



STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING NATIONALISM CHARACTER THROUGH NATIONAL PATRIOTIC SONGS: A CASE STUDY OF THE MUHAMMADIYAH LEARNING CENTER IN KEPONG, MALAYSIA

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Article Info

Article history:

Received : 07 Nopember 2025

Revised : 12 December 2025

Accepted : 21 December 2025

Available online

<http://jurnal.uinsu.ac.id/index.php/analytica>

E-ISSN: 2541-5263

P-ISSN: 1411-4380



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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze strategies for strengthening nationalism character through national patriotic songs among children at the Muhammadiyah Learning Center in Kepong, Malaysia. Nationalism is a fundamental aspect in shaping the character of Indonesian migrant children abroad, who are vulnerable to experiencing a crisis of national identity. This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study method. The research subjects include the learning center administrators, homeroom teacher, and nine students. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model. The findings reveal that nationalism character is strengthened through four main strategies: (1) habituation of singing national patriotic songs before lessons begin, (2) internalization of values and meanings contained in song lyrics, (3) integration of songs with the teaching of national history, and (4) active involvement of students in the commemoration of national holidays. The implementation of these strategies has proven effective in fostering love for the homeland, strengthening national identity, and shaping discipline and pride as Indonesian citizens. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of the concept of patriotic pedagogy and culture-based character education through music within non-formal educational settings among Indonesian diaspora communities. Practically, the results offer an alternative model for educators and learning center administrators abroad to enhance civic and national education through creative and contextual approaches.

Keywords: Nationalism, diaspora education, character education, patriotic pedagogy, national patriotic songs

1. INTRODUCTION

Character education is one of the fundamental pillars of Indonesia's national education system. Its purpose is to develop learners into individuals who are faithful, pious, noble in character, healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, as well as democratic and responsible citizens (Law No. 20 of 2003). However, in the current era of massive globalization, the formation of young people's character faces increasingly complex challenges. The uncontrollable flow of information, the penetration of foreign cultural influences, and the erosion of traditional values have become serious threats to national identity (Wibowo & Gunawan, 2015).

The fading of patriotic spirit is reflected in the low awareness among the younger generation regarding the nation's history, their limited appreciation for national symbols, and the declining sense of pride in being Indonesian. Annisa et al. (2024) emphasize that the lack of understanding of the meaning of ceremonial flag rituals among elementary school children is a clear indicator of declining nationalism. In this context, building national identity becomes an essential form of cultural defense to prevent the younger generation from losing their sense of identity amid global pressures (Hajri Hendra, 2023).

National identity represents the essence of a nation, manifested through state symbols such as Pancasila, the red-and-white flag, the Indonesian language, and the national anthem Indonesia Raya (Muhammad Fadhel et al., 2024). Therefore, nationalism education must be designed holistically and integratively, covering cognitive dimensions (knowledge of history and national values), affective dimensions (love and pride for the nation), and psychomotor dimensions (real actions in safeguarding national unity).

Nationalism-based character education becomes even more crucial when national values begin to erode under the influence of global culture. Strengthening nationalism must be initiated from an early age through contextual, creative, and enjoyable media capable of bridging rational understanding with emotional engagement.

Indonesia is one of the largest migrant-worker-sending countries in Southeast Asia. According to data from the Indonesian Migrant Worker Protection Agency (BP2MI, 2022), more than 4.5 million Indonesian migrant workers are spread across various countries, with Malaysia being one of the top destinations. This phenomenon brings complex social consequences, including educational challenges for children who accompany their parents abroad.

Limited access to formal education based on the Indonesian curriculum causes migrant children to lose opportunities to learn about Indonesian history, culture, and Pancasila values. This makes them vulnerable to a crisis of national identity due to exposure to local culture and different educational systems (Rachmat, 2024). In Malaysia, linguistic and cultural similarities with the Malay community further increase the risk of unintentional cultural assimilation. Indonesian as a heritage language has a strategic function not only as a means of communication but also as a medium for transmitting cultural and national values (Aswan et al., 2023). Therefore, non-formal educational institutions such as the Muhammadiyah Learning Center in Kepong play a vital role in maintaining the continuity of national identity among Indonesian migrant children.

