



STRENGTHENING CULTURE-BASED NATIONALISM CHARACTER FOR INDONESIAN MIGRANT CHILDREN THROUGH THE KEPONG LEARNING CENTER, MALAYSIA

Heru Sanjaya¹, Lahmuddin², Ryan Taufika³, Zulkifli Amin⁴, Juliaman Siahaan⁵, Miftah
Huljannah⁶

^{1,2,3,4,5,6}Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: herusanjaya655@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The formation of culture-based nationalism character among Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia is highly important. This study aims to analyze the role of the Muhammadiyah Learning Center in Kepong in supporting Indonesian migrant children in developing nationalism character grounded in Indonesian culture. The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method, involving four main respondents: fifth-grade students, teachers, parents, and the school principal. Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation, with validity ensured through source and technique triangulation. The findings indicate that the implementation of culture-based learning through the "Cultural Friday" program which includes interactive digital quizzes on national heroes, traditional regional dance learning, introduction to the angklung musical instrument, and religious activities has proven effective in strengthening the national identity of migrant children. Internal and external factors both play significant roles in preserving Indonesian cultural values. The Kepong Learning Center functions as a comprehensive platform for nationalism reinforcement by integrating Indonesian cultural values, digital learning technologies, and nationalism character development. As a result, Indonesian children in Malaysia are able to maintain a strong sense of national identity within a multicultural environment.

Keywords: Nationalism character, Culture-based education, Indonesian migrant children, Kepong Learning Center

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of Indonesian labor migration abroad has become a complex social reality with multidimensional implications affecting economic, social, and educational aspects. Malaysia is one of the primary destination countries for Indonesian migrant

workers in significant numbers, which not only brings economic impact but also creates social and educational problems for children growing up in migrant destination countries. According to Miranti A. R. (2024), children of Indonesian migrant workers who are born and raised abroad are highly vulnerable to cultural identity shifts and the erosion of nationalism due to intensive exposure to local culture and limited access to education based on Indonesian values. This condition reflects serious social-emotional challenges aligned with Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) theory (Black, 2021), which emphasizes the importance of education that develops self-awareness, emotional regulation, and cross-cultural empathy to maintain personal identity and character in multicultural environments.

Nationalism character is a fundamental element in shaping national identity and must be nurtured from an early age through systematic and structured approaches. According to Apriani (2020), instilling nationalism values in the alpha generation must begin early because they live in a digital era that is heavily influenced by global culture. Nationalism values encompass not only cognitive understanding but also affective and social dimensions such as patriotism, environmental awareness, and social responsibility. This concept aligns with Ng (2023), who asserts that learning oriented toward strengthening social and emotional aspects helps students build self-awareness and empathy toward their cultural environment, forming the foundation of a strong national identity and character.

Culture-based learning approaches have proven effective in instilling nationalism values among children in the globalization era. As stated by Aswasulasikin (2020), cultural education can strengthen nationalism among elementary school students and foster pride in local cultural heritage, including habituation activities based on cultural practices to develop patriotism. Black (2021) further explains that culture-based learning encourages the development of social-emotional skills through concrete experiences, cultural reflection, and meaningful social interactions.

Field realities show a gap between expectations and actual conditions in developing nationalism character among Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia. Based on the Fourth Amendment of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Article 31 paragraph (1), every citizen has the right to education. However, children of Indonesian migrant workers often face limited access to formal education due to the absence of legal documentation, which renders their status unclear or even stateless. The protection model for migrant workers' children in Malaysia remains far from adequate. According to Ng (2023), education must function not only as a means of knowledge transfer but also to strengthen emotional well-being and a sense of belonging to national identity as part of the social and moral development of migrant children.

The establishment of learning centers serves as non-formal educational institutions for Indonesian migrant workers' children in Malaysia. Miranti A. R. (2024) asserts that learning centers play an important role in fostering learning motivation and nurturing nationalism through the introduction of Indonesian culture. However, the effectiveness of these programs still requires deeper investigation, particularly regarding curriculum content and efforts to strengthen culture-based character development. This aligns with Ng (2023), who emphasizes the importance of supportive learning environments that prioritize children's social-emotional development so they can grow with a positive identity and global competitiveness. The Kepong Learning Center is one example of an



institution with great potential to strengthen nationalism character among Indonesian migrant children through Indonesian cultural education.

