



The Role of Acehese Culture in Building National Character Amidst Indonesia's Diversity

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Abstract: Indonesia is a multicultural country with diverse ethnicities, languages, customs, and cultures. This diversity serves as an important social capital in building national character based on the values of unity, tolerance, and mutual cooperation. Aceh, as one of the regions with strong cultural richness, has distinctive Islamic culture, customs, traditional arts, and local wisdom values that contribute to the formation of the character of the Indonesian people. This study aims to analyze how Indonesian cultural diversity based on Acehese characteristics can build national character. The research method used is a literature study with a qualitative approach through analysis of various journals and scientific literature over the past five years. The results show that Acehese culture contains religious values, tolerance, social solidarity, discipline, and respect for customs that are relevant in strengthening national character. Traditions such as peusijek, mutual cooperation, the Saman dance, and Acehese traditional values serve character education for the younger generation. Therefore, the preservation of Acehese culture needs to be continuously carried out as part of efforts to strengthen national identity and build a nation with character.

Keyword: Cultural diversity, Acehese culture, National character, Local wisdom, Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known as the country with the greatest cultural diversity in the world. This diversity is evident in the many ethnic groups, regional languages, customs, arts, and traditions spread throughout the archipelago. According to *Koentjaraningrat*, culture is the entire system of ideas, actions, and human works in social life that become human property through the learning process. This view demonstrates that culture is a vital part of social life because it embodies the values, norms, and identity of a nation. Indonesia's cultural diversity is a national treasure that must be protected and preserved. According to Tilaar, culture-based education is crucial in shaping national identity and character amidst globalization. Local culture possesses noble values that can serve as guidelines for social life. Therefore, regional culture needs to be introduced and passed down to the younger generation to prevent it from becoming extinct due to the influence of foreign cultures (Nurhasnah et al., 2022).

One region in Indonesia with a rich and distinctive culture is Aceh. Aceh is known for its strong religious culture and the influence of Islamic values in its community life. According to Clifford Geertz, culture is a system of meanings and symbols inherited historically to shape a society's way of thinking and behavior. In the context of Acehese

society, culture is not only evident in customs but also reflected in dance, regional languages, traditional clothing, social traditions, and a community life that upholds religious values and social solidarity (J et al., 2026). Acehese culture contains many character values that can be applied in everyday life. One famous Acehese cultural tradition is the Saman Dance. This dance teaches the values of cooperation, discipline, responsibility, solidarity, and tolerance. Furthermore, the traditions of gotong royong (mutual cooperation) and peusijek (community service) in Acehese society demonstrate the importance of mutual respect, brotherhood, and social awareness. According to *Ki Hajar Dewantara*, education is a process of character formation and morality aimed at guiding all of a child's natural strengths to become a person of morality and useful to society. Thus, local culture can serve as a medium for character education for the younger generation.

In the era of modernization and globalization, the challenges to cultural preservation are increasing. The younger generation tends to be more interested in foreign cultures than local ones. According to Thomas Lickona, character education is crucial for developing a generation with morals, responsibility, and social awareness. If local culture is not introduced early, the nation's character values will increasingly fade due to the influence of globalization and technological developments. Integrating Acehese culture in education can be one solution to strengthening national character. According to James A. Banks, multicultural education aims to instill an appreciation for cultural diversity, tolerance, and unity in a pluralistic society. Therefore, Acehese culture can be used as a learning resource to instill religious values, cooperation, discipline, tolerance, and love of the homeland in students (Putra, 2025).

Indonesia's cultural diversity, particularly the cultural richness of Aceh, plays a crucial role in building and strengthening national character. Acehese culture serves not only as a symbol of regional identity but also as a repository of noble values that contribute to the development of individuals who are religious, disciplined, responsible, tolerant, and committed to social harmony (Sari & Syafii, 2024). Cultural traditions and local wisdom passed down through generations provide moral guidance and practical examples of how individuals can live harmoniously within a diverse society (Sari et al., 2019). These values are highly relevant to the goals of national character education and can help foster citizens who are capable of contributing positively to society and the nation. Cultural preservation and character development are closely interconnected (Eviyanti & Pramuniati, 2019). Through cultural activities, traditional ceremonies, arts, and community practices, younger generations can internalize values such as mutual cooperation, respect for elders, social responsibility, and love for their homeland (Aisyah et al., 2020). These values not only strengthen personal character but also promote national unity within Indonesia's multicultural environment. In this context, Acehese culture represents an important cultural asset that supports the realization of Indonesia's vision of a dignified and character-driven society (Alifia & Safuan Selian, 2024).