In the context of character education, music plays a significant role. Neuroeducation studies show that music stimulates simultaneous activity across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains in learning processes (Trost et al., 2024). Activation of the



amygdala and hippocampus when listening to music strengthens emotional engagement and memory retention, making song-based learning more effective for instilling values. Thus, character education through music is not merely recreational; it fosters deep emotional connections with national values.

National patriotic songs possess pedagogical advantages because they are easy to remember, rich in patriotic messages, and capable of building a sense of unity. Qondias et al. (2024) demonstrate that consistent practice of singing national songs can cultivate patriotism among students. Similarly, Della (2022) and Alwi et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of introducing patriotic songs from an early age as a means of fostering nationalism and promoting active participation in national activities. Therefore, national patriotic songs serve as an integrative medium of character education that combines cognitive elements (understanding the meaning of lyrics), affective elements (appreciating values), and psychomotor elements (singing together).

Previous studies mostly focused on implementing national patriotic songs in formal school settings in Indonesia. However, research examining the role of national songs as a strategy for strengthening nationalism in non-formal educational institutions for children of migrant workers remains very limited. In fact, the Indonesian diaspora context abroad presents unique identity dynamics that require distinct pedagogical approaches. Therefore, this study focuses on analyzing strategies for strengthening nationalism character through national patriotic songs among children at the Muhammadiyah Learning Center in Kepong, Malaysia. This study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of patriotic pedagogy in character education and provide practical implications for non-formal educational institutions in Indonesian diaspora communities to reinforce national identity among younger generations.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of strategies for strengthening nationalism character through national patriotic songs among students at the Muhammadiyah Learning Center in Kepong, Malaysia. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on social and educational phenomena that naturally occur within a non-formal learning environment, where nationalism values are instilled through the practice of singing national songs. The case study design enables the researcher to present a factual, in-depth, and contextual description of the processes, strategies, and meanings behind the use of national patriotic songs in shaping the nationalism character of Indonesian diaspora children in Malaysia.

The research was conducted at the Muhammadiyah Learning Center in Kepong, located at Jalan Metro Prima, 52100 Kuala Lumpur, Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The data collection process took place over one month, from September 4 to October 1, 2025. This learning center is a non-formal educational institution serving the children of Indonesian migrant workers, with a focus on learning based on Islamic values and Indonesian nationalism.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data.

a) Primary data were obtained through:

- Participant observation, conducted during learning activities and practice sessions of national patriotic songs at the learning center, including the routine of singing before lessons and activities during national celebrations.
 - In-depth interviews with nine informants consisting of one mentor teacher, one learning center administrator, and seven students.
 - Documentation, including photos, activity videos, and records of learning activities and national events.
- b) Secondary data were obtained from supporting documents such as institutional profiles, activity archives, and relevant scholarly literature on character education, nationalism, and non-formal education in Indonesian diaspora communities.

The informants in this study were selected using purposive sampling, considering their active involvement in activities related to national patriotic songs.

- The mentor teacher, aged 24, has been teaching at the learning center for three years and holds an undergraduate degree in education or Islamic studies.
- The learning center administrator, aged 42, has more than 10 years of experience in managing educational institutions within Indonesian diaspora communities.
- The students, aged 9–10, are children of Indonesian migrant workers who have lived in Malaysia for 3–10 years.

The diversity of these characteristics enabled the researcher to obtain comprehensive insights from various perspectives of roles, ages, and social experiences.

To ensure the validity of the data, this study applied source triangulation and technique triangulation.

- 1) Source triangulation was carried out by comparing information from various informants (teachers, students, and administrators) to examine the consistency of perspectives regarding the practices of strengthening nationalism through national patriotic songs.
- 2) Technique triangulation was conducted by combining the results of observations, interviews, and documentation in order to reinforce the credibility of the findings.

In addition, the researcher conducted member checking by providing feedback on the initial interpretations to the informants to ensure that the interpreted data accurately reflected their lived experiences.

