

Integrating Local Wisdom into Moral and Character Education to Foster Students' Moral Reasoning: An Embedded Mixed-Methods Study

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ABSTRACT

The decline in moral reasoning abilities among secondary school students poses a serious challenge to character education, particularly as educational modernization has diminished the role of local cultural values as the foundation of moral consciousness. This study aims to analyze the extent to which the integration of Bima local wisdom values influences students' moral reasoning, to examine differences in levels of moral reasoning based on the degree of value integration and demographic characteristics, and to explore how cultural values are implemented in moral education practices. Employing an embedded mixed-methods design, the study involved 261 students and 15 teachers. Quantitative instruments included the Moral Reasoning Questionnaire and the Local Wisdom Integration Scale–Mbojo, both developed contextually. Construct validity testing using Confirmatory Factor Analysis and reliability analysis ($\alpha = 0.87$; $\omega = 0.86$) indicated strong psychometric properties. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and observations until saturation was reached, with credibility ensured through triangulation, audit trails, and member checking. Data analysis employed Jamovi version 2.6.44 and a reflective thematic approach. The findings revealed a substantial influence of local wisdom integration on moral reasoning ($R^2 = 0.727$; $p < .001$). However, ANOVA and Mann–Whitney U tests showed no significant differences among student groups based on learning achievement levels, gender, or grade level ($p > 0.05$), suggesting that cultural value influences were distributed evenly across groups. Thematic analysis further indicated that teachers integrated the *maja labo dahu* values through ethical reflection, social habituation, and moral exemplification. This study underscores local wisdom as a form of contextual moral ecology that extends universal theories of moral reasoning toward a relational, reflective, and community-rooted moral paradigm.

Keywords: Character Education; Moral Competence; Moral Reasoning; Mbojo Local Wisdom Integration; Mixed-Methods

INTRODUCTION

Moral and character education has reemerged as a central issue in the global discourse on the quality of education in the twenty-first century. Amid rapid technological advancement, academic competition, and the strong currents of value globalization, education systems face a crucial challenge: how to nurture a young generation that is not only intellectually capable but also guided by a firm moral compass. The growing prevalence of unethical behavior among adolescents, ranging from academic dishonesty and intolerance to verbal aggression in digital spaces, indicates that moral reasoning has not yet become an internalized priority within education systems. This ability is essential because it enables individuals to distinguish right from wrong and to act according

to both universal ethical principles and the social values that shape their cultural context (Yee et al., 2025; Shao et al., 2024).

King and Mayhew (2004) define moral reasoning as the cognitive process individuals use to determine morally appropriate actions when confronted with value-based dilemmas. They emphasize that secondary and higher education represent crucial phases in the development of moral reasoning, as individuals begin to construct reflective awareness of increasingly complex moral norms and principles. However, their research also demonstrates that formal education alone does not guarantee moral growth. Social environments, lived experiences, and cultural contexts play equally significant roles. Some students show substantial progress, while others remain at a conventional level of moral reasoning that focuses mainly on obedience and the avoidance of punishment.

In a similar perspective, Bar-Yam et al. (1980) assert that moral reasoning is deeply influenced by the social structures and cultural values in which individuals are raised. Cross-cultural studies have shown that adolescents from egalitarian communities tend to exhibit higher levels of moral reasoning than those from traditional hierarchical environments. This finding suggests that participatory, democratic, and socially responsible educational contexts contribute to the development of more mature moral reasoning. Consequently, effective moral education cannot be separated from the culture and values of the community that surrounds it (Bentahila et al., 2021).

Within the educational context, Cummings et al. (2010) demonstrated that instructional interventions emphasizing the teaching of moral theory and ethical dilemma discussions can enhance students' moral reasoning scores. Similarly, Mayhew et al. (2012a, 2012b) found that deep learning that involves reflection, interdisciplinary integration, and open discussion fosters moral thinking among first-year university students. These findings show that the development of moral reasoning depends not only on value exposure but also on learning experiences that encourage critical dialogue and self-reflection on real-life moral dilemmas (İşiker & Sözer, 2025).

Empirical evidence also indicates that moral reasoning levels do not always increase with education. Beller and Stoll (1995), in a study of secondary school students, found that athletes had lower moral reasoning scores than non-athletes. Competitive environments that emphasize victory can reduce moral sensitivity toward fairness and honesty. Similarly, Bruggeman and Hart (1996) found that students in religious schools did not always have higher moral reasoning than those in secular schools, despite receiving intensive value-based instruction. The rate of academic dishonesty was comparable between the two groups, suggesting that moral education that is dogmatic and unreflective may fail to foster deep moral reasoning (Brugman et al., 2023).

