

## **CULTURAL LITERACY-BASED COACHING MODEL: ENHANCING QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK**

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### **Abstract**

This study is based on the urgency of developing the quality of early childhood education through an approach relevant to the local cultural context in the independent curriculum. This study aims to analyze the application of a coaching model based on cultural literacy in improving the quality of early childhood education in the context of the Independent Curriculum. This study uses a qualitative case study approach, where researchers use interviews, observations, and documentation for data collection. The data analysis technique is carried out circular manner, from data display to data reduction and conclusion. The results of the study indicate that the coaching model based on cultural literacy in improving the quality of early childhood education in the context of the Independent Curriculum is carried out through teacher training in cultural literacy, development of local culture-based curriculum and teaching methods, guidance and reflection on the implementation of learning, evaluation and strengthening cultural literacy in learning. This study provides implications for applying a coaching model based on cultural literacy to improve the quality of early childhood education by strengthening local culture-based teaching. This requires ongoing teacher training, development of relevant curriculum, and evaluation and reflection to enhance the implementation of culture-based learning.

**Keywords:** Coaching Model, Cultural Literacy, Independent Curriculum

### **Abstrak**

*Penelitian ini didasarkan pada urgensi pengembangan mutu pendidikan anak usia dini melalui pendekatan yang relevan dengan konteks budaya lokal dalam konteks kurikulum merdeka. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tentang penerapan model coaching berbasis literasi budaya dalam meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan anak usia dini dalam konteks Kurikulum Merdeka. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif jenis studi kasus, di mana peneliti menggunakan wawancara, observasi dan dokumentasi untuk pengumpulan datanya. Teknik analisis datanya dilakukan secara sirkuler, yang dimulai dari display data, reduksi data dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa model coaching berbasis literasi budaya dalam meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan anak usia dini dalam konteks Kurikulum Merdeka dilakukan melalui pelatihan guru dalam literasi budaya, pengembangan kurikulum dan metode pengajaran berbasis budaya lokal, pembimbingan dan refleksi terhadap implementasi pembelajaran, evaluasi dan penguatan literasi budaya dalam pembelajaran. Penelitian ini memberikan implikasi tentang penerapan model coaching berbasis literasi budaya dapat meningkatkan kualitas*

*pendidikan anak usia dini dengan memperkuat pengajaran berbasis budaya lokal. Hal ini mengharuskan pelatihan guru berkelanjutan, pengembangan kurikulum yang relevan, serta evaluasi dan refleksi untuk memperbaiki dan menguatkan implementasi pembelajaran yang berbasis budaya.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Model Pembinaan, Literasi Budaya, Kurikulum Merdeka*

## INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (PAUD) plays a vital role in forming the foundation of children's character and fundamental abilities that will affect their development in the future (Rumbidzai & Achebe, 2023; Ginting, 2024; Tahlia et al., 2024). In Indonesia, early childhood education faces significant challenges, especially regarding the quality of teaching, which still varies from region to region (Saabighoot et al., 2024; Windayani & Sudarma, 2025). This makes it essential to research the application of a coaching model based on cultural literacy in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. This research can help improve the quality of education in the Kindergarten Cluster 01, Dolopo District, Madiun Regency, and contribute to equitable efforts to improve the quality of early childhood education (PAUD) throughout Indonesia. By emphasizing a coaching model that focuses on the development of cultural literacy, the quality of learning in PAUD can improve, which will create a more prepared generation with better skills.