Data analysis was carried out thematically by referring to Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, which consists of three stages:

- Data reduction, namely the process of selecting, focusing, and simplifying data in accordance with the research focus.
- Data display, presented in the form of narrative descriptions and thematic matrices that illustrate the strategies, processes, and impacts of national patriotic song learning on the development of students' nationalism character.
- Conclusion drawing and verification, which involves interpreting patterns and meanings from the organized data to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.



These three stages occurred cyclically and continuously from the data collection phase to the final analysis. All interpretations were re-examined to ensure consistency between empirical data and the resulting social meanings.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

This study found that the strategies for strengthening nationalism character among Indonesian children at the Muhammadiyah Learning Center in Kepong, Malaysia, were implemented through four main approaches: (1) the habituation of singing national patriotic songs before lessons begin, (2) the internalization of the meanings contained in song lyrics, (3) the integration of national songs with the teaching of national history, and (4) the implementation of activities commemorating national holidays. These four strategies were applied contextually in accordance with the conditions of the learning center, which serves as a non-formal educational institution for children of Indonesian migrant workers. Based on interviews and observations, these strategies were proven to play a significant role in fostering love for the homeland, strengthening national identity, and shaping discipline and a sense of togetherness among the students.

Habituation of Singing National Patriotic Songs Before Learning Activities

The findings of this study indicate that one of the main strategies implemented at the Muhammadiyah Learning Center in Kepong, Malaysia, to instill nationalism character is the habituation of singing national patriotic songs before or after learning activities. This routine is carried out consistently by teachers as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Based on interviews with the homeroom teacher and field observations, the collective singing activities are conducted almost every day, with songs such as Garuda Pancasila, Indonesia Raya, and Tanah Airku as the primary selections. This activity establishes a routine that not only fosters patriotic spirit but also creates a classroom atmosphere filled with motivation and togetherness.



Figure 1. Singing the song Tanah Airku together with the 4th-grade students of the learning center.

This habituation functions as a medium for strengthening national identity while simultaneously serving as a vehicle for instilling discipline, togetherness, and pride in Indonesia. Observations show that the students are highly enthusiastic when singing national songs; they stand upright, sing loudly, and some even spontaneously give a salute. This phenomenon reflects the internalization of patriotic values that is not merely verbal but manifested through reflective and spontaneous actions. Such activities align with Lickona's (2018) concept of character education, which emphasizes that character formation requires consistent habituation through direct experiences involving the dimensions of "knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good." The routine of singing national songs is a concrete manifestation of this concept, in which nationalism is internalized through repetitive and meaningful actions.

In the context of nonformal education, this strategy has proven relevant and effective. Atika et al. (2019) explain that strengthening character education related to love for the homeland can be achieved through institutional culture that integrates routine activities such as singing national songs into students' daily learning experiences. This is reinforced by observations in the learning center, which show that singing national songs has become a habitual and eagerly anticipated part of the learning culture.

Beyond the daily classroom routine, this habituation is further reinforced through flag ceremonies held every Monday. Although conducted indoors due to limited facilities, students carry out the ceremony with enthusiasm and solemnity. They sing "Indonesia Raya" together, followed by salutes and collective prayer. The seriousness and deep appreciation displayed by the students indicate their understanding of the significance of the ceremony as a form of respect for the nation. This aligns with Annisa et al. (2024), who found that routine activities such as flag ceremonies and singing the national anthem are effective media for instilling discipline and responsibility in elementary school children. These findings parallel what occurs in the learning center, where national rituals despite being conducted in simple conditions still have a significant impact on students' character formation.

Interviews with teachers also reveal that the consistent habituation of singing national songs helps students memorize and comprehend the songs effortlessly. They become familiar with the lyrics and melodies, making the singing activities voluntary and joyful. Lestari et al. (2020) found that continuous habituation encourages natural internalization of patriotic values through repeated practice and active participation.

This finding is especially relevant in the socio-cultural context of Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia. Observations show that some students exhibit influences of Malaysian language and culture in their speech and daily habits. Thus, the habituation of singing national songs becomes an important strategy in maintaining Indonesian linguistic and cultural identity amid the dominance of foreign cultural influences. Aswan et al. (2023) similarly highlight that Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia face significant challenges in preserving their Indonesian language and culture due to environmental assimilation. Hence, national song-singing activities in the center serve a strategic role in reinforcing national identity and a sense of connection to the homeland.