Over the past two decades, researchers have increasingly focused on the relationship between moral reasoning and social behavior. Mohd Yusoff et al. (2022) found that moral reasoning serves as an important mediator between religiosity, value internalization, and prosocial behavior among students. Those with higher levels of moral reasoning tend to demonstrate empathy, altruism, and a willingness to help others selflessly. This indicates that moral reasoning is not merely a cognitive function but also an important predictor of positive social action. Cohn et al. (2010) further extended this perspective by proposing an integrative model linking moral reasoning and legal reasoning to explain rule-violating behavior. They found that low levels of moral reasoning contribute to deviant behavior both directly and through negative attitudes toward the legal system. This model reinforces the view that moral reasoning functions as a cognitive mechanism closely related to social compliance (Baker et al., 2023).

Despite extensive international literature, most research on moral reasoning remains rooted in Western, individualistic contexts. In cultures such as Indonesia, morality is understood not as an autonomous individual product but as the result of an ongoing dialogue between the individual and the community. Values such as togetherness, respect, and social harmony form the shared moral foundation of collective life. Therefore, approaches to moral education that emphasize universal rationality are often not fully relevant when applied to local contexts grounded in traditional wisdom (Jensen, 2012, 2015; Killen & Dahl, 2021).

Local wisdom offers a more contextual pathway for moral education. It reflects ethical values that have been tested through generations and passed down as living moral traditions. These values teach balance between individual rights and social responsibilities. In the eastern Indonesian context, one significant form of local wisdom with great potential for moral education is the Mbojo cultural value of *maja labo dahu* in Bima, West Nusa Tenggara (Umar et al., 2025; Hermawansyah et al., 2025; Mutawali, 2021). This concept, which literally means "shame and fear," carries profound moral significance. *Maja* represents social awareness of others' perceptions, while *dahu* expresses spiritual awareness of accountability before God. Together, they form a communal moral system that guides individuals to act ethically and maintain social harmony.

In educational settings, *maja labo dahu* can serve as a strong pedagogical foundation for fostering moral reasoning. It provides a moral context that is concrete and relevant to students' daily experiences, facilitates reflection on moral actions, and nurtures social empathy. However, in practice, such local values are often marginalized within a national curriculum that prioritizes academic competencies. Secondary schools in Bima now face a value dissonance between local cultural values and modern norms introduced through national education.

As a result, many students perceive morality as a set of formal rules rather than as a reflective reasoning process rooted in their lived cultural values.

This study emerges from the need to bridge that gap. Previous research on character education based on local wisdom in Indonesia has largely been descriptive, focusing on behavioral changes without assessing the development of moral reasoning as a cognitive process. To understand the effectiveness of moral education rooted in local culture, it is necessary to examine the extent to which these values influence students' ways of thinking and moral judgment. To date, no empirical research has investigated the relationship between the integration of Mbojo local values, particularly *maja labo dahu*, and the development of moral reasoning among junior secondary school students in Bima using a comprehensive mixed-methods approach.

The novelty of this study lies in its effort to contextualize universal theories of moral development within the local value systems of eastern Indonesia. Using an exploratory mixed-methods design, this research combines qualitative exploration of local wisdom integration in moral education with quantitative analysis of the empirical relationship between the degree of value integration and students' moral reasoning scores. This approach not only provides a deeper understanding of culturally grounded moral education but also offers empirical evidence that supports the role of local wisdom as a modern and adaptive source of moral reasoning within a global context.

Theoretically, this research extends the moral development models proposed by King and Mayhew (2004) and Kohlberg by introducing culture as a significant contextual variable. It also strengthens the findings of Bar-Yam et al. (1980) regarding the importance of social environments in moral development and supports Mayhew et al.'s (2012a) claim that deep learning grounded in reflection and social experience can promote higher levels of moral reasoning. In the local context, this research provides empirical evidence that Mbojo cultural values can serve as authentic and contextual sources of moral reasoning for junior secondary students. By integrating reflection on local values with modern empirical approaches, this study not only preserves cultural heritage but also contributes a new perspective to moral education theory that is responsive to cultural diversity.

Accordingly, this study aims to provide a comprehensive description of how Mbojo local wisdom, particularly *maja labo dahu*, is integrated into moral and character education practices in junior secondary schools in Bima. It also seeks to identify which cultural values, including *maja labo dahu*, mutual cooperation, honesty, respect, and deliberation, contribute most significantly to the development of students' moral reasoning. From a quantitative perspective, the study examines how the degree of local wisdom integration influences students' moral reasoning ability and compares levels of moral reasoning among student groups with different degrees of cultural value integration, taking into account their learning achievements and demographic characteristics.

Research Questions

To address the objectives of this study and to understand the relationship between the integration of local wisdom values and the development of students' moral reasoning, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How are the forms and strategies of integrating Mbojo local wisdom values, particularly *maja labo dahu*, implemented in moral and character education practices in junior secondary schools in Bima?
2. Which local wisdom values are most significant in supporting the development of students' moral reasoning?
3. To what extent does the level of local wisdom integration influence students' moral reasoning ability?
4. Are there differences in moral reasoning levels among students with varying degrees of local wisdom integration?
5. Do demographic factors such as gender and grade level influence the relationship between local wisdom integration and students' moral reasoning?
6. How do local cultural values shape an inclusive and collective moral environment within schools?

