



***Dharmagitha* as a Strategy for Character and Skills Education Based on Local Wisdom in the Elementary School**

I Made Luwih

Universitas Hindu Negeri I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar, Indonesia
luwih@uhnsugriwa.ac.id

Abstract

Character education and 21st-century skills are urgent needs in Indonesia's basic education system. In the context of Balinese culture, *Dharmagitha* is a sacred chant rich in Hindu ethical and spiritual values, with great potential as an educational medium steeped in local wisdom. This study aimed to examine the role of *Dharmagitha* as a learning strategy that can shape the noble character and basic skills of elementary school students. Through a descriptive qualitative approach, this study revealed that the integration of *Dharmagitha* in learning activities not only strengthens students' cultural identity and spirituality but also fosters values of discipline, responsibility, cooperation, as well as literacy and musicality. Additionally, this strategy encouraged students to engage in contextualized, fun, and meaningful learning. Thus, *Dharmagitha* has proven to be an effective alternative strategy for character and skills education, grounded in local wisdom, making it relevant to today's educational needs.

Keywords: *Dharmagitha*; Character Education; 21st Century Skills; Local Wisdom; Elementary School

Introduction

Basic education is an essential foundation in shaping children's character and skills from an early age. In this era of globalization and digital disruption, educational challenges lie not only in academic achievement but also in efforts to instill moral values, ethics, and 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity. Therefore, contextualized educational approaches rooted in local culture become highly relevant in addressing these challenges.

One form of local wisdom rich in educational value is *Dharmagitha*, a sacred song in Sanskrit and/or Balinese that conveys Dharma teachings, virtues, and spirituality within the Balinese Hindu tradition. *Dharmagitha* not only functions as part of religious rituals, but also contains noble messages that can be used as a means of building students' character and skills. Through *Dharmagitha*, students can learn about the values of discipline, honesty, and responsibility, as well as hone their musical skills and local language literacy (Wiasti, 2025; Ariyoga, 2025).

Unfortunately, the existence of *Dharmagitha* in the formal education world is still often marginalized by a curriculum oriented towards national and global standards. In fact, with the right approach, *Dharmagitha* can serve as a fun and meaningful learning medium that aligns with the principles of *Merdeka Belajar* and Pancasila Student Profile.

Education in the elementary school has a crucial role in shaping students' character and skills from an early age. In the educational process, character and skill development not only aim to fulfill academic demands but also to form a generation with a strong personality and competence, who is ready to face future challenges. A strong character, accompanied by 21st-century skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking, is a key asset for students in navigating life in a dynamic era.

However, there are still challenges in integrating character and skills development in a balanced way in the elementary school curriculum. In many cases, attention to character and skill development is often overlooked or considered less important than academic achievement. In fact, the elementary school years are a crucial period for the formation of foundational values and life skills. At this age, children are in a developmental period that is strongly influenced by their surroundings and are highly responsive to values conveyed through learning experiences.

The urgency of this problem becomes even more apparent when looking at the urgency of this problem becomes even more apparent when considering the reality of education, which still fails to utilize the potential of local culture as a means of character and skill development. One form of local wisdom rich in educational values is *Dharmagitha*, a sacred song in the Balinese Hindu tradition that conveys moral, ethical, and spiritual teachings (Putri, 2022). *Dharmagitha* is not only a religious medium but also serves as a pedagogical tool in shaping positive character and holistically honing students' skills, including literacy skills, musicality, and social and emotional sensitivity (Sudarsana & Arwani, 2018).

This study aims to highlight *Dharmagitha* as a local wisdom-based character and skills education strategy that can be integrated into the elementary school learning. The author emphasizes a holistic approach, which focuses not only on academic aspects but also on the formation of students' personalities as a whole. The strategies discussed include the integration of *Dharmagitha* in the thematic curriculum, community and parental involvement, and teacher exemplification in creating a learning environment steeped in cultural values. Through this approach, it is expected that students will grow into individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent but also wise, characterized, and possess the skills needed to live life meaningfully and ethically.

Method

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach to explore in depth the utilization of *Dharmagitha* as a local wisdom-based character and skills education strategy in the elementary school. The research subjects consisted of teachers, students, and local cultural figures involved in *Dharmagitha*-based learning practices, with informants selected by purposive sampling. Data collection techniques included participatory observation of learning activities, in-depth interviews with teachers, students, and cultural figures, as well as documentation studies of the learning tools and media used. The data obtained were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, which involved the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was tested by triangulating sources and techniques to ensure the credibility of the findings. This approach enables researchers to comprehend the role of *Dharmagitha* in shaping students' character and skills holistically, through the cultural and spiritual values it embodies.