Habituation also contributes to building students' discipline. Observations indicate that learning activities in the center begin with a structured sequence: starting with dhuha



prayer, followed by Qur'an reading, and then lessons that begin with singing national songs. This routine strengthens discipline and creates a positive learning climate. This aligns with findings by Makmur et al. (2023), who note that strengthening nationalism through repetitive methods is effective not only for building memorization but also for fostering discipline and responsibility.

The habituation practices also create an institutional culture grounded in national values, where national songs are no longer seen as formal obligations but as a natural part of the learning environment. This shift in perception demonstrates successful internalization of values occurring organically. Wulandari and Kristiawan (2017) argue that "strengthening character education must be realized through the creation of a conducive institutional culture," enabling national values to be embedded in daily habits and interactions. This viewpoint reinforces the finding that the center's supportive culture toward national activities is a key factor in successfully instilling nationalism. Thus, the learning center has successfully created a learning atmosphere that nurtures patriotism and solidarity among students not through coercion, but through meaningful habituation.

Overall, the findings affirm that the routine singing of national songs is an effective strategy for cultivating national awareness among Indonesian children in Malaysia. Through simple yet consistent activities, students not only learn national symbols but also internalize their meaning in real life. This habituation demonstrates that character education can grow from daily practices that are routine, enjoyable, and meaningful.

Internalization of the Meaning of National Patriotic Song Lyrics

The findings of the study show that another important strategy in strengthening nationalism among students at the Muhammadiyah Learning Center in Kepong, Malaysia, is the internalization of the meaning of national patriotic song lyrics. This activity aims to ensure that students not only memorize the songs, but also understand the values embedded within them. Based on interviews and observations, teachers actively explain the meaning of each lyric, relate it to the students' life experiences, and instill moral and patriotic values through simple interpretations that are easy for children to understand.



Figure 2. an interview with the teacher who also serves as the homeroom teacher of the 4th-grade class at the learning center

Based on the observations, this activity is carried out interactively. The teacher often asks students about the meaning of specific lines in the song and then connects them to everyday life. For example, when discussing the song Garuda Pancasila, the teacher explains the Garuda bird as a symbol of the nation's strength and resilience. This method demonstrates a contextual learning approach in which students understand the values of nationalism through reflection on their own lived experiences. This approach aligns with Musanna's (2017) view that effective character education must be contextual and appreciative of learners' local experiences.

The teacher also explains the meaning of the song in relation to Pancasila values and the nation's historical struggles. In learning activities, lyrics from songs such as Tanah Airku are linked to values of unity and love for the homeland, which correspond to the third principle of Pancasila. This strategy helps students connect the messages in the songs with broader moral and national principles. Lickona (2018) states that meaningful character education must integrate cognitive aspects (understanding values), affective aspects (valuing the good), and behavioral aspects (acting upon values). The findings at the learning center reflect the application of this principle, as students not only understand the lyrics but also strive to internalize and practice them.

Interviews with the teacher reveal that students understand song meanings more easily when the teacher uses narrative and reflective approaches. Patriotic songs such as Bagimu Negeri are used as a starting point for discussions about sacrifice and the contributions of national heroes. The teacher then links these values to students' responsibilities and learning motivation as forms of contribution to the nation. This strategy effectively enhances students' emotional engagement with national songs. Della (2022) supports these findings, stating that national songs function as character-building media capable of fostering pride and historical awareness among elementary school students.

Field observations show that the internalization process not only improves students' cognitive understanding but also fosters deep emotional attachment. Students appear enthusiastic when discussing song meanings, and some even express curiosity about the historical background of the songs. Their spontaneous questions indicate a genuine interest in national values. This suggests that the internalization of song meanings plays an essential role in nurturing curiosity about Indonesia and the homeland. Qondias et al. (2024) highlight that understanding the meaning of national songs not only fosters pride but also strengthens active and responsible citizenship awareness. This strengthens the study's finding that when students understand the meaning behind the songs they sing, the activity transforms from mere singing into a process of national identity formation.