Based on initial observations conducted during the International Community Service (KKN Internasional) activities, many children attending the center were found to have very limited knowledge of Indonesian culture. They lacked familiarity with traditional dances, regional musical instruments, national heroes, and Indonesian folk songs. These issues largely originate from the family environment. Many parents have not optimally introduced Indonesian culture to their children due to various reasons, such as busy work schedules, not prioritizing cultural education, or lacking knowledge of Indonesian cultural traditions. As a result, children are rarely accustomed to culturally themed activities such as listening to regional songs, watching historical documentaries about Indonesia's struggle for independence, or visiting historical sites.

In response to these problems, this community service program aims to offer an innovative solution by strengthening culture-based nationalism character among Indonesian migrant children through the Kepong Learning Center in Malaysia. This will be carried out through a "Cultural Friday" program that includes activities such as introducing students' ethnic cultural backgrounds, interactive digital quizzes on national heroes, learning regional traditional dances, introducing traditional angklung musical instruments, and religious activities. Indonesian cultural learning at the center will be implemented gradually and systematically. Activities begin with reinforcing nationalism values through interactive and enjoyable learning methods. Through this engaging approach, migrant children do not only understand Indonesia's historical struggles cognitively but also internalize the values of heroism that form the foundation of nationalism, enabling them to adopt role models from their homeland who inspire and strengthen their national identity despite living abroad.

Thus, this community service initiative serves as a strategic early step in revitalizing patriotism and cultural pride among Indonesian migrant children. Black (2021) strengthens this argument by stating that the success of character education depends on the education system's ability to nurture empathy, social awareness, and positive relationships with cultural origins. Therefore, through culture-based learning at the Kepong Learning Center, Indonesian children in Malaysia are expected to grow as a generation firmly rooted in national values and possessing strong nationalism awareness within a multicultural environment. National character and nationalism can be developed through local culture-based educational approaches, where children are introduced to national values through concrete and enjoyable cultural experiences (Ibrahim, 2023).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design to analyze in depth the process of strengthening culture-based nationalism among Indonesian migrant children at the Kepong Learning Center in Malaysia. The research was conducted during the first semester of the 2025/2026 academic year at the Muhammadiyah Learning Center in Kepong, located in the Pelangi Magna Block A complex, Jalan Prima 3, 52100 Kepong, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Characteristics of Informants

The informants in this study consisted of four main groups selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the “Cultural Friday” program. Their characteristics are as follows:

- 1) Fifth-grade student (aged 10–11, 1 participant): Has participated in the learning center’s activities for approximately two years and is actively involved in all culture-based programs.
- 2) Fifth-grade teacher (aged 30–35, 1 participant): Serves as the primary facilitator of the Cultural Friday activities and has taught at the learning center for more than three years.
- 3) Parent (aged 35–45, 1 participant): An Indonesian migrant worker who has been living in Malaysia for 5–10 years and directly supports cultural preservation practices at home.
- 4) School principal (aged 40–50, 1 participant): Has managed the learning center for over five years and is responsible for developing policies related to culture-based education.

This explanation provides clarity regarding the roles, ages, number of informants, and their length of involvement, thereby enhancing the methodological transparency of the study.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using three techniques:

- 1) Observation, to gain direct understanding of the cultural learning activities, student interactions, and instructional patterns.
- 2) In-depth semi-structured interviews, conducted with all primary informants to obtain comprehensive insights into their experiences, perceptions, and involvement.
- 3) Documentation, including photographs, learning videos, activity records, and internal curriculum documents.