The challenges posed by globalization, modernization, and digital transformation cannot be ignored. The increasing influence of global culture, supported by rapid technological advancements and unrestricted access to information, has altered the attitudes and lifestyles of many young people (Sari, 2023). As a result, interest in local culture is gradually declining, creating concerns about the sustainability of cultural heritage and the weakening of national identity. If not addressed appropriately, this trend may reduce the younger generation's appreciation of cultural values that have long served as the foundation of social cohesion and moral development. Strategic and collaborative efforts are needed to ensure the continuity of cultural preservation (Ansary et al., 2024). Educational institutions should integrate local cultural content into learning activities and character education programs. Families should actively introduce cultural traditions and values in daily life, while communities and cultural organizations should provide opportunities for young people to engage directly with cultural

practices (Design et al., 2023). Government support is equally important through policies, cultural programs, and funding initiatives that promote the preservation and dissemination of local wisdom. Furthermore, digital technology should be utilized as a medium for cultural innovation, enabling Acehese culture to be documented, promoted, and transmitted to wider audiences through digital platforms, social media, and interactive educational resources (City et al., 2024).

Acehese culture demonstrates that local wisdom remains highly relevant in addressing contemporary social challenges. By preserving and integrating cultural values into education and community life, Indonesia can cultivate a generation that possesses strong moral character, cultural awareness, national pride, and social responsibility. Ultimately, Indonesia's cultural diversity, grounded in the rich heritage of regions such as Aceh, can serve as a powerful foundation for building a resilient, united, and character-oriented nation capable of thriving in an increasingly globalized world (Nurhasnah et al., 2022).

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive approach. The qualitative approach was chosen because it aimed to deeply understand the values of Indonesian cultural diversity, based on Acehese characteristics, in building national character. According to Sugiyono, qualitative research is a research method used to examine natural conditions, where the researcher serves as the primary instrument in data collection, and data analysis is conducted descriptively to understand the meaning of a social phenomenon. This research was conducted in Aceh, focusing on local Acehese culture as it relates to the formation of national character. The research objects included Acehese cultural values such as religiosity, mutual cooperation, tolerance, discipline, social solidarity, as well as various cultural traditions such as the Saman dance, peusijek, and Acehese customs. This study aimed to analyze how local Acehese culture can serve as a vehicle for character education for the younger generation in the era of globalization.