Interviews with the head of the learning center indicate that internalizing song meanings also strengthens students' emotional connection with Indonesia. When students understand the meaning of the songs they sing, they develop a deeper curiosity about life in their homeland. These findings align with Divana et al. (2024), who show that patriotism- and culture-based learning fosters a desire among migrant children to explore their national identity more deeply.



The internalization of song meanings is also effective in fostering other moral values such as discipline, cooperation, and perseverance. Observations show that the teacher often emphasizes the moral messages embedded in the songs. For instance, *Bangun Pemuda Pemudi* is associated with learning motivation and hard work, while *Indonesia Pusaka* promotes gratitude for the beauty of the homeland. According to Alwi et al. (2023), learning through national songs becomes more meaningful when teachers interpret the moral values embedded in the lyrics, as students learn through repeated affective experiences.

This internalization activity also plays a critical role in preserving students' national identity while living abroad. In a diaspora context, national songs serve as cultural bridges connecting students with Indonesian values and language. Hajri Hendra (2023) stresses that national identity awareness must be nurtured from an early age to prevent the loss of cultural identity amid globalization. In this regard, understanding the meaning of national songs helps students maintain their Indonesian identity despite Malaysia's dominant cultural environment.

Thus, the findings affirm that the internalization of national song lyrics at the learning center is not merely an additional activity, but a key strategy in shaping profound nationalism. Through contextual, reflective, and participatory approaches, this activity successfully integrates cognitive, affective, and moral elements into one meaningful learning process. This strategy also demonstrates that national songs can serve as transformative character-education tools, especially for Indonesian children abroad who require strong emotional and intellectual reinforcement of their national identity.

Integration of National Patriotic Songs into History Lessons and Other Subjects

The findings of this study indicate that teachers at the Muhammadiyah Learning Center in Kepong integrate national patriotic songs into various learning activities, particularly in Civics (PPKn), Social Studies (IPS), and Arts and Culture. This approach reinforces that the cultivation of nationalism is not implemented as a separate activity, but is embedded within classroom learning so that national values are internalized naturally. Observations and interviews show that teachers connect patriotic songs with relevant subject matter. In Civics, the song *Garuda Pancasila* is used to strengthen students' understanding of unity and love for the homeland. In Social Studies, the song *Tanah Airku* is played when discussing Indonesia's natural beauty and resources to foster national pride. These findings align with Atika et al. (2019), who emphasize that integrating character values into thematic learning creates more meaningful learning experiences because they are connected to real-life contexts.

In Arts and Culture lessons, national songs are used as tools to introduce Indonesian arts and cultural heritage. Observations reveal that students learn patriotic songs accompanied by simple musical arrangements or body movements, making the learning process more enjoyable and interactive. Teachers also relate the songs to historical contexts for example, explaining the meaning and significance of *Indonesia Raya* during the struggle for independence. This aligns with R. Lestari et al. (2022), who assert that linking historical content with music enriches students' learning experiences because music can bridge the emotional connection between the past and the present.

Findings from observations show that the use of national songs creates a more enthusiastic learning environment and strengthens a sense of togetherness in the classroom. Teachers use the songs not only at the start of lessons but also at the end to leave a positive impression on students. This practice shows that songs function as an “emotional bridge” that helps students connect emotionally with the learning material. These results are supported by Campbell (2018), who states that music in education helps build collective identity and encourages social solidarity because it touches learners’ emotional dimension.

Integrating national songs into learning also contributes to enhancing students’ historical awareness of Indonesia’s struggle for independence. Teachers use song lyrics such as Hari Merdeka and Bagimu Negeri to illustrate values of sacrifice and the spirit of independence. Through this approach, students learn history not merely as a sequence of events, but as an emotional experience relevant to their lives. This aligns with Rachmat (2024), who emphasizes that civic education for Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia must be engaging and context-based to maintain their sense of attachment to their home country.