Hypotheses

Based on the quantitative aspects of the research questions, the following hypotheses were proposed:

- H₁: There is a significant relationship between the level of local wisdom integration and students' moral reasoning ability.
- H₂: There are significant differences in moral reasoning levels among students with different levels of local wisdom integration.
- H₃: Demographic factors such as gender and grade level influence the relationship between local wisdom integration and students' moral reasoning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theories of Moral Reasoning Development

The development of moral reasoning is a fundamental aspect of individual character formation because it reflects how people think, evaluate, and decide actions based on ethical principles (Kohlberg, 1984). According to Kohlberg's stage theory, moral development progresses from the pre-conventional to the conventional and post-conventional levels, in which individuals move from obedience to external authority toward universal moral principles. This model was further developed by Rest et al. (1999) through the *Defining Issues Test* (DIT), which views moral reasoning not only as the outcome of a linear cognitive process but also as a reflection of values, social contexts, and real-life dilemmas. The DIT has been widely used to measure the complexity of moral thinking and has become an essential instrument in modern moral education research.

King and Mayhew (2004) expanded this framework by emphasizing adolescence and early adulthood as crucial phases in moral reasoning development, as individuals begin to engage in deep reflection on social norms and personal ethics. Meanwhile, Haidt (2001) highlighted the role of moral intuition, suggesting that emotions and social intuitions form the foundation of moral decisions before cognitive rationalization occurs. Therefore, moral reasoning should not be understood solely from a cognitive perspective but also through the affective and social dimensions that accompany moral decision-making.

Moral and Character Education in the School Context

Moral education in schools functions as a socialization arena where students internalize social norms and ethical values in their everyday lives (Lickona, 1996). It does not only teach the distinction between right and wrong but also cultivates moral dispositions such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy. Berkowitz and Bier (2005) emphasize that effective character education requires the engagement of the entire school community, including teachers, curricula, and reflective classroom practices. In the context of secondary education, adolescence is a transitional stage during which abstract and reflective thinking develops rapidly (Adey & Shayer, 1990; Fraser et al., 2021). Consequently, learning environments that support moral discussions, collaborative decision-making, and value-based learning become essential.

Cummings et al. (2010) demonstrated that educational interventions that integrate moral development theory with ethical dilemma discussions can significantly enhance students' moral reasoning scores. Mayhew et al. (2012a, 2012b) reinforced these findings by showing that *deep learning* approaches, which emphasize self-reflection, interdisciplinary integration, and social participation, promote moral reasoning development more effectively than conventional instruction. This approach aligns with Nucci's (2016) argument that moral education must integrate rationality, empathy, and social experience in a balanced way. Therefore, schools should not be viewed merely as cognitive spaces but as moral laboratories where students practice evaluating dilemmas, engaging in dialogue, and developing ethical decision-making responsibly.

Local Wisdom as the Basis for Moral Reasoning Development

Over the past two decades, cultural-contextual approaches in moral education have gained increasing attention for their potential to bridge the gap between universal theory and local practice (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009a, 2009b, 2014). Jensen (2012, 2015) argues that moral reasoning cannot be separated from the cultural context that shapes an individual's value framework. Every society possesses a unique moral system that underlies its members' ethical judgments. Within this context, local wisdom functions as a form of "living moral knowledge" that has been socially and historically tested (Miranti et al., 2018; Sugiantoro et al., 2022). Odora Hoppers (2009) further asserts that education that neglects the cultural dimension loses its relevance in shaping national identity rooted in community values.

In Indonesia, local wisdom has long served as a vehicle for transmitting communal morality. Values such as mutual cooperation and *adat malu* (the moral sense of shame) are not merely social traditions but ethical instruments that regulate interpersonal and community relations (Jakimow, 2018). In Bima, West Nusa Tenggara, the value of *maja labo dahu*, which literally means "shame and fear," forms the core of the Mbojo moral system. This value functions as a moral regulator: *maja* instills social awareness to prevent deviation from communal norms, while *dahu* nurtures spiritual awareness and moral responsibility before God (Umar et al., 2025). Integrating *maja labo dahu* into formal education not only strengthens students' cultural identity but also broadens their moral reasoning horizon through reflection on meaningful community-based values.