In early childhood education, the quality of teaching and learning is a significant issue (Bati, 2022; Durlak et al., 2022; Su & Zhong, 2022). In many areas, including in the Dolopo District, the quality of early childhood education is still limited by several factors, including limited resources, a lack of interest in integrating local cultural aspects into learning, and the lack of teaching methods that are adaptive to the Merdeka Curriculum. The community is also faced with the challenge of understanding the importance of an educational approach that is not only focused on academic achievement, but also on the development of children's character, attitudes, and social skills. This research is essential to find concrete solutions that can improve the quality of education at the elementary level, especially in less developed environments. In the field, many teachers in Cluster Kindergarten 01, Dolopo District, are still trapped in traditional teaching methods that do not sufficiently facilitate the holistic development of children. The lack of integration of local culture in the curriculum leads to the inability of children to understand and appreciate their cultural heritage. This creates inequality in learning and limits the creative potential of children who should be able to express themselves more freely and contextually. In this context, applying a coaching model based on cultural literacy is critical to bridge this gap and help teachers develop more inclusive and effective strategies in educating early childhood children. This phenomenon creates an urgent need for research that focuses on using cultural literacy to improve the quality of education in Cluster Kindergarten 01.

Various previous studies have examined the application of the coaching model in early childhood education, focusing on developing teacher professionalism and improving the quality of teaching (Yang et al., 2022; Zimmer & Matthews, 2022; Siraj et al., 2023).

However, most of these studies have not emphasized integrating cultural literacy into the coaching model. Existing studies focus more on the academic aspects or technical teaching skills without considering the role of culture in shaping children's character (Anisah, 2023; Sakti, Endraswara, & Rohman, 2024; Saryanto et al., 2023). This study offers a new contribution by combining the concept of cultural literacy-based coaching relevant to the current curriculum, namely the Merdeka Curriculum. The contribution of this study is to show how cultural literacy can function as an effective tool in developing children's social and character skills from an early age.

Several previous researchers have suggested introducing cultural values in early childhood education to form stronger characters and respect diversity (Lash et al., 2022; Kusumawati & Hasanah, 2024; Sakti et al., 2024). However, the application of cultural literacy-based coaching models in early childhood education is still minimal. The weakness of previous studies is the lack of focus on how this coaching strategy can be implemented practically and effectively in the field, especially in the Independent Curriculum, which prioritizes freedom and creativity. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by providing concrete solutions that can be applied in the Kindergarten Cluster 01, Dolopo District, while enriching the literature on applying cultural literacy-based coaching models.

This study's novelty lies in using a cultural literacy-based coaching model in early childhood education, focusing on the Independent Curriculum. Previously, studies examining the application of cultural literacy in education were more limited to elementary or secondary education fields. This study offers a new approach by emphasizing the importance of developing local culture in early childhood learning. The success of the cultural literacy-based coaching model can improve teachers' understanding of the potential of local culture that can be conveyed to children, as well as enhance the quality of education that is more relevant to the social and cultural context of the local community. Therefore, this research must be carried out to create more inclusive and sustainable learning.

This research problem focuses on how applying a cultural literacy-based coaching model can improve the quality of early childhood education in the Kindergarten Cluster 01, Dolopo District, within the Merdeka Curriculum framework. The temporary argument for this problem is that by providing coaching training based on cultural literacy, teachers can better integrate local cultural values into their teaching, supporting the development of children's character and social skills. This study also proposes that with this approach, children will be more familiar with and appreciate their culture, which is an essential foundation for forming self-identity from an early age. This research contributes to a new understanding of how local culture can be a key element in improving the quality of PAUD education.

Applying a cultural literacy-based coaching model in early childhood education is a crucial step to improve the quality of learning in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum.