Although the integration of national songs into learning proves effective, this study also identifies several challenges, such as limited instructional time and the lack of teachers with strong backgrounds in arts or socio-humanities. Nonetheless, teachers continue to innovate by using simple technologies such as televisions and speakers to play songs and learning videos. The facilities provided by the head of the learning center play a crucial role in supporting the sustainability of the program. This aligns with Wulandari & Kristiawan (2017), who highlight that supportive leadership and a conducive learning environment are essential foundations for strengthening character education.

Beyond classroom activities, the integration of national songs is expanded through various extracurricular programs, including singing competitions and Indonesian cultural performances. These activities provide opportunities for students to creatively express their national identity. These findings are consistent with Qondias et al. (2024), who argue that arts activities involving national songs can strengthen solidarity, foster pride, and increase students’ sense of belonging to national culture because they provide both aesthetic and emotional experiences.

In addition to pedagogical impacts, the integration of national songs also has significant social value, especially for children of migrant workers living in environments heavily influenced by foreign cultures. National songs serve as media for preserving culture and symbols that connect them emotionally to their homeland. Divana et al. (2024) highlight that culture- and patriotism-based education in Malaysia plays a major role in maintaining the national identity of Indonesian diaspora children. In this context, national songs function as emotional and spiritual reminders of their national roots.

Overall, the findings confirm that integrating national patriotic songs into various subjects at the Muhammadiyah Learning Center in Kepong constitutes an effective and contextual character education practice. This strategy helps students develop a comprehensive understanding of nationalism through academic lessons, arts activities, and complementary social experiences. By combining cognitive, affective, and cultural dimensions, teachers successfully create a learning process that not only imparts knowledge but also strengthens students’ national consciousness.



National Holiday Commemorations as Intensive Moments for Strengthening Nationalism

The findings of the study reveal that commemorations of national holidays such as Independence Day, Heroes' Day, and Youth Pledge Day play a central role in strengthening nationalism among students at the Muhammadiyah Learning Center in Kepong, Malaysia. These activities are not merely ceremonial; they serve as reflective and educational platforms that foster patriotism, pride, and solidarity among the students. Through national-themed activities such as flag ceremonies, competitions, and cultural performances, students engage in value-based learning that incorporates both emotional and social dimensions.

Observations show that each national holiday celebration at the learning center includes creative activities such as patriotic speech competitions, recitations of heroic poetry, and performances of Indonesian cultural arts. Teachers and the head of the learning center view these activities as ways to cultivate togetherness and to remind students of the nation's historical struggles. These findings are consistent with Makmur et al. (2023), who explain that national holiday celebrations within migrant children's educational environments function as an anchor of identity, namely a cultural and emotional bond that helps them remain connected to their home country through shared emotional experiences.



Figure 3. The flag ceremony held every Monday at the learning center

The implementation of the weekly Monday flag ceremony is an important component in cultivating a sense of patriotism among the students. Although the ceremony is conducted in a limited indoor space and without a permanent flagpole, it is carried out with solemnity and respect. Students enthusiastically sing Indonesia Raya and recite the student pledge, demonstrating that the meaning of the ceremony is shaped more by shared values and commitment than by physical facilities. These findings are reinforced

by Annisa et al. (2024), who explain that routine activities such as flag ceremonies and singing national songs play a major role in building discipline, responsibility, and respect for national symbols.

The commemoration of Independence Day on August 17 is one of the most memorable moments for the students. Observations show that they display high enthusiasm when participating in traditional competitions, decorating rooms with red-and-white themes, and wearing various patriotic accessories. These activities not only foster a sense of togetherness but also cultivate patriotic spirit within the school environment. This finding aligns with Rachmat (2024), who emphasizes that nationalism-themed activities are essential in strengthening the national identity of migrant children amid the cultural influences of the host country.

In addition to formal events, teachers also use these commemorative moments to instill understanding about national history and the values of Indonesia's struggle for independence. Songs such as *Bagimu Negeri* and *Hari Merdeka* are used as learning media to raise students' awareness of the meaning of independence and the responsibility of the younger generation to carry forward the nation's legacy. Lestari et al. (2020) found that national songs possess strong affective power in fostering pride and nationalism because they convey historical narratives that can be collectively felt and interpreted.

