

Character Strengthening Through the Local Wisdom of Wailaki Kema Sa'o in Ende Ethnic Society

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the values of the local wisdom of Wailaki Kema Sa'o in house construction as an effort to strengthen the sense of responsibility and social concern among the community of Rukuramba Village, East Nusa Tenggara, as well as to identify the factors that support and hinder its implementation. The study employs a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and then analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana model, which includes data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study indicate that the Wailaki Kema Sa'o tradition embodies religious, aesthetic, cooperative, moral, and tolerant values that contribute to strengthening the character of responsibility and social concern among the community. The strengthening of a responsible character is reflected in responsibility toward duties, family, community, nation, and the environment, while a socially caring character is manifested through attitudes of mutual aid, empathy, tolerance, social action, and noble ethics. Supporting factors for the implementation of this tradition include the availability of facilities and infrastructure, community participation, community awareness, and support from the village government. The inhibiting factors are economic limitations and the declining involvement of the younger generation.

Keywords: Ethnopedagogy; House Construction; Responsible Character; Socially Caring Character; Wailaki Kema Sa'o Local Wisdom.

1. Introduction

Indonesia is a country characterized by an exceptionally high level of cultural diversity, as evidenced by the existence of 17,380 officially named and georeferenced islands and 2,213 items of intangible cultural heritage distributed across various regions (Geospatial Information Agency, 2024; Arnowo, 2024). This diversity constitutes both a national identity and a cultural asset that must be preserved and safeguarded. However, the advancement of globalization presents significant challenges to the sustainability of local cultures. The influx of foreign cultures, facilitated by rapid developments in technology and communication, has led to shifts in values, lifestyles, and social behavior, particularly among younger generations who tend to exhibit greater interest in external cultures than in their own local traditions (Dewi et al., 2024; Hasan et al., 2024).

Such conditions have the potential to weaken the values of local wisdom that have long served as guiding principles in community life. Consequently, various social issues have emerged, including declining social awareness, increasing individualism, and the erosion of social responsibility within society (Irmania et al., 2021). Therefore, efforts to strengthen character particularly the values of responsibility and social care are essential as foundational elements in both social and civic life (Josephson Institute of Ethics, n.d.; Rahayu, 2016).

One effective approach to achieving this is through the integration of local wisdom into character education. Local wisdom embodies social values that are highly relevant for shaping citizens' character while simultaneously preserving cultural identity (Prayogi & Danial, 2016; Lutfi, 2025). In Ende Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, there exists the Wailaki tradition, a form of communal cooperation practiced in various social activities, including Wailaki Kema Sa'o, which refers to collaborative efforts in house construction (Irmawati et al., 2022). This tradition reflects deeply rooted values of togetherness, responsibility, and social concern that have been passed down through generations. Previous studies indicate that the Wailaki tradition plays a significant role in strengthening kinship ties and fostering a

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spirit of mutual cooperation within the community (Irmawati et al., 2022). However, studies that specifically analyze the values embedded in Wailaki Kema Sa'o as a means of reinforcing the character of responsibility and social care remain limited. Therefore, this study aims to examine the local wisdom of Wailaki Kema Sa'o within the Ende ethnic community as an effort to strengthen the values of responsibility and social care among the people of Rukuramba Village, East Nusa Tenggara.

2. Literature Review

This section must contain a state-of-the-art explanation. It can be explained in several ways. First, you can discuss several related papers, both about objects, methods, and their results. From there, you can explain and emphasize gaps or differences between your research and previous research. The second way is to combine theory with related literature and explain each theory in one sub-chapter.

Local Wisdom

Local wisdom refers to values, norms, knowledge, and cultural practices that are passed down through generations and serve as guidelines for communities in interacting with others, the environment, and God (Laili et al., 2023; Kasmawati et al., 2025). It functions not only as a cultural heritage but also as a value system encompassing religious elements, mutual cooperation, morality, tolerance, and social concern, all of which play a crucial role in shaping societal character (Corry et al., 2025; Wiediharto et al., 2020). In addition to preserving cultural identity, local wisdom also serves as a means of adaptation to the changing times and as a relevant source of character education for younger generations (Sahara & Susanto, 2023; Aslan, 2017). Therefore, local wisdom such as the Wailaki tradition among the Ende community in East Nusa Tenggara must be preserved, as it contains positive values that support social life and strengthen community character (Irmawati et al., 2022).

Culture and the Tradition of Wailaki Kema Sa'o

Culture is a system of values, norms, beliefs, and customs that are transmitted from generation to generation and function as a guide for human life (Koentjaraningrat, 2015; Husen & Husni, 2025). One manifestation of culture is tradition, which refers to practices that are continuously maintained and embody social and cultural values (Sudirna, 2019). One of the traditions of the Ende ethnic community is Wailaki Kema Sa'o, a form of mutual cooperation in house construction involving family members and relatives. This tradition reflects values of togetherness, solidarity, kinship, and mutual assistance, which are inherited across generations to strengthen social relationships within the community (Irmawati et al., 2022; Miso & Kerong, 2021).

Character Strengthening

Character strengthening refers to efforts to instill noble values derived from Pancasila in order to develop individuals who are morally upright, responsible, tolerant, socially aware, and patriotic (Mazid et al., 2024). Character education is essential for preparing younger generations to face global challenges while maintaining national cultural identity (Rahmatiani, 2017). According to Lickona (1991), character is constructed through three main components: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. These components are interconnected and collectively shape behaviors that reflect moral values in everyday life.