This study explores how this approach can help teachers in the Kindergarten Cluster 01, Dolopo District, Madiun Regency, provide more relevant, creative, and inclusive education for children. Through implementing a coaching model based on cultural literacy, it is hoped that early childhood education can better respond to the growing community's needs and increasingly appreciate local values that are the nation's wealth. This research is very relevant and needs to be continued to provide new insights into the world of early childhood education in Indonesia.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative research design with a case study approach (Mishra & Dey, 2022; Muzari et al., 2022). The selection of this design is based on exploring in depth the application of a coaching model based on cultural literacy in the context of early childhood education in the Kindergarten Cluster 01, Dolopo District, Madiun Regency. The case study was chosen because it allows researchers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena that occur and provide a real picture of the implementation of this coaching model in a specific environment. This qualitative approach is more appropriate for understanding perceptions, experiences, and dynamics in the field related to the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum by integrating cultural literacy in PAUD learning. This research was conducted in Kindergarten Cluster 01, Dolopo District, Madiun Regency. This location was chosen because it illustrates the characteristics of an area with diverse local cultures but still faces challenges in integrating these cultures into the early childhood education system. Dolopo District, which has several schools with various levels of teaching, provides an opportunity to see firsthand how teachers and educational institutions face challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and how cultural literacy can enrich the teaching and learning process. This location is expected to provide representative results to test the effectiveness of the cultural literacy-based coaching model in improving the quality of PAUD. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with teachers, principals, and education supervisors in Cluster TK 01, as well as direct observation of the learning process in the classroom. Other techniques include document studies related to the Merdeka Curriculum and teaching materials used by teachers. Data analysis was carried out using qualitative analysis techniques, namely data reduction to filter relevant information, data display to present findings systematically, and data verification to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the information obtained (Khoa et al., 2023). To ensure the validity of the data, a triangulation of sources and methods was carried out, and participants were re-checked to ensure the validity and credibility of the research findings.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Teacher Training in Cultural Literacy**

Teacher training in cultural literacy in Cluster Kindergarten 01, Dolopo District, Madiun Regency refers to activities designed to improve teachers' understanding and skills in integrating local cultural values into early childhood learning. This training not only

focuses on teaching academic skills, but also on developing children's character and cultural understanding. Through this training, teachers are given knowledge about the importance of teaching local culture, such as folklore, regional traditions, and regional songs, which enrich students' learning experiences. In the context of the Independent Curriculum, this training aims to provide teachers with the freedom to design teaching materials relevant to students' cultural context, so that they can facilitate the development of children's potential holistically.

Sri Mei, one of the teachers, said that cultural literacy training provided a deeper understanding of incorporating cultural values into children's learning. "Before the training, I didn't think much about how culture could be included in learning, but after the training, I feel more confident in introducing our folklore and culture to children," said Sri Mei. The researchers interpreted that this training has equipped teachers with the skills to make learning more contextual and relevant to children's lives. This allows children to understand the subject matter academically and appreciate their cultural values. Sri Purwanti, the principal of Gugus TK 01, also responded positively to this training. "After the training, we began to appreciate the importance of culture in learning more. I saw teachers becoming more creative in compiling teaching materials that emphasize academics and teach moral and social values contained in local culture". The researchers showed that this training has changed teachers' mindset in their learning approach. They are now more aware of the importance of fostering a sense of pride in local culture from an early age, thus providing a strong foundation for children's character development.

The researchers observed that many teachers began integrating local culture elements into learning. For example, in classroom learning sessions, teachers use regional songs to teach children language and social values. Teachers also use folklore as a tool to teach moral concepts, such as cooperation and honesty. The researchers interpreted that these observations showed that cultural literacy training positively impacted teaching, with teachers being more confident and creative in adapting learning materials to suit local culture. This created a more engaging learning environment and connected learning to children's real lives. Overall, cultural literacy training significantly impacted the quality of learning at the institution. Teachers were now better able to integrate local culture into their learning process, which increased children's interest and understanding of the subject matter and enriched their learning experience by introducing critical cultural values. This suggests that cultural literacy can be vital in early childhood education, supporting children's character development and social skills.

From the data obtained, teachers at the institution began to be more involved in integrating local cultural elements into their learning after participating in cultural literacy training. They became more creative and innovative in designing teaching materials, focusing on academic skills, character development, and artistic introduction to children. This pattern shows that cultural literacy-based training has successfully created positive changes in how teachers approach learning, thereby improving the quality of education that is more inclusive and contextual, as outlined in the Independent Curriculum.