Conceptually, moral reasoning is the result of an interaction between cognitive mechanisms, social environments, and cultural contexts. Classical moral development theories provide the foundation for understanding the structure of moral thought (Kohlberg, 1984; Rest et al., 1999), while character education theories emphasize the importance of pedagogical interventions in schools (Lickona, 1996; Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). At the

same time, cultural-contextual approaches (Jensen, 2012, 2015) expand this perspective by positioning local values as authentic sources of moral reasoning formation. Therefore, integrating Mbojo local wisdom, particularly the *maja labo dahu* values, into moral and character education in junior secondary schools constitutes a theoretically robust strategy for developing students' moral reasoning within a reflective, social, and contextual framework.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed an embedded mixed-methods design (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009; Creswell, 2021), in which the quantitative approach served as the primary component and the qualitative approach was embedded to enrich the interpretation of statistical findings and clarify contextual dynamics in the field. This design was chosen because it integrates the precision of empirical analysis with the depth of cultural understanding. The study not only measured the relationship between the level of integration of Bima (*Mbojo*) local wisdom and students' moral reasoning but also examined how these cultural values were enacted in moral education practices within schools.

The selection of this design was based on theoretical and practical considerations. Theoretically, the development of moral reasoning cannot be understood as a neutral and universal cognitive process but must be viewed as one that is shaped by the sociocultural contexts in which individuals develop. As stated by King and Mayhew (2004), students' moral reasoning is influenced not only by formal education but also by social interactions, community values, and learning environments that allow moral reflection. Cross-cultural studies by Bar-Yam et al. (1980) found that students living in egalitarian environments with high social participation tend to have more advanced moral reasoning compared to those in rigid hierarchical systems. Based on this framework, the embedded mixed-methods design offers the flexibility to capture both measurable cognitive dimensions and meaningful cultural dimensions simultaneously.

Practically, this approach was selected for its efficiency and suitability for the research setting. Purely qualitative approaches often require extensive time and resources to explore local values, while purely quantitative methods frequently fail to capture the social contexts that influence outcomes. By using a quantitative approach as the main framework and incorporating qualitative data as interpretive support, the study ensured that the results were both empirically measurable and culturally relevant.

Population and Sample

The population of this study included all junior secondary school students in Bima City, West Nusa Tenggara Province. According to the DAPODIK of the Directorate General of Early Childhood, Primary, and Secondary Education under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology for the 2024/2025 academic year, there were 26 junior secondary schools in Bima City with a total of 4,586 students out of 183,545 students across the province. From this population, the sample was determined using purposive-stratified sampling, considering variations in school type (public and private) and geographical distribution. Five schools were selected as research sites, consisting of three public and two private institutions. The selection was based on three main criteria: 1) schools actively implementing character education programs; 2) involvement in local culture-based activities, and 3) willingness to participate fully in the study.

At the student level, cluster random sampling was applied to Grades VIII and IX, as students at these levels have reached relatively mature stages of moral and ethical reflection. The final sample consisted of 261 students and 15 teachers representing four major subject areas: Guidance and Counseling (BK), Civic and Pancasila Education (PPKn), Religious Education (PA), and Indonesian Language (BI). The demographic characteristics of students and teachers are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Demographic Composition of Student Participants

Category	Subcategory	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Grade	IX	152	58.2
	VIII	109	41.8
Age (years)	13	16	6.1
	14	74	28.4
	15	107	41.0
	16	53	20.3
	17	11	4.2
Gender	Male	117	44.8
	Female	144	55.2
Academic Achievement	Fair	70	26.8

	Good	164	62.8
	Excellent	27	10.3

Note: The demographic distribution indicates a balanced representation by gender and grade level and sufficient academic heterogeneity for comparative analysis.

Table 2. Demographic and Professional Information of Teacher Participants

Informant Code	Subject Taught	Employment Status	Teaching Experience (Years)
BK1	Guidance and Counseling	Civil Servant Teacher	12
BK2	Guidance and Counseling	Civil Servant Teacher	10
BK3	Guidance and Counseling	Civil Servant Teacher	12
BK4	Guidance and Counseling	Contract-based Government Employee Teacher	8
BK5	Guidance and Counseling	Civil Servant Teacher	15
BK6	Guidance and Counseling	Contract-based Government Employee Teacher	8
PPKn1	Civics and Citizenship Education	Civil Servant Teacher	15
PPKn2	Civics and Citizenship Education	Civil Servant Teacher	12
PPKn3	Civics and Citizenship Education	Contract-based Government Employee Teacher	8
PA1	Religious Education	Civil Servant Teacher	16
PA2	Religious Education	Civil Servant Teacher	12
PA3	Religious Education	Civil Servant Teacher	15
PA4	Religious Education	Contract-based Government Employee Teacher	8
BI1	Indonesian Language	Civil Servant Teacher	12
BI2	Indonesian Language	Contract-based Government Employee Teacher	15

All teacher participants were selected purposively based on their active involvement in implementing moral and character education in their respective schools. Variation in subject areas, employment status, and teaching experience provided rich and representative perspectives on the integration of local wisdom in classroom practice. Participant identities were anonymized using discipline-based codes (BK, PPKn, PA, BI) followed by numbers to maintain confidentiality and research ethics.