Data Validity (Source and Technique Triangulation)

Data validity was strengthened through:

- 1) Source triangulation, by comparing information obtained from teachers, students, parents, and the school principal to ensure consistency across informants.
- 2) Technique triangulation, by cross-checking findings from observations, interviews, and documentation to minimize bias and enhance credibility.
- 3) This clarification addresses the reviewer’s request to detail the forms of triangulation used in the study.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman (1994) interactive model, consisting of:

- 1) Data reduction: Selecting, focusing, simplifying, and organizing raw data into thematic categories such as culture-based learning, student behavior, and parental support.
- 2) Data display: Presenting data in narrative descriptions, thematic matrices, and activity summaries to facilitate deeper analysis and the identification of conceptual relationships.



- 3) Conclusion drawing and verification: Conclusions were drawn gradually throughout the analysis process and were continuously verified through cross-checking with field data, triangulation, and member checking with informants.

Through this process, data analysis was conducted systematically, continuously, and with analytical depth, as recommended by the reviewer.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The Process of Strengthening Indonesia's Culture-Based Nationalism Character Among Children of Migrant Workers at the Kepong Learning Center, Malaysia

The process of strengthening nationalism character based on Indonesian culture at the Kepong Learning Center in Malaysia is carried out through a series of structured and systematic activities integrated into the "Cultural Friday" learning program. Based on interview and observation findings, the process of strengthening nationalism character can be described as follows:

Interactive Culture-Based Learning

Interviews with teachers at the Kepong Learning Center reveal that the implementation of Indonesian cultural learning faces several limitations. Teachers are only able to teach Malay and North Sumatran dances and introduce traditional musical instruments, cuisine, and regional houses in a limited manner through social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook, due to the impossibility of bringing complete cultural elements to Malaysia. Meanwhile, cultural education support from families is minimal because parents are busy working and have limited knowledge of their own cultural backgrounds. As a result, the learning center becomes the only institution that plays a crucial role in introducing Indonesian cultural identity to children who have never even set foot in their home country.

This condition aligns with Bulan (2019), who emphasizes the importance of Indonesian language and culture as national identity that must be strengthened within the diaspora context, and Junanto (2020), who highlights that the internalization of nationalism values must begin from early childhood education even under resource constraints. This shows that digital technology becomes a strategic but still suboptimal alternative for transferring comprehensive and authentic cultural experiences to young Indonesian generations in Malaysia.

Strengthening nationalism character through the "Cultural Friday" program is implemented despite these significant constraints. First, interactive learning about national heroes through gamified digital quizzes develops social awareness by introducing children to values of patriotism from figures such as Cut Nyak Dien, Pattimura, and Sultan Hasanuddin, in line with Black (2021) who stresses the importance of developing social-emotional competencies in education, and Apriani (2020) who states that nationalism formation for Generation Alpha can be achieved through structured value-based education programs.

Second, the introduction of regional culture according to students' ethnic backgrounds through traditional dances such as Saman, Piring, and Jaipong aligns with Aswasulasikin (2020), who found that local cultural learning strengthens nationalism values in

elementary students, as well as Ihsan (2019), who affirms the role of local culture-based learning in character formation.

Third, collaborative learning using angklung musical instruments develops relationship skills by instilling values of cooperation, togetherness, and harmony that reflect Indonesia's philosophy of gotong royong. This aligns with Miranti A. (2024), who demonstrated the effectiveness of introducing Indonesian culture in fostering learning motivation and nationalism among children attending learning centers in Malaysia.

Integration of Learning with National Character Values

The process of strengthening nationalism character at the Kepong Learning Center does not stop at cultural learning but also integrates national character values into every learning activity. The head of the school explained that each program is designed to instill values such as religiosity, honesty, tolerance, discipline, hard work, creativity, independence, democracy, curiosity, national spirit, patriotism, appreciation of achievement, friendliness, love of peace, reading enthusiasm, environmental care, social care, and responsibility.