## Development of Local Culture-Based Curriculum and Teaching Methods

The development of local culture-based curriculum and teaching methods in the context of the Independent Curriculum is a process of adapting and designing a curriculum that focuses on academic competencies and integrates local cultural values into learning. In this case, local culture includes folklore, regional songs, traditional arts, and local customs that can be used as learning media relevant to children's lives. In the field, teachers are free to develop teaching materials based on the socio-cultural context of children in Cluster Kindergarten 01, Dolopo District, to create more contextual learning and foster a sense of pride in their cultural heritage. Endang Ekowati Putri Ningsih, one of the teachers at the institution, explained that after attending training related to developing a local culture-based curriculum, she began to integrate folklore and regional songs more often in the learning process. "Previously, I only taught basic lessons such as counting and recognizing letters. Now, I try to link this learning with folklore to teach values such as honesty and respect for parents". The researcher understands that implementing this method has enriched the children's learning experience, allowing them to learn not only from an academic perspective but also through their culture's social and moral values.

Sri Purwanti, the principal at Cluster Kindergarten 01, also expressed the importance of developing a local culture-based curriculum. "We have begun to integrate local culture into every subject. For example, when teaching numbers, we use traditional games that actively involve children," she said. This shows an innovation in teaching methods that rely not only on theory, but also use techniques that invite active participation of children in the learning process. Integrating local culture provides color in learning that is deeper and more relevant for children.

**Figure 1.** Development of Curriculum and Teaching Methods Based on Local Culture

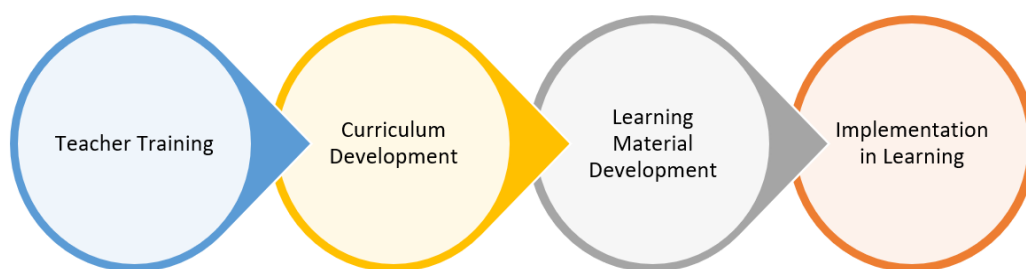


Figure 1 shows that developing a local culture-based curriculum begins with teacher training that provides an understanding of the importance of local culture in early childhood education. After training, teachers design and develop teaching materials that integrate local cultural elements through the Merdeka Curriculum. These teaching materials include various forms such as folklore, traditional games, regional songs, and local arts relevant to children's context. Teachers implement these teaching materials in multiple subjects, not limited to the arts or social fields. This flow shows that the development of a local culture-based curriculum has been successfully integrated into learning in a creative and participatory way. The results of observations show that the implementation of a local culture-based curriculum in Cluster TK 01 has a significant



impact on increasing children's enthusiasm during learning. Teachers appear more creative in developing activities that utilize local culture, such as holding traditional play competitions involving mathematical calculations. In addition, folklore is used by teachers to teach moral and social values. Researchers interpret that integrating local culture in learning not only adds variety to teaching methods, but also strengthens children's understanding of their cultural values, so that they not only learn science but also about their identity.

Overall, developing local culture-based curriculum and teaching methods in Gugus TK 01, Dolopo District, gave positive results. Teachers succeeded in integrating local culture in various aspects of learning, from introductory lessons to social skills. This process makes learning more relevant and engaging for children and introduces them to the cultural values they have carried since childhood. Local culture-based teaching also creates a sense of pride and appreciation for their cultural heritage, supporting children's character development. From the data obtained, developing a local culture-based curriculum in the institution can improve the overall quality of learning. The teachers involved began to focus more on creative ways to integrate local culture in education, which touches on academic aspects and develops children's character and identity. This pattern shows that teaching incorporating local culture effectively makes learning more interesting and helps children better understand and appreciate their own culture. This has a positive impact on a more holistic and comprehensive learning experience.

**Guidance and Reflection on Learning Implementation**

Guidance and reflection on the implementation of learning in the context of a cultural literacy-based coaching model refers to activities in which teachers receive feedback and support to assess and improve the learning process they have implemented. In its application, this guidance aims to evaluate how teachers integrate local cultural values in each stage of learning and how they can improve the method to be more effective. Teacher reflection on their teaching practices is also an important part of improving the quality of education, as it allows teachers to identify strengths and areas for improvement and refine their approach to teaching local culture to children. This guidance is carried out continuously, providing opportunities for teachers to develop and innovate in every aspect of learning.