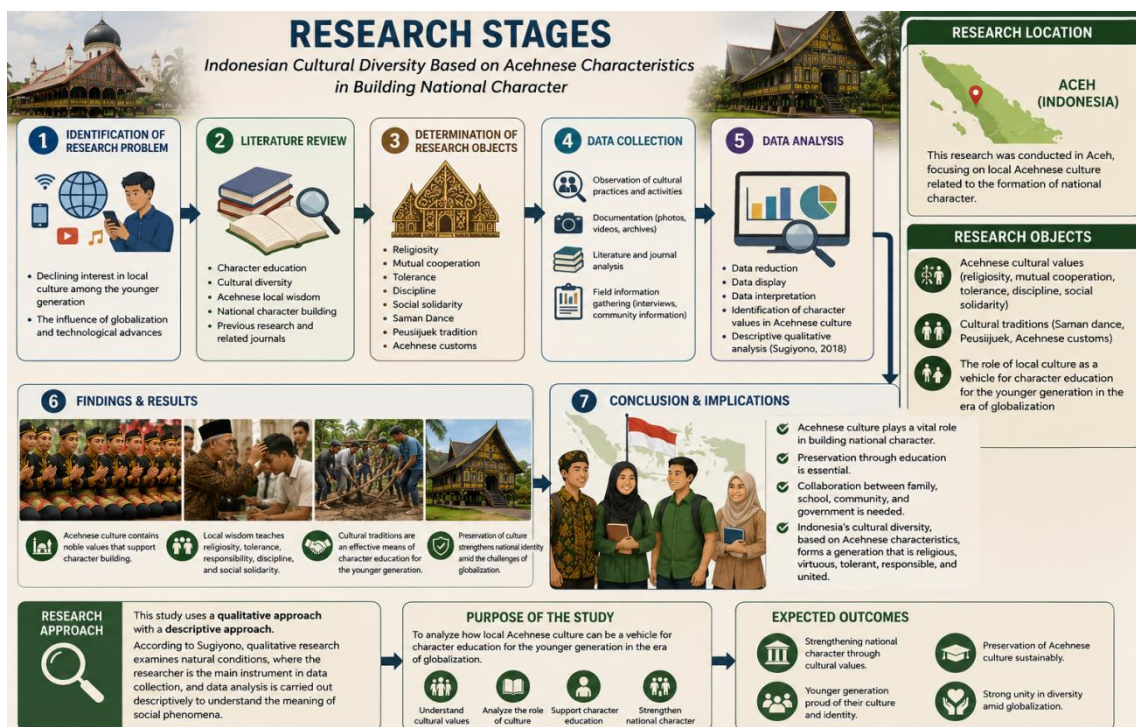


Figure: 1. Research Stages Method

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research findings indicate that Indonesia's cultural diversity, based on Acehese characteristics, plays a crucial role in building national character. Acehese culture embodies various noble values, such as religiosity, discipline, mutual cooperation, responsibility, tolerance, and social solidarity, which are still practiced in everyday life. These values form the basis for shaping the behavior and character of society, especially the younger generation. According to Koentjaraningrat, culture is the entire system of ideas, actions, and human works acquired through the learning process within society (Eviyanti & Pramuniati, 2019). Based on this understanding, Acehese culture is not merely understood as tradition, but also as a guideline for life that contains character education values for the community (Ndari et al., 2021). The research findings indicate that the Acehese people still maintain various cultural traditions, such as peusijek (traditional gatherings), village deliberations (musyawarah gampong), mutual cooperation (gotong royong), and religious activities that reflect the values of togetherness and religiosity (Putra, 2025). These traditions serve as a medium for social learning for the younger generation, helping them understand the importance of cooperation, respect, and caring for others. Acehese culture is also implemented in education through local culture-based learning activities (Meliza et al., 2024). Teachers have begun introducing Acehese culture through art lessons, regional languages, folklore, and school cultural activities. This aims to make students more familiar with their regional cultural identity and able to apply character values in their daily lives (Mardiah et al., 2026).



Figure: 2. Character Education Building

The research also found that globalization has a significant impact on changing the behavior of the younger generation. Many students are more interested in foreign cultures than local ones. The use of social media and technological advancements have led to a decline in interest in regional culture. This situation poses a challenge to efforts to preserve Acehese culture and shape national character (Hurriah et al., 2021). Acehese culture still holds great potential for building the character of the younger generation because its cultural values are relevant to modern life, such as religious values, discipline, responsibility, and tolerance (Nasir & Juliandi, 2021).



Figure: 3. The Role of Acehese Culture

This infographic illustrates the dual impact of globalization and local cultural preservation on the character development of the younger generation in Indonesia. It highlights how globalization, social media, and technological advancements have influenced young people's lifestyles, leading to a growing preference for foreign cultures and a declining interest in local traditions (Fatmi & Fauzan, 2022). These changes pose significant challenges to preserving Acehese cultural heritage and strengthening national identity. At the same time, the infographic emphasizes the potential of Acehese culture as a powerful source of character education. Cultural traditions such as Peusijuek (blessing ceremony), Gotong Royong (mutual cooperation), and the Saman Dance embody essential values including religiosity, discipline, responsibility, social solidarity, cooperation, tolerance, and respect for diversity (Mardiah et al., 2026). These values remain highly relevant in modern society and can help shape a generation that is morally grounded, socially responsible, and committed to national unity. The infographic concludes that preserving Acehese culture is not only important for maintaining local identity but also for strengthening national character. By integrating cultural values into education and daily life, Indonesia can cultivate a young generation that is faithful, disciplined, tolerant, responsible, and prepared to contribute positively to the nation's future.