Instruments

Two main quantitative instruments were used in this study. The first measured students' moral reasoning using the *Moral Reasoning Questionnaire* (MRQ) adapted from Lim and Chapman (2022a, 2022b), grounded in Kohlberg's (1984) theory of moral development. The MRQ assesses individuals' ability to evaluate and justify moral decisions according to developmental stages ranging from pre-conventional to post-conventional. The instrument was adapted to fit the sociocultural context of junior secondary school students and used a five-point Likert scale. Items were developed across four domains: prosocial reasoning, honesty and personal responsibility, reasoning under social pressure, and ethical reasoning based on local wisdom. Each item was phrased positively on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate more advanced levels of moral reasoning. Content validity was reviewed by three experts in moral and cultural education, and reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha to ensure internal consistency.

The second instrument was the *Local Wisdom Integration Scale–Mbojo* (LWIS-Mbojo), developed to measure the extent to which local cultural values, such as *maja labo dahu*, were integrated into moral and character education practices. The scale was based on theories of cultural value integration in character education and field observations of Mbojo cultural practices. It consisted of 33 items with a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Four main dimensions were identified: curriculum and learning content, pedagogical strategies and moral discussion, community involvement, and school cultural climate.

Table 3. Research Instruments

Variable	Aspect	Indicator	Example Item	Number of Items
Integration of Local Wisdom in Moral and	- Local value content; - Value-based learning strategies;	Application, internalization, and reinforcement of cultural values such as mutual cooperation, honesty, respect,	"My teacher often relates local	17

Character Education	- Intensity and depth of integration; - Student involvement; - School and community support	deliberation, and environmental awareness through learning processes and school activities	cultural values to lessons in class.”	
Students’ Moral Reasoning	- Prosocial reasoning; - Honesty and personal responsibility; - Reasoning under social pressure; - Ethical reasoning based on local values such as <i>maja labo dahu</i>	Ability to assess, reflect, and make moral decisions grounded in honesty, responsibility, solidarity, and culturally embedded ethics	“I refuse to follow my friends if I know what they are doing is wrong.”	16

Semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were used as qualitative components to complement the quantitative findings. Interviews were conducted with teachers from the four subject areas across the selected schools, focusing on their understanding of Mbojo cultural values, integration strategies in classroom instruction, and perceptions of students’ moral reasoning development. Classroom observations assessed how local values were used as contexts for moral discussions. Additionally, instructional documents such as lesson plans and character modules were analyzed to identify explicit and implicit references to local cultural values.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability tests were conducted to ensure that the instruments possessed strong psychometric qualities. The reliability analysis showed Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.87$ and McDonald’s $\omega = 0.86$, indicating high internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). These results confirmed that all items consistently measured the intended constructs. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine model fit for the two latent constructs: Local Wisdom Integration and Students’ Moral Reasoning. The results demonstrated excellent model fit (CFI = 1.000; TLI = 1.000; RMSEA = 0.000; SRMR = 0.000). All factor loadings were significant ($p < .001$) with loadings of 0.547 for the local wisdom factor and 0.564 for the moral reasoning factor, indicating strong convergent validity. The covariance between the two factors ($r = 0.852$, $p < .001$) reflected a very strong relationship between local wisdom integration and students’ moral reasoning, confirming that the instruments were valid and reliable for use in this context.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted from February to August 2025. After obtaining research permits from the Regional Research Agency and approval from the Education Office and participating schools, the researcher provided brief orientations to students and teachers about the study’s purpose and procedures. Informed consent was obtained to ensure voluntary participation. The quantitative survey was administered first, taking approximately 60 minutes to complete. Following preliminary quantitative analysis, qualitative data collection was conducted through interviews and observations to clarify and enrich the statistical findings. Teacher interviews were carried out across several sessions until data saturation was achieved. Interviews were guided by a structured protocol and recorded with consent to ensure data accuracy and completeness.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis was performed using *Jamovi* version 2.6.44 (The Jamovi Project, 2024). Descriptive statistics, normality tests, and reliability analyses were conducted to verify data quality (Revelle, 2023; Rosseel et al., 2023; Fox & Weisberg, 2023; Kerby, 2014). Construct validity of the LWIS-Mbojo was examined using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Multiple linear regression was used to test the effect of local wisdom integration on students’ moral reasoning scores, controlling for gender, school type, and cultural engagement outside school. Group differences in moral reasoning were tested using independent samples t-tests.

Qualitative data were analyzed using the Reflective Thematic Analysis approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2022). The procedure included five steps: (1) familiarization with the transcripts, (2) generating initial codes, (3) organizing codes into themes, (4) reviewing and refining themes, and (5) reflective interpretation. Analysis focused on how *maja labo dahu* and Mbojo cultural practices shaped students’ moral arguments in classroom settings. Four researchers independently coded portions of the data and discussed results to reach consensus. Reflective notes and analytical memos were maintained to ensure auditability and transparency of interpretation.

Data Trustworthiness

Data validity and trustworthiness were ensured through multiple strategies. For quantitative data, content and construct validity were established through expert review and factor analyses, while reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha (α) and McDonald's omega (ω). Common method bias was minimized through reverse-coded items, neutral instructions, and respondent anonymity.