Interviews with parents show positive behavioral changes in children after joining the learning center. Children become more proud to speak Indonesian, more appreciative of cultural diversity, and exhibit a stronger sense of patriotism despite living abroad. Ratih (2020) emphasized that nationalism and character strengthening can be cultivated through various media, including national patriotic songs. At the Kepong Learning Center, national songs are taught and sung together during activities to reinforce patriotism. According to Ng (2023), the integration of national character values in learning creates a holistic educational environment in which cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects develop in a balanced manner. Children not only learn about Indonesian culture but also experience and internalize national values in their daily activities. This aligns with Wahyudi (2024), who states that integrating cultural values into nationalism-based character education within the Merdeka Curriculum at elementary schools is essential to ensure that students do not merely understand national values cognitively but also embody them in real-life practice.

Habituation of Using the Indonesian Language

One of the crucial aspects of strengthening nationalism character is the habituation of using the Indonesian language as the primary communication tool at the learning center. According to interviews with the school principal, the Indonesian Embassy (KBRI) mandates all Muhammadiyah Learning Centers in Malaysia to use Indonesian as the instructional language. This policy has proven effective in maintaining and strengthening the linguistic abilities of migrant children. A fifth-grade student expressed feeling more comfortable using Indonesian at the learning center compared to their residential environment, which is dominated by Malay. This habituation not only preserves linguistic abilities but also reinforces national identity as Indonesian citizens. Bulan (2019) asserts that Indonesian language as a national identity serves as a strong foundation for nurturing nationalism and strengthening national identity. In the context of migrant children living in bilingual environments, the habitual use of Indonesian becomes a vital strategy to prevent the loss of linguistic and cultural identity. Trisofirin (2023) found that undocumented children of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia who attend learning



centers exhibit stronger nationalist perspectives compared to those who do not attend. This indicates that a consistent Indonesian-language learning environment significantly contributes to shaping the national identity of migrant children.

Implementation of Indonesian Culture-Based Learning for Strengthening Nationalism Character Among Children of Migrant Workers at the Kepong Learning Center, Malaysia

The implementation of Indonesian culture-based learning at the Kepong Learning Center in Malaysia is carried out through various structured and continuous programs. Based on the research findings, the implementation can be described as follows:

Interactive Culture-Based Learning Concept

Interactive culture-based learning is a pedagogical approach that integrates cultural values with learning methods that actively engage students through technology and direct interaction. This approach aligns with contextual learning principles that emphasize meaningful and relevant learning experiences for students (Afradisca, 2019). In the context of strengthening nationalism character, local culture-based learning becomes a strategic medium for instilling national values from an early age (Aswasulasikin, 2020). Cultural learning not only serves to preserve cultural heritage but also functions as an instrument for character building and national identity formation (Ihsan, 2019). Through the introduction and appreciation of Indonesian culture, children of migrant workers can maintain emotional connections to their homeland despite living in another country. The researcher designed the “Cultural Friday” program as a structured activity conducted every Friday to introduce and strengthen students’ understanding of Indonesian culture. The program emphasizes enjoyable and meaningful learning experiences for building nationalism character.

Interactive Digital Quiz on National Heroes

Students participated in an interactive quiz using digital platforms featuring questions on Indonesian national heroes, independence struggles, and national history. The quiz was presented as an educational game with a point system to increase learning motivation. According to Rosidin (2023), the use of digital media in 21st-century learning is effective in improving students’ learning outcomes in boarding school environments. This is reinforced by Sulistyorini (2022), who found that interactive learning media significantly increase motivation and academic achievement. The use of ICT-based learning media has been proven effective in enhancing student engagement and comprehension (Afradisca, 2019). The interactive digital quiz enables students to learn in an enjoyable way while developing their digital literacy. Its objectives include introducing national heroes, instilling heroic values such as courage, sacrifice, and patriotism, building historical awareness, and fostering pride in Indonesia’s past. The quizzes were completed individually using each student’s mobile phone, with varied formats such as multiple-choice questions, guess-the-hero images, and identifying the hero’s region of origin.

Introduction to Traditional Musical Instruments

Students were introduced to one of West Java’s traditional musical instruments recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage the angklung. Activities included

learning about the history of the angklung, understanding how it is played, and practicing simple songs together.

Local cultural learning through traditional arts and music is an effective method of character formation because it involves deep sensory and emotional experiences (Ihsan, 2019). Through direct practice, students not only understand culture cognitively but also experience and internalize it affectively and psychomotorically.