Results and Discussions

The results showed that *Dharmagitha* has excellent potential as a learning strategy in shaping students' character and skills in the elementary school. Through the integration of *Dharmagitha* in learning activities, students are not only encouraged to sing sacred songs, but also to understand their philosophical meaning. Honesty, patience, perseverance, respect for parents and teachers, and social care values are consistently instilled through *Dharmagitha* lyrics that are full of Dharma teachings. In practice, teachers use *Dharmagitha* as part of lesson openers, transition activities, or primary material in Hindu cultural arts and religion lessons. The use of audio, visual media, and

hands-on methods makes learning more interesting and meaningful for students (Trimo, 2025). In addition to strengthening character, *Dharmagitha* activities also encourage the development of 21st-century skills, especially in the aspects of communication, collaboration, and creativity. Students are trained to appear confident when singing in front of the class or during religious activities, work together in groups during practice, and create variations in tone or movement that align with the song's meaning. This activity also strengthens local language literacy skills, as students are required to understand Balinese vocabulary and song structures well. The involvement of cultural figures such as *sulinggih* and local artists in the learning process enriches students' insights and strengthens the relationship between school and community.

This discussion aligns with the ethnopedagogy approach, which emphasizes the importance of integrating local wisdom in the education process as a means of internalizing cultural values and strengthening identity. In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, the application of *Dharmagitha* supports efforts to enhance the Pancasila Student Profile, especially in the dimensions of faith and fear of God, global diversity, and critical reasoning. Therefore, *Dharmagitha*-based learning is not only a cultural preservation, but also an effective strategy in shaping students' character and skills holistically from an early age.

1. Instilling Values Early in Elementary School Students

Introducing positive values, such as discipline, honesty, responsibility, caring, and cooperation from an early age. Structured and systematic character education can be done through daily activities at school. One way to instill character values is by giving direct examples by teachers. It aligns with the perspective of Kohlberg (1981); Kohlberg & Power (1981), explained that the formation of children's morals and character through exemplary models is highly effective in their development.

Character education is not only done through lectures or direct lessons, but also through activities that challenge students to apply these values. For example, children can learn about cooperation and responsibility through group work. In addition, students can be trained to care about their surrounding environment through programs such as "*Siswa Peduli Lingkungan*".

According to Narvaez (2010), character education in a school should be designed holistically, encompassing various aspects, including cognitive, emotional, and social aspects. Therefore, a school needs to create a conducive atmosphere so that character values can be maximally embedded in students.

Instilling positive values in elementary school children from an early age plays a significant role in shaping their personality and character. Honesty, responsibility, empathy, and discipline are the values that become the foundation for children's future moral and social development. Children who are taught these values from a young age tend to develop a strong character, are disciplined in carrying out tasks, and are capable of respecting time and rules. Additionally, instilling values can also foster a sense of empathy and social responsibility for the surrounding environment, both at home, in school, and society.

Another benefit of instilling values is increased motivation and academic achievement. Children who are taught the value of hard work and curiosity will be more focused on learning. On the other hand, mutual respect and tolerance values can prevent negative behaviors such as bullying and intolerance. These values also help children solve problems wisely and constructively. Children who are equipped with positive values will have high self-confidence and good social skills to interact with others (Setyaningsih, 2019).

However, the process of instilling values from an early age does not come without challenges. One of them is the limited cognitive development of elementary school children, which prevents them from fully understanding abstract concepts such as ethics and morals. Therefore, the approach to value learning should be concrete, simple, and relevant to daily life. Another challenge arises from the influence of the social environment, including peers, social media, and family conditions, which may convey different values from those taught at school.

Lack of consistency in implementing values at home and school can also confuse children. When teachers and parents do not provide aligned examples, children will struggle to understand the importance of the value. Additionally, differences in family backgrounds and educational approaches can cause children to feel confused when adjusting to the values they are exposed to. Learning that is purely theoretical and lacks practical experience is less effective at deeply instilling values.

Another significant challenge is children's exposure to technology and digital media. Children can easily access content that contradicts moral values, which may divert their attention from positive influences. In addition, emotional and psychological factors such as feelings of insecurity, anxiety, or low self-esteem can also affect children's acceptance of the values taught. Therefore, instilling values in children requires a comprehensive and consistent approach, involving cooperation between the school, family, and social environment.