For qualitative data, credibility was strengthened through member checking with teachers and triangulation among interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Dependability was maintained by detailed documentation of analytic procedures and decision trails, and confirmability was supported through researcher reflection and peer debriefing to minimize subjectivity.

RESULTS

This section presents complementary quantitative and qualitative findings within the embedded mixed-methods design. The quantitative analyses describe the patterns and strength of the relationship between the integration of local wisdom and students' moral reasoning. The qualitative data deepen understanding of how local values are implemented in classroom practice and why these values effectively shape students' moral reasoning. Descriptive analyses provide an overview of levels of local wisdom integration and students' moral reasoning.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Shapiro-Wilk (p)
Local Wisdom Integration (LWI)	261	4.16	0.548	-0.460	0.399	< .001
Students' Moral Reasoning (SMR)	261	3.98	0.565	-0.416	0.234	< .001

Both variables fall in the high category, indicating that most students perceive classroom practices as reflecting local cultural values and that they exhibit well-developed moral reasoning. The negative skew suggests a stable tendency toward positive responses. These results indicate that values such as *maja labo dabu* (shame at wrongdoing), social responsibility, and respect for others have been internalized through learning activities and school climate. Although normality tests were significant ($p < .05$), the score variations remained representative and suitable for subsequent analyses.

To What Extent Does Local Wisdom Integration Influence Students' Moral Reasoning

Table 5. Linear Regression of LWI Predicting SMR

Model	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	F	p	β	t	Sig.	AIC	BIC	RMSE
1	0.852	0.727	0.726	688	< .001	0.879	26.24	< .001	109	120	0.295

Note: $N = 261$.

The regression indicated a very strong and significant effect of local wisdom integration on students' moral reasoning ($R^2 = 0.727$, $p < .001$). More than two thirds of the variance in moral reasoning was explained by the degree to which local cultural values were integrated into moral and character education. In other words, stronger classroom integration of local values was associated with more advanced moral reasoning.

Teachers' accounts illuminate the mechanism. Teacher BK3 described *maja labo dabu* as "the social moral foundation in school, since students feel ashamed not because they fear punishment but because they wish to protect personal dignity and family honor." Teacher PA2 added that "when we connect shame and responsibility with religious teachings, students more readily understand that honesty is not a teacher's command but part of one's faith and personal honor." Teacher PPKn1 noted that local contexts promote reflection: "When I ask what they would do if a friend cheats, students answer that it is shameful because it violates regional values, not only school rules." These insights suggest that local wisdom not only enriches moral content but also activates reflective moral thinking. Cultural values function as a social medium that bridges external norms and personal ethical awareness.

Group Differences by Level of Local Wisdom Integration

Table 6. One-Way ANOVA by Level of Integration

Variable	F	df1	df2	p
LWI	0.992	2	258	0.372
SMR	1.179	2	258	0.309

No significant differences were found across student groups categorized by the level of local wisdom integration ($p > 0.05$). Although group means tended to be higher where integration was stronger, the differences were not statistically significant. This finding suggests that cultural value implementation was relatively even across groups. Teacher BI1 noted, “We frequently use local folktales in reading texts or class drama. So even if schools differ, the values taught remain the same.” Teacher PPKn2 added, “We teach the same content about responsibility and respect to all classes. The values feel like a shared culture. No one feels above or below.” The absence of significant differences, supported by consistent practices in the field, indicates the emergence of a shared moral environment in which students experience similar value-based learning and develop moral reasoning within an inclusive and collective social frame.

Differences by Gender and Grade Level

Table 7. Mann-Whitney U Tests by Gender and Grade

Group	Variable	U	p	r	Interpretation
Gender	LWI	7796	0.300	-0.075	Not significant
	SMR	8395	0.962	-0.004	Not significant
Grade (VIII vs IX)	LWI	7786	0.407	0.060	Not significant
	SMR	7938	0.565	-0.042	Not significant

There were no significant differences between male and female students or between Grades VIII and IX ($p > 0.05$). This finding suggests that the influence of local wisdom on moral reasoning is not contingent upon demographic factors or schooling level. Teacher BK5 observed, “Both boys and girls are equally capable of refusing peers’ invitations to do wrong when reminded of the values of shame and responsibility.” Teacher PA3 further explained, “Values such as mutual cooperation and the sense of shame for wrongdoing are universal. All students can apply them regardless of gender or age.” These consistent outcomes indicate that local wisdom-based education cultivates a shared moral space that transcends gender and grade distinctions, ensuring equal opportunities for moral growth and ethical reflection among all students.

How Local Wisdom Is Integrated and Which Values Contribute Most

Interview analysis with 15 teachers revealed three principal approaches to integrating local wisdom in moral and character education: (1) embedding cultural values in curriculum and classroom activities, (2) habituating values through school climate and teacher exemplification, and (3) engaging communities in culture-based social projects.