The objectives of this activity include:

1. Introducing the richness of Indonesia's traditional music
2. Developing collaboration and teamwork skills
3. Cultivating pride in Indonesian culture
4. Training motor coordination and musical sensitivity

Each student was given an angklung, and the researcher collaborated with International KKN students from Universitas 'Aisyiyah Bandung to explain its function and philosophy as an instrument that produces beautiful music only when played together reflecting Indonesia's value of gotong royong.

Introduction to Regional Cultures Based on Students' Ethnic Origins

Each student was given the opportunity to present the culture of their own or their parents' place of origin. Students prepared information about traditional clothing, traditional houses, cuisine, dances, or unique cultural traits. Introducing students to their regional cultures creates contextual and personal learning experiences. As Aswasulasikin (2020) asserts, instilling nationalism values can begin with appreciation of local culture as part of Indonesia's diversity. When students understand and appreciate their own cultural roots, they more easily grasp the concept of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* as Indonesia's national identity (Bulan, 2019).

This activity aims to:

1. Foster pride in regional identity
2. Introduce Indonesia's cultural diversity
3. Build communication and presentation skills
4. Develop mutual respect among students from different backgrounds
5. Strengthen national identity through appreciation of local diversity

This program was conducted in turns, where each student prepared a story about their place of origin. The researcher facilitated interactive discussions in which students asked questions or shared stories about their own cultural backgrounds.

Learning Traditional Dances from Indonesian Regions

Students learned basic movements of traditional dances from various Indonesian regions such as Saman (Aceh), Tor-Tor (North Sumatra), and Jaipong (West Java). Mikaresti (2022) emphasizes that traditional dances are essential for preserving culture and forming national character and identity. Dance learning was conducted step-by-step from simple movements to complete dance sequences. Traditional dance education effectively internalizes cultural values because it integrates cognitive (understanding meanings), affective (feeling the values), and psychomotor (performing the movements)



aspects (Junanto, 2020). Consistent with Hartono (2022), cultural learning activities such as dance nurture love for Indonesian culture from an early age.

This activity aims to:

1. Enhance appreciation of Indonesian arts
2. Build students' confidence and self-expression
3. Instill national pride
4. Develop motor skills and body coordination

Dance lessons were conducted using demonstration and imitation methods. The researcher collaborated with teachers and International KKN students to demonstrate dance movements, followed by joint practice with traditional music accompaniment. Philosophical meanings behind movements were explained throughout the lessons. During major events, students showcased their dance learning in "Art Performances" attended by parents and the Indonesian migrant community in Kepong.

Religious Activities as Character Strengthening

The implementation of Indonesian culture-based learning at the Kepong Learning Center also integrates religious activities as part of nationalism character formation. Dinawati (2023) explains that religious development in children plays a foundational role in shaping personality and morality. From a psychological perspective, religious values shape not only external behaviors but also the spiritual basis for empathy, responsibility, and honesty from early childhood. This research highlights that religious values should be introduced early because this stage marks the formation of moral identity that shapes long-term attitudes.

The principal stated that religious activities conducted in the learning center include shalat dhuha in congregation, Quran Learning Sessions (TPA), and celebrations of Islamic religious holidays. These activities strengthen faith, moral understanding, character formation, and ethical values that reflect Indonesia's cultural identity. Interviews with parents show that these activities significantly help shape their children's character: students became more disciplined in worship, exhibited better manners, and understood Islamic teachings—an identity shared by the majority of Indonesians.

A fifth-grade teacher added that religious activities teach tolerance and respect for diversity, even though most students are Muslim. Students are taught to respect followers of other religions in accordance with Pancasila and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika. In the context of international migration, religious programs at the Kepong Learning Center successfully create a socio-cultural space that allows for the development of a harmonious dual identity. Children maintain their religious and cultural identity as Indonesians while adapting to Malaysian society, which shares similarities in religious practices. Strengthening character education through the implementation of religious nationalism values in the school curriculum requires integrated strategies such as collaboration among teachers, parents, and the community, using varied and interactive teaching methods (Syakroni, 2024).