**Table 1.** Guidance and Reflection on Learning Implementation

INTERVIEW	INDICATORS	INFORMANT
"THIS TRAINING AND MENTORING REALLY HELPED ME TO BE MORE CONFIDENT IN TEACHING. I UNDERSTAND BETTER HOW TO RELATE CULTURAL VALUES IN EVERYDAY LESSONS."	Increased teacher confidence and understanding	Teacher

<b>"AFTER RECEIVING MENTORING, I FEEL THAT MY TEACHING METHODS INVOLVE MORE LOCAL CULTURE. THE CHILDREN ARE MORE ACTIVE AND INTERESTED IN LEARNING."</b>	Increased children's activity and involvement in local culture	Principal
<b>"THE MENTORING WE RECEIVED GAVE ME MANY CREATIVE IDEAS TO TEACH CULTURAL VALUES THROUGH TRADITIONAL GAMES. THE CHILDREN NOW APPRECIATE THEIR CULTURE MORE."</b>	Use of cultural media in learning	Teacher
<b>"I FEEL THAT THIS MENTORING HAS OPENED UP A NEW PERSPECTIVE IN TEACHING. RELATING LOCAL CULTURE TO EACH LESSON MAKES THE CHILDREN MORE CONNECTED TO THE MATERIAL."</b>	Relationship between learning and children's lives	Teacher

Table 1 shows that guidance and reflection on implementing local culture-based learning significantly impact teachers and children. This guidance increases teachers' confidence in linking cultural values to learning materials, which allows children to understand lessons more contextually. Children also become more active and interested after local culture is applied in learning. The use of traditional games as a learning medium has succeeded in making children appreciate their culture more. In addition, guidance opens up new perspectives in teaching, strengthening the relationship between lessons and children's lives. Overall, local culture-based guidance enriches teachers' learning experiences and increases children's involvement and understanding of their culture, strengthening the learning process in PAUD.

Reflection and guidance are essential in improving the quality of local culture-based learning. This guidance enriches teachers' understanding and builds confidence to teach local culture more effectively. The implementation of cultural values in learning has a positive impact on children, especially in increasing their involvement. This shows that mentoring improves teacher skills and directly impacts children in terms of their interest and participation in learning. Overall, implementing this mentoring shows that local culture-based education can improve PAUD's learning quality.

The results of the researcher's observations during the implementation of learning showed that after mentoring, teachers in Cluster TK 01 began to apply more creative methods in teaching by involving local cultural elements, such as folklore and traditional games. Children looked more excited and enthusiastic about participating in learning, which was



reflected in their increased interaction with teaching materials. The researcher interpreted that reflection on the teaching and mentoring carried out significantly impacted the way teachers taught and the way children responded to the learning materials. This reflection allows teachers to assess the effectiveness of their methods and make continuous improvements, so that the quality of learning continues to improve.

Overall, mentoring and reflection on implementing local culture-based learning gave very positive results for teachers and students. Teachers felt more confident integrating local culture into education, increasing children's involvement and interest. This guidance not only focuses on academic aspects but also character development and cultural understanding of children, providing long-term learning benefits. Thus, guidance and reflection on local culture-based teaching have proven effective in improving the quality of early childhood education. The data obtained show that guidance and reflection on implementing local culture-based learning create a mutually beneficial relationship between teachers and children. Teachers trained and supported by appropriate guidance tend to be more creative in using local culture as a learning medium, increasing children's participation and interest in learning. This pattern shows that a local culture-based approach, with guidance and reflection, can create a more enjoyable, contextual, and practical learning experience for children.