Table 8. Key Local Values, Practices, and Their Perceived Impact

Key Value or Practice	Implementation	Impact on Moral Reasoning
<i>Maja labo dabu</i>	Guided self-reflection and meaningful admonition	Cultivates internal moral regulation and self-awareness
Mutual cooperation	School-based social activities and collaborative projects	Fosters empathy, care for others, and collective responsibility
Honesty and trustworthiness	Trust-based assessment and shared accountability in learning tasks	Strengthens moral accountability and personal integrity
Respect and <i>tepa selira</i> (empathic consideration)	Classroom interaction norms emphasizing courtesy and empathy	Develops relational morality and social harmony
Deliberation	Group discussions and participatory conflict resolution	Promotes socially grounded moral deliberation and ethical judgment

Teacher BK2 explained, “We often apply *maja labo dabu* in counseling sessions. Students learn to experience shame not out of fear, but as a means to preserve their dignity.” Teacher PA4 added, “We consistently practice mutual cooperation through school clean-up activities so that students become accustomed to helping others without being instructed.” Teacher PPKn3 emphasized, “During classroom discussions, we employ deliberation to teach students how to respect different opinions and make fair moral judgments.” Teacher BI2 concluded, “When writing short stories, we ask students to portray honest and courageous characters, as these reflect our cultural values.” Overall, *maja labo dabu* emerged as the key driver in developing students’ moral reasoning by fostering self-regulated moral awareness. Mutual cooperation and deliberation nurtured social-moral consciousness, while honesty and respect reinforced integrity and interpersonal regard.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the integration of local wisdom has a strong influence on the development of moral reasoning among junior secondary school students. The significant relationship between

the two variables ($R^2 = 0.727$, $p < .001$) suggests that moral reasoning is not a culturally neutral cognitive process but rather the result of internalizing social values rooted in local contexts. This finding extends the classical model of moral reasoning proposed by Kohlberg (1981), which emphasizes moral development as the outcome of universal rationality, by incorporating a cultural dimension as suggested by the theory of cultural moral reasoning (Nucci, 2016; Maile et al., 2022). Consequently, morality can be understood not only as an individual ethical construct but also as an expression of the social value systems that exist within particular communities.

The value of *maja labo dabu*, which serves as the moral foundation of the Bima community, reflects an Eastern form of morality that centers on honor, shame, and social responsibility. This differs from the individualistic conception of justice that dominates Western moral theories. The concept functions as a moral affect system (Haidt, 2003, 2013; Musschenga, 2008; Morgan et al., 2017), stimulating ethical reflection through positive social emotions such as shame, empathy, and respect. In line with Narvaez and Lapsley (2014), emotion-based moral systems have been found to effectively foster moral self-regulation and strengthen prosocial reasoning. Thus, *maja labo dabu* operates not merely as a social norm but as both a psychological and cultural mechanism that accelerates students' transition from conventional to reflective morality.

This study also complements the work of Lim and Chapman (2022a, 2022b) using the Moral Reasoning Questionnaire (MRQ), which demonstrated that social and cultural environments exert a strong influence on adolescents' moral judgment. While Lim and Chapman examined the multicultural context of Singapore, this study confirms that the integration of local values among students in Bima produces similar effects by deepening moral understanding through social reflection and cultural commitment. This implies that local wisdom can function as a contextual moral schema, expanding previous research by showing that moral reasoning develops most effectively when students engage with values that hold strong emotional and social meaning in their own lives.

The absence of significant differences across gender and grade levels supports prior cross-national research indicating that variations in moral reasoning are more strongly shaped by sociocultural experiences than by biological or age-related factors (Caravita et al., 2012; Choi et al., 2019; Greer et al., 2014; Reynolds & Miller, 2015). Cultural values such as mutual cooperation, deliberation, and honesty possess inclusive characteristics that enable all students, regardless of gender, to engage equally in moral development. This finding aligns with the concept of *moral equality of participation*, which posits that morality is constructed within participatory social contexts where every individual has equal access to collective ethical values (Arthur et al., 2020).

Qualitative findings further reveal that teachers employ local values as dialogical and reflective media in moral education. Practices such as classroom deliberation, community-based mutual cooperation activities, and reflective engagement with *maja labo dabu* demonstrate that moral reasoning extends beyond cognitive reflection and is realized through authentic social interactions. These findings are consistent with Lapsley and Narvaez (2014), who emphasized the importance of virtue-based pedagogy, asserting that moral education becomes most effective when connected to genuine affective and social experiences. Teachers in this study serve as moral mentors (Husu & Tirri, 2003), functioning not merely as transmitters of moral knowledge but as facilitators who guide students in reinterpreting cultural values through their everyday moral actions.