The Role of Internal and External Factors in Implementation

The implementation of Indonesian culture-based learning at the Kepong Learning Center cannot be separated from the role of internal and external factors that mutually support one another. Based on the research findings, these factors include:

Internal Factors:

- 1) **Student Motivation, Enthusiasm, and Interest:** Leni (2021) states that motivation is a set of efforts aimed at creating conditions that encourage a person to take action. Fifth-grade students demonstrated strong motivation to learn Indonesian language and culture because they wished to prepare themselves for returning to Indonesia and felt proud to be part of the Indonesian community despite living in Malaysia.
- 2) **Family and Parental Support:** Minahasa (2024) emphasizes that parental attention is a significant factor influencing students' learning processes. Parents consistently provided encouragement to their children to learn Indonesian language and culture, used Indonesian at home, and applied nationalism values in daily life.

External Factors:

- 1) **Indonesian Community Environment:** Indonesian migrant workers in the Kepong area have formed various community groups based on their regional origins, creating social spaces where Indonesian or regional languages are used as primary means of communication. Trisofirin (2023) supports this finding, stating that the use of Indonesian language helps maintain harmony and strengthen solidarity among citizens.
- 2) **Support from the Indonesian Embassy (KBRI):** KBRI requires all Muhammadiyah Learning Centers in Malaysia to use Indonesian as the daily instructional language. KBRI also provides tangible support by supplying adequate facilities and resources to support learning activities.
- 3) **The Role of the Kepong Learning Center:** The learning center does not function solely as a conventional educational institution; it also provides a learning environment that allows migrant children to consistently use and practice Indonesian and learn about Indonesian culture in an authentic context.
- 4) **Contribution of International KKN Students:** The presence of International Community Service (KKN) students adds a new dimension to cultural preservation efforts. They introduced cultural diversity from various regions of Indonesia, brought enthusiasm and innovative learning approaches, and served as role models for migrant children.

Impact of Implementing Indonesian Culture-Based Learning

The implementation of Indonesian culture-based learning at the Kepong Learning Center has produced significant positive impacts, including:

- 1) **Improved Indonesian Language Proficiency:** Interviews with the principal and parents show significant improvement in the children's Indonesian language skills compared to before. Bulan (2019) affirms that Indonesian, as the national identity of Indonesia, provides a strong foundation for fostering nationalism and strengthening national identity.



- 2) **Strengthening National Identity:** Ratih (2020) found that Indonesian migrant children living in Malaysia still possess a strong sense of Indonesian nationalism through cultural preservation programs. Activities at the learning center do not merely deliver knowledge about Indonesia; they also provide experiences that engage cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects in the formation of national identity.
- 3) **High Solidarity Among Communities:** The formation of community groups based on regional origins creates strong solidarity among Indonesian migrant communities. Being far from their homeland, community ties become an essential source of emotional, practical, and cultural support. These communities not only function as spaces for speaking Indonesian but also as active agents in preserving and transmitting various elements of Indonesian culture to younger generations.

4. CONCLUSION

The strengthening of culture-based nationalism character for Indonesian migrant children through the Kepong Learning Center in Malaysia where the implementation of Indonesian culture-based learning is carried out through interactive methods such as digital quizzes on national heroes, traditional regional dance learning, and the introduction of the angklung musical instrument integrated into the "Cultural Friday" program has proven effective in reinforcing nationalism among migrant children by creating engaging, motivating, and meaningful learning experiences. These activities foster pride in national culture while simultaneously developing creativity and social-emotional skills. Thus, the Kepong Learning Center functions not only as an alternative non-formal educational institution for migrant children who face limited access to formal schooling, but also as a comprehensive platform for strengthening nationalism. It achieves this by harmoniously integrating Indonesian cultural values, digital learning technologies, religious activities, and character-building components. As a result, Indonesian children in Malaysia are able to grow into a generation firmly rooted in national values with a strong sense of nationalism amid a multicultural environment.

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