### Evaluation and Strengthening of Cultural Literacy in Learning

Evaluation and strengthening of cultural literacy in learning refers to the process by which teachers actively evaluate the application of cultural values in teaching and learning activities and make adjustments or improvements based on the feedback received. Strengthening cultural literacy aims to deepen children's understanding of local cultural values and integrate them more deeply into learning. Evaluation examines how local culture has been incorporated into learning materials and affects children's involvement and understanding. This process helps teachers to continuously adapt their approach, ensuring that learning not only meets academic standards but also enriches children's cultural experiences in line with the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum.

**Table 2.** Evaluation and Strengthening of Cultural Literacy in Learning

INTERVIEW	INDICATORS	INFORMANT
"AFTER CONDUCTING EVALUATION AND STRENGTHENING CULTURAL LITERACY, I SAW THAT THE CHILDREN KNEW AND APPRECIATED THEIR CULTURE BETTER, AND THEY WERE EVEN MORE ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT LEARNING."	Increased understanding and appreciation of local culture by children	Teacher

<b>"THE EVALUATION MADE US REALIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF USING LOCAL CULTURE MORE OFTEN IN LEARNING. THE CHILDREN BECAME MORE CONNECTED TO THE LESSONS."</b>	More frequent use of local culture in learning	Principal
<b>"STRENGTHENING CULTURAL LITERACY HAS A POSITIVE IMPACT, THE CHILDREN FIND IT EASIER TO UNDERSTAND THE MATERIAL BECAUSE IT IS CONNECTED TO THEIR STORIES AND TRADITIONS."</b>	Impact of strengthening cultural literacy on understanding of material	Teacher
<b>"THROUGH ROUTINE EVALUATION, WE GET MANY IDEAS TO DEVELOP LOCAL CULTURE-BASED TEACHING METHODS THAT ARE MORE INTERESTING FOR CHILDREN."</b>	Development of local culture-based teaching methods	Teacher

Table 2 shows that the evaluation and strengthening of cultural literacy in learning significantly impacted children's learning process. After the review, children became more familiar with and appreciative of their culture, which increased their enthusiasm for learning and engagement in learning. Using local culture in teaching materials was carried out more frequently, making children more connected to the lessons and making it easier for them to understand the material. This shows that integrating local culture in learning creates a more meaningful context for children. In addition, regular evaluation allows teachers to develop more creative and engaging teaching methods, thus further enriching children's learning experiences with relevant and contextual content.

Based on the above, the evaluation and strengthening of cultural literacy positively influence the learning process. Assessments carried out by teachers allow them to reflect on the methods that have been applied and make improvements. As a result, local culture in learning becomes more frequent and integrated, creating a more meaningful learning experience for children. This leads to increased involvement and understanding of the learning materials. In this context, evaluation not only functions as a tool to assess the effectiveness of learning but also as a means to continue developing more relevant and contextual methods. This confirms that strengthening cultural literacy must be carried out continuously to achieve optimal results.

The field observations showed that after the evaluation and strengthening of cultural literacy, children in Cluster TK 01 were more active and enthusiastic in learning. Teachers often used local culture, such as folk tales, regional songs, and traditional games, as part of teaching and learning activities. Children seemed more interested and found remembering learning materials connected to their culture easier. Researchers interpreted

that strengthening cultural literacy in learning positively impacted children's understanding and appreciation of their own culture and created a more enjoyable and meaningful learning experience.

Overall, the evaluation and strengthening of cultural literacy in learning improved the quality of early childhood education in Cluster TK 01. Teachers who evaluated their teaching practices improved the methods used and increased children's involvement and understanding of their culture. This process allows teachers to integrate local culture into learning more often, strengthening children's relationships with the material. This evaluation and reinforcement are essential for developing more relevant and effective teaching methods.