Field observations also reveal that these commemorative activities serve as a platform for developing students' social character. Students actively collaborate in preparing event activities, from taking roles as ceremony leaders, Pancasila readers, to becoming competition committee members. This process cultivates responsibility and *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) among students. This supports the view of Muhammad Fadhel et al. (2024), who assert that direct student involvement in patriotic activities significantly contributes to the formation of national identity, as real experiences provide stronger meaning than theoretical lessons.

The data further indicate that national commemoration activities strengthen students' emotional attachment to Indonesia. When the national anthem is sung together, an emotional atmosphere emerges that reflects their closeness to their homeland. Campbell (2021) notes that singing within social rituals can strengthen solidarity and foster collective emotional bonds. In this sense, music serves as a bridge connecting individual identity with a broader national identity.

On several occasions, national commemorations are combined with religious events, such as the Prophet's Birthday or the Islamic New Year. Teachers integrate national songs into these events, demonstrating harmony between religious values and national values. This approach aligns with Wulandari and Kristiawan (2017), who argue that national character formation becomes more effective when integrated with school culture and spiritual values familiar to the students' daily lives.

Beyond emotional attachment, these activities also stimulate civic curiosity—students' interest in national history and civic life. Teachers report that after participating in the Independence Day celebration, many students began asking questions about the president, Indonesian history, and national symbols. This phenomenon is strengthened by Della (2022), who found that national songs can stimulate young people's interest in their national identity.

For migrant children, the meaning of these activities becomes even more significant. Divana et al. (2024) show that patriotic activities in nonformal educational institutions in



Malaysia serve as important spaces for Indonesian children to maintain their national identity within multicultural communities. Therefore, national holiday celebrations at the learning center are not merely ceremonial events but serve as effective cultural strategies for strengthening national pride and a sense of belonging to Indonesia.

Overall, this study demonstrates that national holiday celebrations at the Muhammadiyah Kepong Learning Center function as integrated platforms for teaching national values. Through these activities, students not only learn about history but also experience nationalism directly through emotional engagement, cooperation, and social interaction. This approach enables more holistic national character formation because it simultaneously engages cognitive, affective, and social dimensions. These findings are in line with Vargas-Salfate et al. (2020), who state that national identity develops strongly when individuals participate in meaningful collective experiences that foster a sense of unity. Therefore, national holiday celebrations at the learning center play a vital role in strengthening students' national consciousness.

Effectiveness, Challenges, and Implications

The overall findings of this study show that strategies for strengthening nationalism through national patriotic songs and nationalism-themed activities at the Muhammadiyah Learning Center in Kepong are effective in shaping students' national awareness and pride. The four practices habituation of singing national songs, internalization of lyric meanings, integration into learning, and national holiday commemorations work complementarily as a value-based system that reinforces the national identity of Indonesian children living in Malaysia.

Effectiveness of the Strategy

The effectiveness of these strategies can be seen in the changes in students' attitudes during daily activities at the learning center. Observations indicate that students demonstrate increased respect for national symbols, can sing national songs correctly, and show a more mature understanding of national values. This finding aligns with A. D. Lestari et al. (2020), who state that regularly singing national songs can internalize patriotism through meaningful repetition.

Students' understanding of song content has also developed. They begin to grasp the moral messages contained in the lyrics, which is then reflected in positive behaviors such as mutual respect, cooperation, and caring for others. This finding is consistent with Qondias et al. (2024), who assert that interpreting national songs can strengthen civic responsibility by fostering a sense of belonging and national pride. The impact becomes even stronger because national songs are integrated into various learning activities, including history, Civics (PPKn), and arts. This aligns with Atika et al. (2019), who emphasize that character values are more effectively formed when integrated across learning contexts rather than taught as separate topics.

National holiday commemorations further strengthen students' sense of togetherness and collective identity. For Indonesian children growing up in migrant families, such activities hold important social meaning because they help them remain connected to their cultural and national roots. Makmur et al. (2023) explain that patriotic activities

conducted abroad serve as forms of identity reinforcement that sustain national memory even when children live in a different cultural environment.

