local cultural values from an early age are likely to grow up with a fragile cultural identity. Children may grow up to be technologically and linguistically proficient, but have a poor understanding of their own history, traditions and noble values. In the long run, this can weaken the spirit of nationalism and patriotism, and impact the sustainability of national culture.

It is important to respond to this challenge with smart and adaptive strategies. One solution is to develop digital learning media based on local culture that is interesting and in accordance with the characteristics of early childhood. For example, folktales are packaged in the form of interactive animations, folk songs are presented in game-style applications, or traditional games are modified in digital versions that still maintain educational and cultural values. The involvement of teachers, parents, local artists and creative content developers is needed to revive local culture in the digital space that is part of today's children's world (Swart, 2024). Thus, strengthening children's cultural identity can not only be done through traditional approaches in the classroom, but should also be extended to the digital ecosystem and children's entertainment media. This is a strategic move to make local culture not just a legacy to be remembered, but a part of children's daily lives that they know, love and are proud of.

Despite facing various challenges, the potential and effectiveness of local wisdom-based ECD education remains very promising as a long-term strategy in shaping children's character that is firmly rooted in the nation's cultural identity. This approach is not only pedagogically relevant, but also has strategic value in building cultural resilience in the midst of globalization. Education that promotes local values is able to create meaningful, authentic and contextual learning experiences for children, while strengthening their emotional ties to the socio-cultural environment in which they grow up (Zajda, 2021). Therefore, the development of local wisdom-based ECD education is not just an option, but a need that must be responded to systematically and collaboratively. To realize this potential, solid and sustainable cross-sector support is needed. Central and local governments play a key role in creating policies that favor local culture-based education. This can be realized through the preparation of a curriculum that is flexible and adaptive to the local context, providing incentives for education units that implement culture-based learning, as well as budget allocations for documentation and digitization of local wisdom.

Equally important, local communities have a moral and cultural responsibility to maintain and pass on cultural values that are still alive in the community. The role of the community in supplying cultural narratives, being a resource person for learning and documenting local knowledge is very important in enriching teaching materials and maintaining the sustainability of culture-based education

practices. The involvement of traditional leaders, artists, culturists and children's extended families in the education process can create a more collaborative and grounded learning space. This spirit will also generate a sense of belonging to educational institutions as part of a social ecosystem that functions not only to educate, but also to civilize. Advances in technology and digital media can be utilized to expand the reach of local wisdom-based education. Digitalization of folklore, traditional games in the form of interactive applications, and culture-based educational content on social media can be an attractive learning alternative for today's children. Support from the creative community and the business world can also be optimized in creating an innovative and relevant cultural education ecosystem. The synergy between the world of education, culture, technology, and the creative industry is the key to presenting PAUD education that is characterized, competitive, and down-to-earth.

With a planned, collaborative, and sustainable approach, local wisdom-based early childhood education has great potential to become a strategic foundation in shaping an Indonesian generation that is intellectually smart, morally strong, and proud of its national identity. With the right and directed approach, local wisdom-based early childhood education not only functions as an instrument of character education, but also has strategic value as a means of sustainable cultural preservation. In the midst of the swift flow of modernization and globalization, education rooted in local culture provides space for children to recognize, love and defend their ancestral heritage. Learning that contains local values such as mutual cooperation, politeness, social responsibility, and respect for nature makes children not only academically skilled, but also morally and spiritually strong. They are molded into individuals who are not uprooted from their cultural roots, but are able to adapt to a changing world without losing their identity.

Children who grow up early in an educational environment that integrates local cultural values will have a solid foundation of character (Achmad, 2025; Sadiana, 2024; khaironi, 2017). They will be more aware of their own cultural identity, more tolerant of diversity, and more appreciative of the noble values that have bound society for centuries. When local culture is internalized through the education process, these values not only become part of the collective memory, but also become the basis for decision-making, ways of behaving, and critical thinking in future social life. Local wisdom-based ECD education also plays an important role in maintaining cultural sustainability amid the threat of global cultural homogenization. When cultural values and practices are taught systematically and creatively in learning, the younger generation will grow up as active cultural actors and inheritors, not just passive spectators of outside cultures. This means that education not only contributes to the strengthening of individual capacity, but also to the preservation of the nation's collective identity. Children who understand their folklore, sing their folk songs and play their traditional games will grow up with a strong sense of belonging to their culture and homeland.

The integration of local values in education from an early age is not only an educational step, but also an investment in civilization (Fazira, 2024; Muliawati, 2024; Mimin, 2023). Building a nation's civilization is not enough to improve academic and technological skills, but it must also be accompanied by the cultivation of cultural values that form a complete national personality. The strength of a nation is not only determined by the progress of its infrastructure, but also by the extent to which its generation knows and loves its own cultural heritage. Thus, early childhood education based on local wisdom is an important foundation in shaping quality future generations, not only in terms of knowledge, but also in terms of character, ethics and cultural identity. This is the real form of education that not only educates for the present, but also prepares children to become the guardians of values and inheritors of the nation's culture in the future

Conclusion

Local wisdom-based early childhood education is an innovative approach that is effective in shaping the character of children who are cultured, noble, and have a strong national

identity. The integration of local cultural values such as mutual cooperation, politeness, care for the environment, and respect for ancestral traditions into the PAUD learning process can enrich children's learning experiences and make education more contextual and meaningful. Cultural learning practices, such as the use of folklore, traditional games and the involvement of community leaders, have been shown to increase interest in learning, strengthen school-community links and strengthen children's cultural roots from an early age. To implement this approach more widely and systematically, support is needed in the form of adaptive policies, local context-based curriculum development and teacher training oriented towards developing culture-based learning. Challenges such as the lack of local cultural documentation, the absence of comprehensive pedagogical guidance, and the strong influence of global culture must be overcome with collaboration between educational institutions, government and society. Overall, local wisdom-based ECD education serves not only as a means of character education, but also as an instrument for preserving the nation's culture. Therefore, this approach needs to be encouraged, developed and implemented sustainably in order to produce a young generation that is not only smart and competent, but also firmly rooted in the noble values of Indonesian culture.

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