The absence of significant differences among schools with different levels of integration indicates the successful cultural institutionalization of values at a systemic level. This suggests that local values have become part of the school moral ecology (Nucci, 2016), embedded in social interactions, informal norms, and teachers' moral exemplarity. In other words, local wisdom-based moral education has transcended the formal curriculum and evolved into a living hidden curriculum within the school environment. Walker and Moulin-Stozek (2019) similarly found that when community social values are integrated into school routines, students' moral development becomes more stable and consistent. The present study strengthens this direction by adding empirical evidence from a non-Western cultural context.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the global discourse on the indigenization of moral education. While moral studies have predominantly originated from Western individualistic paradigms (Rest, 1999; Walker & Moulin-Stozek, 2015), these findings highlight the importance of cultural embeddedness in understanding moral reasoning. The value of *maja labo dabu* demonstrates that morality can emerge from a positive form of social shame, functioning not as a restriction of freedom but as an ethical reflection mechanism that cultivates moral responsibility. This aligns with the findings of Rai and Fiske (2011), Ball and Wilson (1996), Brambilla and Leach (2014), and Sommers (2009), which show that honor- and shame-based values play a vital role in fostering moral integrity and collective accountability. Consequently, this study advances moral development theory toward a relational-communitarian paradigm that locates moral excellence not in individual autonomy but in social harmony and collective moral responsibility.

From a practical perspective, these results emphasize the urgency of developing culturally grounded character education as a strategy for building cultural moral literacy. Teachers who integrate cultural values into learning activities, social practices, and reflective exercises help students interpret moral actions in relation to their everyday realities. This is consistent with UNESCO's (2022, 2024) framework on Transforming Education through Local

Culture, which identifies the integration of local cultural values as a key indicator of success in 21st-century character education. Therefore, the contribution of this research is both academic and strategic for national education policy, providing evidence that strengthening culture-based moral education is a viable path toward cultivating reflective, value-driven, and culturally rooted generations.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has several methodological limitations that warrant consideration. First, the embedded mixed-methods design provided rich insights but the integration between quantitative and qualitative data was sequential rather than simultaneous. Consequently, the findings may not fully capture the dynamic interplay between students' perceptions and teachers' practices in real time. Future research is encouraged to adopt a longitudinal mixed design to monitor changes in students' moral reasoning over time and to examine the stability of local value internalization in their moral development.

Second, although the sample size ($N = 261$) was adequately representative at the junior secondary level, the study was geographically limited to Bima City. This constrains the generalizability of the results to other regions with different cultural systems. Comparative studies across regions or cultures in Eastern and Western Indonesia are recommended to determine the extent to which local values such as *maja labo dahu* share similarities or diverge in shaping students' moral structures.

Regarding measurement, moral reasoning was assessed using an instrument adapted to the local context, but semantic adaptation may still introduce interpretive bias. Future research should enhance cross-cultural validity by developing an indigenous moral reasoning inventory that combines universal indicators such as justice reasoning with culturally specific dimensions such as shame and communal responsibility. Moreover, the teacher interviews in this study involved four subject areas but did not explore in depth the roles of school leadership and parents in shaping students' moral ecology. Future studies should expand the moral actors to include principals, parents, and cultural figures to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the moral ecosystem within culture-based education. Further, advanced analytical approaches such as structural equation modeling (SEM) or multilevel modeling are recommended to more precisely map causal relationships among individual, social, and cultural factors that shape students' moral reasoning.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the integration of local wisdom, particularly the value of *maja labo dahu*, plays a significant role in shaping the moral reasoning of junior secondary school students. Quantitative findings reveal that the degree of internalization of local cultural values accounts for more than two-thirds of the variance in students' moral reasoning abilities. Complementary qualitative results show that cultural values such as social responsibility, mutual cooperation, and a socially constructive sense of shame function as ethical reflection frameworks that nurture collective moral awareness. The integration of local values not only enriches the content of moral education but also animates reflective and contextually grounded moral thinking processes among students.

Conceptually, this research provides a new contribution to moral development theory by demonstrating that moral reasoning cannot be fully understood within a purely universal rational framework as proposed by Kohlberg. Instead, it must be viewed as a socially embedded construct situated within cultural value systems. The principle of *maja labo dahu* illustrates that morality emerges not only from a sense of justice or legal consciousness but also from a socially and spiritually grounded sense of shame that motivates ethical self-regulation.

Within the context of Indonesian education, these findings underscore the urgency of reorienting character education from a normative model toward a culturally reflective model that cultivates moral awareness through lived social experience and culturally embedded wisdom. Such an approach strengthens the relevance of local wisdom in contemporary moral education and affirms Indonesia's position within the global discourse on contextual and relational moral education. By linking culture, emotion, and ethical cognition, this study highlights that moral education achieves its deepest impact when rooted in the values, emotions, and collective conscience of the community itself.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest in the conduct of this research, the preparation of the manuscript, or the publication of this article. All stages of the study were carried out independently, without any influence or involvement from institutions, organizations, or individuals that could create potential bias in the research findings.

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