2. Social and Emotional Skills Development

The development of social and emotional skills can be done through activities that encourage interaction between students. These skills play a crucial role in fostering positive social relationships and helping individuals navigate life's challenges. Children need to be equipped with skills, such as empathy, self-control, and effective communication, from an early age. Training in these skills can be achieved through activities such as group discussions, role-playing, or working together on a common project. Various educational programs, such as Mindfulness and Social Emotional Learning (SEL), developed by CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning), have been empirically proven to improve students' social and emotional competencies. A study by Zins et al. (2004) emphasizes that the early development of social and emotional skills significantly contributes to students' ability to cope with social pressures and academic challenges later in life.

Developing social and emotional skills provides excellent benefits to both individuals and groups. These skills enable someone to communicate more effectively, convey feelings and needs clearly and empathetically. These skills are also key in building healthy relationships, as people can interact harmoniously, respect differences, and resolve conflicts wisely. Furthermore, social and emotional skills enhance emotional intelligence, making individuals more capable of recognizing, understanding, and managing their own and others' emotions. Thus, they feel calmer when dealing with pressure and are more capable of making the right decisions.

Another benefit is increased self-confidence. When individuals feel comfortable in their interactions and can effectively manage their emotions, they will appear more confident in various social situations. Additionally, good social skills contribute to reducing conflict and creating a more peaceful and productive atmosphere (Prasetya, 2021). It has a direct impact on a person's mental and emotional well-being, as they feel more connected to their social environment. In the context of teamwork, these skills are crucial for fostering collaboration, exchanging ideas, and providing constructive feedback. An individual with mature social and emotional skills also exhibits high

resilience, which is the ability to bounce back and learn from failure or difficult experiences. However, the development of social and emotional skills cannot be separated from various challenges. One of the main obstacles is a lack of self-understanding. Many people struggle to recognize and manage their own emotions, which affects their ability to engage in healthy social interactions. Unsupportive environments, such as stressful or conflictual situations, can also hinder the development of these skills. In addition, the stigmatization of emotional problems and lack of social support are significant barriers to individuals seeking help or guidance.

Technological advancements and excessive social media use also pose a challenge. Virtual interactions that replace face-to-face communication can make a person less practiced in interacting in person and managing emotions healthily. On the other hand, not everyone has the opportunity to receive education or training on social and emotional skills, either at school or in everyday life. Individual character differences also influence the speed and manner in which a person develops these skills. Therefore, a flexible and sustainable approach, supported by a healthy environment, is needed for social and emotional skills to grow optimally.

3. Implementing Active and Student-Centered Learning

The implementation of a student-centered and active learning approach provides students with opportunities to develop critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Learning models, such as group discussions, project work, and experimental activities, have been proven to increase student participation and encourage the mastery of skills relevant to real life. Piaget (1972) stated that learning processes that involve active exploration and discovery would strengthen children's cognitive development. Therefore, elementary schools need to create a learning environment that fosters direct experience as the foundation of understanding, rather than merely emphasizing memorization. One method that can be applied is project-based learning, which requires students to cooperate in solving real-world problems. Additionally, the integration of technology in learning also provides an opportunity for students to hone their digital skills, which are essential in facing the challenges of modern times.

Implementing active and student-centered learning offers numerous important benefits in the educational process. One of the main benefits is the increased student participation in the learning process. Students are no longer passive listeners but are directly involved in learning activities that encourage them to understand the material more deeply. In addition, active learning also hones critical and creative thinking skills through discussion, problem solving, and analysis that trigger higher-order thinking skills.

Another advantage of this approach is the increased ability for students to cooperate. In group activities, students learn to share ideas, respect opinions, and complete tasks collaboratively, which are important provisions in social and professional life (Budayasa & Dharmawan, 2023). Student-centered learning also enables teachers to offer a more personalized approach, tailored to each student's unique learning style and pace. It provides students with space to be more motivated in their learning, as they can explore the material according to their interests and needs. In addition, active learning encourages students' independence in seeking information and solving problems, which strengthens their responsibility for their learning process. Through implementing theory to practice and in-depth discussions, the effectiveness of learning is enhanced as students gain a more meaningful understanding. Furthermore, this approach is also relevant to the development of 21st-century skills, such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving, which are essential for the future workforce.

However, the implementation of active learning cannot be separated from various challenges. One of them is time constraints and the tight curriculum, which often hinder the implementation of interactive and in-depth learning activities. In addition, the shift in teacher paradigm from teacher to facilitator is also a challenge in itself, as it requires training and adjustments to attitudes and skills. Other obstacles arise from limited resources, including facilities, technology, and teaching materials necessary to support active learning activities.