Evaluation and strengthening of cultural literacy improved the quality of learning. Teachers involved in the evaluation process more often integrated local culture into learning activities, leading to increased engagement and understanding of children. This pattern shows that local culture-based teaching, which is continuously strengthened through evaluation, positively impacts creating more enjoyable, relevant, and meaningful learning experiences for children. This process illustrates that cultural literacy needs to be strengthened continuously to ensure the optimal quality of education in PAUD.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings regarding teacher training in cultural literacy are based on the theory put forward by several researchers who emphasize the importance of training to improve teachers' understanding of local cultural values and how to integrate them into learning (Ratri et al., 2024; Sakti et al., 2024; Zhao, Zhao, & Shi, 2024). In the literature, teacher training is the primary key to increasing the effectiveness of culture-based teaching. However, these findings show a significant increase in teacher confidence and the application of local culture in the classroom, which aligns with research by Mekonnen et al., (2023), which states that training can strengthen teacher involvement in culture-based teaching. The practical implication of this finding is the importance of more focused training on strengthening teachers' understanding of local culture so that they can integrate it more effectively into the teaching and learning process.

Furthermore, developing local culture-based curriculum and teaching methods aligns with existing literature, which states that developing a curriculum that integrates local culture can increase student relevance and engagement (Peng & Abd Rahman, 2024; Wahyuni et al., 2024). This study shows that the development of local culture-based teaching materials, such as folklore and regional songs, has successfully attracted children's attention and increased their understanding of the subject matter. This is consistent with a study by Sakti et al., (2024), which revealed that learning based on local culture can strengthen the relationship between children and subject matter. The practical implication is adapting a curriculum more contextually to local culture, so that learning becomes more alive and relevant to children's experiences.

In terms of guidance and reflection on the implementation of learning, the findings of this study confirm the opinion of the literature, which states that reflection and guidance are very important for continuous improvement in teaching (Li & Wang, 2023; Yu, 2023). The results of interviews and observations in this study indicate that evaluation and guidance carried out on teachers after implementing local culture-based learning helped them be more confident and creative in integrating local culture into learning. This is in line with research by Aripin et al., (2023), which revealed that guidance allows teachers to identify and overcome the challenges they face in teaching to continue to develop. The practical implication is that guidance needs to be carried out periodically to ensure that teachers understand the theory and apply this knowledge effectively in the field.

At the stage of evaluation and strengthening cultural literacy in learning, this finding shows that evaluations carried out periodically strengthen the integration of local culture in learning, which increases children's understanding and engagement. This finding aligns with a study by Gligorea et al. (2023), which states that continuous evaluation helps teachers improve their teaching techniques and increase the relevance of the material. In this study, children appeared more enthusiastic in learning after local culture was applied more often, which supports the results of research by Ahadiyyah et al. (2024), which states that strengthening cultural literacy in learning can improve the overall quality of education. The theoretical implication of this finding is that evaluation and strengthening of cultural literacy have an important role in developing a more inclusive curriculum, while the practical implication is the need for a continuous evaluation system to adjust and improve local culture-based learning strategies.

Overall, this study's findings indicate that applying a coaching model based on cultural literacy can improve the quality of early childhood education in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. This finding supports existing studies emphasizing the importance of integrating local culture into the education curriculum. The theoretical implication is that cultural literacy can be one of the learning pillars supporting children's character development. In practice, local culture-based education enriches teaching materials and strengthens children's relationships with their learning, making the learning process more relevant, meaningful, and enjoyable.

## **CONCLUSION**

The conclusion of this study shows that implementing a coaching model based on cultural literacy in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum in Cluster TK 01, Dolopo District, Madiun Regency, significantly impacts the quality of early childhood education. The most important finding of this study is that teacher training, curriculum development based on local culture, and ongoing guidance and evaluation can increase children's engagement and their understanding of the subject matter. This also reinforces the importance of integrating local culture in learning to support children's character development. The wisdom of this study is that teaching based on local culture can create more relevant and meaningful learning and increase overall student engagement.

The strength of this paper lies in its contribution, which provides new insights into the importance of cultural literacy in early childhood education, especially in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This study contributes a new understanding of how the coaching model can be used to develop teachers' skills in integrating local culture in teaching. However, this study has limitations in terms of time and location coverage, which is limited to one school cluster in the Dolopo District, which may not fully represent the broader context. For further research, it is recommended to expand the scope of research to other areas with diverse social and cultural contexts to obtain more generalizable results and enrich the discourse on cultural literacy in early childhood education.

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