Implementation Challenges

Several challenges emerged in implementing these strategies. First, the limited learning time at the center means that nationalism-based activities cannot always be carried out in great depth. This is consistent with Kamil (2009), who notes that nonformal education institutions often face time constraints, requiring teachers to adapt their methods to existing conditions. Second, the number of teachers with backgrounds in arts or socio-humanities is still limited. To address this, teachers creatively use simple technologies such as music players and videos. Gymnastiar et al. (2024) found that accessible digital media can enhance migrant children's emotional connection to their national culture.

Additionally, the social environment in Malaysia influences students' identity formation. Many students use Malay more frequently in daily life, creating the potential for reduced use of Indonesian. Aswan et al. (2023) note that changes in language and living environments can shift national identity awareness if not supported by adequate cultural education. In this context, national songs play an essential role as media for maintaining the Indonesian language and reinforcing students' Indonesian identity.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study provides theoretical implications for the development of culture-based character education. Field findings support the views of Lickona (2018) and Vargas-Salfate et al. (2020), which argue that national character is shaped not only through knowledge acquisition but also through repeated emotional experiences and meaningful social interactions. In this context, national patriotic songs function as pedagogical tools capable of simultaneously engaging students' cognitive, affective, and moral aspects.

Practically, this study offers a strategic model for nonformal educational institutions abroad to instill national values through simple yet enjoyable activities. Divana et al. (2024) emphasize that culture- and patriotism-based education in migrant communities can sustainably strengthen national identity. Additionally, the findings highlight the need for collaborative support between teachers, learning center leaders, and parents. Niehlah et al. (2023) report that the social involvement of migrant families plays a crucial role in maintaining national values among Indonesian children living abroad. With such support, character education extends beyond the learning space and becomes part of the community's cultural environment.

Overall, this study reaffirms that character formation through national patriotic songs and nationalism-themed activities is an effective, contextually relevant, and sustainable approach. This strategy not only strengthens the national identity and pride of Indonesian students in multicultural settings but also contributes meaningfully to the development of culture-based character education theory.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study affirm that strategies for strengthening nationalist character through national patriotic songs at the Muhammadiyah Learning Center in Kepong,



Malaysia, are proven to be effective and contextually relevant in shaping the national awareness of Indonesian children living abroad. The four key strategies routine habituation of singing national songs, internalization of lyric meanings, integration of songs across subjects, and the implementation of national holiday commemorations operate synergistically and mutually reinforce one another in building students' national identity.

The habituation of singing national songs on a regular basis successfully instills a sense of patriotism and pride in national symbols. The internalization of song lyrics deepens students' cognitive and affective understanding of values related to struggle, unity, and national responsibility. Integrating national songs into subjects such as Civics (PPKn), Social Studies (IPS), and Arts and Culture facilitates contextual learning that fosters practical understanding of national history and Pancasila values. Meanwhile, national holiday celebrations function as intensive moments that strengthen emotional bonds, solidarity, and students' collective spirit as members of the Indonesian nation within the multicultural environment of Malaysia.

In the context of Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia, these findings carry important implications: character education based on national songs is not only a tool for cultural preservation but also a strategic instrument for maintaining national identity amid pressures of cultural assimilation. Activities such as singing together, understanding song meanings, and commemorating national days create social spaces that allow students to express pride, a sense of belonging, and loyalty to Indonesia.

Furthermore, this study offers practical implications for nonformal educational institutions abroad to develop adaptive, creative, and culturally grounded character education strategies. Collaborative support among teachers, learning center leaders, parents, and the diaspora community is vital for sustaining the cultivation of national values. When taught reflectively and integratively, national patriotic songs shape not only memorization but also a living and deeply rooted national consciousness within students. Thus, character education through national songs is proven to be an effective approach in shaping young Indonesians with a strong identity, pride in their nation, and readiness to become global citizens who are principled, religious, and nationalistic. This study is expected to serve as both a conceptual and practical reference for developing culturally grounded character education models, particularly within diaspora settings or Indonesian communities abroad.

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