The diversity of student learning styles is also a factor that must be considered. Designing activities that cater to the diverse needs of students requires careful planning and consideration. Some students may even feel uncomfortable with methods that require active participation, mainly if they are used to the lecture method. Additionally, the more complex evaluation system in active learning also necessitates a thorough and consistent assessment approach. The lack of teacher training in implementing this approach, as well as challenges in managing the classroom dynamically and interactively, also become obstacles to optimizing student-centered active learning. Therefore, support from various parties, continuous training, and adjustments to learning strategies are essential in facing these challenges.

4. Leadership and Responsibility Skills Building

Providing students with opportunities to take on leadership roles in various school activities is a strategic step in fostering confidence, a sense of responsibility, and leadership skills early on. Responsibilities such as being a group leader, class leader, or a member of a student organization can train them to lead in a positive and purposeful environment. Leadership education at the elementary age stage is crucial in shaping students' characters who can take initiative and lead groups wisely. Northouse (2016), in his work *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, emphasizes that leadership can be developed early on if children are given the space to lead in a supportive context. Through leadership experiences, students not only learn to make decisions but also understand the importance of collaboration and respecting the opinions of others. This practice contributes to building a mature and adaptive character, equipping individuals with relevant social skills to face the challenges of life and work in the future.

The development of leadership character and responsibility has a very significant impact on personal, group, and organizational life. One of the main benefits is improved decision-making skills. A leader is required to be able to determine direction, make the right policies, and be responsible for every decision made. In addition, leadership skills also hone effective communication skills, which are essential for conveying ideas, listening to opinions, and resolving conflicts within the team wisely (Pratiwi, 2022).

Good leadership also encourages strong teamwork. When individuals feel responsible for their tasks, they tend to be more engaged and committed to the common goal, resulting in a more harmonious and productive working atmosphere. Additionally, leadership based on responsibility enhances managerial skills, enabling individuals to organize resources, time, and activities more efficiently in structuring and completing projects.

Another benefit is the establishment of strong compassion and ethics. A responsible leader will care about the well-being of team members and uphold integrity and ethical values in their leadership. Equally important, leadership also improves adaptability to change. A good leader can adjust to the dynamics of the situation and guide the team to stay focused despite challenges or changes in strategy. Ultimately, leadership and responsibility skills encourage individuals to continually develop themselves and their careers. Those with a leadership spirit are better prepared to face new challenges and

have a greater chance of occupying strategic positions in the future. Thus, the formation of leadership and responsibility characters is an important investment in creating a resilient, visionary, and professional generation.

5. Involving Parents and Communities in Character Skills Education

The involvement of parents and communities in the education process is a crucial element in supporting the development of students' character and skills as a whole. When schools, families, and communities work together, an environment is created that fosters the development of learners' moral values and social skills. Epstein et al. (2011) emphasize that a solid partnership between school and family is a key component in the success of character education. Parents can reinforce learning at school by instilling ethical values at home and actively participating in activities that promote children's character development. On the other hand, community involvement through activities such as social service, reforestation, or environmental-based programs provides students with opportunities to interact directly with the real world, foster empathy, and develop social skills relevant to everyday life.

Involving parents and communities in character skills education brings a range of important benefits that support children's all-round development. One of the main benefits is the reinforcement of values and character. When the values taught at school are also applied at home and in the neighborhood, there is consistency in a child's character development. It helps children to better understand and apply principles such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy in everyday life (Suardana, Sukarlinawati & Suwendra, 2023).

Parental and community involvement provides important emotional and social support for children. When children feel supported by those closest to them, they are more confident and motivated to develop positive character skills. Moreover, this involvement also opens up opportunities for collaborative learning. Through social activities, training programs, or hands-on mentorship, children gain a broader experience in building social skills and character values.

Parents and communities also serve as positive role models. By exhibiting attitudes and behaviors that reflect noble values such as hard work, empathy, and honesty, they provide concrete examples that children can emulate. On the other hand, this involvement also fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility in children. Children realize that character building is a shared responsibility, not only the task of teachers at school, but also one that involves the family and community environment.

Furthermore, parental and community involvement can help reduce negative behaviors in children. With more intensive supervision and attention, children will be better protected from harmful behaviors, such as bullying, violence, or technology addiction. Lastly, this engagement also improves children's social connectedness. Through strong relationships with various parties, children learn the importance of cooperation, empathy, and sharing in their social lives. Thus, synergy between school, family, and community is essential in creating an effective and sustainable character education environment.

6. Continuous Evaluation and Improvement

Conducting regular evaluations of the character and skills education program is a crucial step in assessing the program's effectiveness and relevance. This evaluation serves not only as a measure of achievement but also as a basis for identifying aspects that need improvement or adjustment. In the context of character and skills education, evaluation should encompass a range of indicators, including changes in student behavior, the

development of social and emotional skills, and the impact on academic achievement. Eaton et al. (2017) assert that systematic reflection and evaluation of educational programs is key to improving the quality of the learning process and student outcomes. Thus, continuous evaluation is an integral part of creating an adaptive and growth-oriented education that fosters students' overall character development.