Acehese culture possesses substantial potential to contribute to national character building in Indonesia. The values embedded in Acehese traditions and local wisdom align closely with the principles of character education needed in the 21st century. Cultural practices such as Peusijuek, Gotong Royong, and the Saman Dance promote important character traits, including religiosity, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, mutual respect, and social solidarity. These values support the development of individuals who are not only

academically competent but also morally and socially responsible. The study further indicates that cultural diversity serves as a strategic resource for strengthening national identity and social cohesion. Acehese cultural values encourage tolerance, respect for differences, and peaceful coexistence within Indonesia's multicultural society. Through the preservation and transmission of local traditions, younger generations can develop a stronger sense of belonging, cultural pride, and commitment to national unity. The research also identifies significant challenges arising from globalization and rapid technological development (Ahmad Hilman Syuhudi, 2019). Exposure to global culture through social media, digital entertainment, and international communication has shifted the interests and lifestyles of many young people. As a result, local traditions are often perceived as less attractive or less relevant than foreign cultural trends. This situation may weaken cultural awareness and reduce opportunities for young people to learn and practice traditional values (Sari et al., 2022).

Effective preservation requires active collaboration among families, schools, communities, religious leaders, cultural organizations, and government agencies. Families play a crucial role in introducing cultural values from an early age, while schools can integrate local wisdom into educational curricula and learning activities. Community-based cultural programs and government support are also essential for ensuring the continuity of cultural heritage (Sari et al., 2022). The study highlights the importance of utilizing digital technology as a medium for cultural preservation. Rather than viewing technology solely as a threat, it can be transformed into a tool for promoting Acehese culture through digital content, social media campaigns, virtual cultural exhibitions, educational applications, and online learning platforms. Such innovations can make local culture more accessible and appealing to younger generations. Indonesia's cultural diversity, particularly the cultural values found in Acehese society, provides a strong foundation for building national character. By preserving and integrating these values into education and everyday life, Indonesia can cultivate a generation that is religious, ethical, tolerant, responsible, culturally aware, and committed to maintaining national unity amidst the challenges of globalization and modernization. These efforts will contribute to the development of a resilient society that respects its cultural heritage while remaining adaptive to global changes.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research and discussion, it can be concluded that Indonesia's cultural diversity, based on Acehese characteristics, plays a crucial role in building national character. Acehese culture embodies various noble values, such as religiosity, discipline, mutual cooperation, tolerance, responsibility, and social solidarity, which can serve as a foundation for character development in the younger generation. Acehese cultural values are reflected in various community traditions, such as the Saman Dance, peusijek, village deliberations, and mutual cooperation activities, which are still preserved to this day. These traditions not only serve as regional cultural identities but also serve as a means of social education, instilling attitudes of cooperation, respect, social awareness, and a spirit of unity in community life. In education, integrating Acehese culture into the learning process can help students understand the importance of preserving local culture while strengthening character education. Through local culture-based learning, students can develop religious attitudes, tolerance, discipline, creativity, and love for their homeland. This demonstrates the significant contribution local culture makes to supporting national education goals. Globalization and technological advances pose challenges to the preservation of local culture. The younger generation tends to be more attracted to foreign cultures, potentially leading to the erosion of cultural values and national character. Therefore, collaboration between families, schools, communities, and the government is necessary to sustainably preserve, maintain, and

introduce Acehese culture to the younger generation. Thus, Indonesia's cultural diversity, based on Acehese characteristics, can be an important tool in building a national character that is religious, virtuous, tolerant, responsible, and has a strong sense of unity amidst the challenges of globalization and modernization.

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