Continuous evaluation and improvement in the educational process of elementary school children play a crucial role in supporting their overall development. One of the main benefits of continuous evaluation is to measure the extent of children's learning development in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Through this evaluation, teachers and parents can get a clear picture of their child's academic progress and character.

Additionally, continuous evaluation helps identify each child's learning needs. By identifying areas that still require improvement, teachers can provide more targeted assistance and learning strategies to support students' growth. Evaluation also plays a role in increasing children's enthusiasm for learning (Mandra, 2023). Positive and constructive feedback can motivate children to keep trying to improve, while strengthening their self-confidence.

Not limited to academic aspects, the evaluation also encompasses the development of children's social and emotional skills, including cooperation, leadership, and emotional management. The information obtained from this evaluation provides an important basis for teachers to design more effective learning that suits the individual needs of students. With the right approach, every child has the opportunity to have a meaningful and optimal learning experience.

Furthermore, continuous evaluation encourages the formation of an organized and consistently self-improvement-oriented learning pattern. Children are encouraged to continue learning, correct mistakes, and adapt to the challenges they face (Artha & Pitriani, 2024). Through this process, children's problem-solving skills are also honed as they become accustomed to thinking critically and finding solutions to the evaluations they receive. Thus, continuous evaluation and improvement are not just a measurement tool, but also an integral part of the educational process that facilitates the children's holistic growth.

An interview with Sudarsana, a lecturer in the field of Hindu Religious Education, revealed that the use of *Dharmagitha* is highly effective in conveying moral values. Sudarsana stated:

Through *Dharmagitha*, children more easily understand values such as *Satya* (honesty), *Śanti* (peace), and *Ahimsa* (non-harming), because they not only hear but also feel and voice them (Interview, May 5, 2025).

Furthermore, the character values that most often appeared in the *Dharmagitha* lyrics used in class included discipline, responsibility, respect, and compassion for others. Meanwhile, in terms of skills, it was found that students experienced an increase in self-confidence, the ability to work together in small groups during practice, and mastery of musical basics such as scales and tempo. It is reinforced by observational data, which shows that in group exercises, 70% of students can demonstrate good cooperation, and 65% of students can perform singing individually with confidence after two months of learning.

The documentation study showed that the school has developed a local thematic module containing a collection of *Dharmagitha* with relevant character value guidelines. This module was developed jointly by teachers, principals, and local cultural leaders as a form of curriculum innovation rooted in local wisdom.

The findings demonstrated that *Dharmagitha* was not only a tool for cultural preservation but also an effective medium in strengthening character education and 21st-century skills. This strategy aligns with the ethnopedagogy approach, which emphasizes the importance of education rooted in local values and culture. In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum and the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile, this practice supports the dimensions of “faith and piety in God,” “global diversity,” and “independence and critical reasoning”.

Thus, *Dharmagitha*-based learning contributes significantly to forming students who are not only intellectually intelligent but also possess a noble character, social skills, and respect for and preservation of ancestral culture from an early age.

Conclusions

Character education and social-emotional skills are integral to child development and must begin early, particularly at the elementary school level. This study demonstrated that *Dharmagitha*, as a form of local wisdom, played a strategic role in supporting the holistic development of character and skill-building in students. The positive values contained in *Dharmagitha* lyrics, such as discipline, honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and compassion, can be instilled through a fun, contextual, and meaningful learning approach. Learning that actively involved students in singing, discussing the song’s meaning, and performing in front of their peers proved to be an effective way to increase their confidence, communication skills, and critical thinking abilities. The involvement of teachers, parents, and local cultural figures in the *Dharmagitha*-based learning process created a collaborative educational ecosystem that is firmly rooted in cultural values. Character education carried out in a structured manner through social activities and teacher example contributed to building children’s resilient and ethical personalities. Additionally, strengthening social skills such as empathy, self-control, and effective communication also helped students face social challenges in the school and community environment. Continuous evaluation of learning processes and outcomes allowed teachers to adjust approaches to make them more relevant to students’ needs. Thus, the integration of *Dharmagitha* in the elementary school learning not only preserves local culture but also becomes an effective strategy in realizing 21st-century character and skills education based on values, spirituality, and local wisdom. These efforts support the creation of a young generation that is not only academically intelligent but also has identity, integrity, and readiness to face life as a whole.

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