Strengthening the Character of Responsibility

The character of responsibility refers to an individual's attitude and behavior in fulfilling duties and obligations toward oneself, society, the environment, the state, and God, as well as the willingness to accept the consequences of one's actions (Rahayu, 2016). Responsibility reflects moral maturity, discipline, and commitment in carrying out both social and personal roles (Lickona, 1991). Strengthening the character of responsibility is essential for developing individuals who are independent, disciplined, capable of completing tasks effectively, able to keep promises, and concerned with the common good (Najib et al., 2016). Furthermore, this character fosters the development of mutual cooperation, collaboration, and active participation in social life (Adha et al., 2019). Therefore, responsibility is a fundamental character value in shaping good and virtuous citizens (Anwar, 2014).

Strengthening the Character of Social Care

The character of social care refers to attitudes and actions that demonstrate concern, empathy, and a willingness to help others in need without expecting rewards (Ministry of National Education, 2010; Rahayu et al., 2020). This character reflects humanity, solidarity, and social responsibility, which are essential in community life (Kahrman et al., 2016). Strengthening the character of social care aims to cultivate attitudes of mutual assistance, cooperation, tolerance, and concern for others, thereby fostering harmonious social relationships (Samani et al., 2012). Individuals who possess social care tend to show empathy, assist those experiencing difficulties, and actively participate in social and community

activities (Apriastuti & Utomo, 2023; Yuniria et al., 2022). Therefore, social care is a crucial value in building a humane, inclusive, and cooperative society.

Ethnopedagogy in Civic Education (PPKn)

Ethnopedagogy is an educational approach that utilizes local wisdom as a source of learning and character formation for students (Fatmi & Fauzan, 2022; Ariyani et al., 2020). In Civic Education (PPKn), ethnopedagogy is applied to integrate local cultural values with the principles of Pancasila, making learning more contextual and meaningful (Zuriah, 2014). Through this approach, students can develop character, cultural identity, and awareness as responsible and socially concerned citizens (Supriyanto et al., 2018).

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with an ethnographic design to examine the local wisdom of Wailaki Kema Sa'o in house construction as an effort to strengthen the values of responsibility and social care among the community of Rukuramba Village, Ende Regency, East Nusa Tenggara. The research was conducted from November 2025 to February 2026 and involved traditional leaders, village government officials, and community members participating in the tradition as research informants. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The validity of the data was ensured through source and technique triangulation (Sugiyono, 2019). Data analysis was conducted interactively through the stages of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification, as proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). The ethnographic analysis followed Spradley's (1997) model, which includes domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis, and cultural theme analysis to uncover the meanings of local wisdom in strengthening community character.

4. Results and Discussion

Objectives and Values Embedded in the Local Wisdom of Wailaki Kema Sa'o in House Construction in Rukuramba Village

Based on the research findings, the local wisdom of Wailaki Kema Sa'o in house construction encompasses various objectives and values that contribute to strengthening the character of responsibility and social care within the community of Rukuramba Village.

Objectives of the Local Wisdom of Wailaki Kema Sa'o in House Construction

Preserving the Culture of the Ende Ethnic Group. Wailaki Kema Sa'o is preserved as an ancestral cultural heritage that maintains the cultural identity of the Ende ethnic community amidst the dynamics of modernization and societal change (Saenal, 2020). **Instilling Social Responsibility.** This tradition teaches community members to assist one another, share responsibilities, and uphold accountability through collective participation in house construction activities (Wardani, 2025).

Alleviating Community Burdens. Wailaki Kema Sa'o aims to support individuals building houses through contributions of labor, materials, and social assistance, thereby reducing the overall burden of construction (Wahyuni, 2019). **Fostering Solidarity and Social Cohesion.** The implementation of this tradition, which involves all segments of society, strengthens social relationships, enhances solidarity, and reinforces communal unity within Rukuramba Village (Amalia et al., 2021; Kumalasari, 2022).

Values Embedded in Wailaki Kema Sa'o in House Construction

Religious Values, Religious values are reflected in communal prayers (neka tanah) as expressions of gratitude and supplication to God for a smooth construction process and blessings upon the household (Rifa'i, 2016). **Aesthetic Values,** Aesthetic values are evident in the use of traditional Ende attire, the presentation of traditional cuisine, and the beauty of both the construction process and its outcomes, all of which reflect the community's cultural identity (Wiediharto et al., 2020).

Mutual Cooperation (Gotong Royong). Mutual cooperation serves as a central value, demonstrated through voluntary collective efforts to achieve shared goals in house construction (Widaty, 2020; Rolitia et al., 2016). **Moral Values,** Moral values are reflected in attitudes of responsibility, honesty, care, and the willingness to help others without expecting rewards, thereby strengthening social life within the community (Murdiono, 2008; Wiediharto et al., 2020). **Tolerance,** Tolerance is demonstrated through mutual respect for social and religious differences, as well as the harmonious participation of all community members in the implementation of Wailaki Kema Sa'o (Nisvilyah, 2013; Wiediharto et al., 2020). Wailaki Kema Sa'o Local Wisdom as an Effort to Strengthen the Character of Responsibility in Rukuramba Village. The local wisdom of Wailaki Kema Sa'o serves as a medium for

strengthening the character of responsibility within the Rukuramba Village community. Through this tradition, individuals learn to fulfill obligations, maintain social cohesion, and preserve ancestral culture. This aligns with Lickona (1991), who emphasizes that character education aims to instill moral values in everyday life. Responsibility toward Duties and Trust. In the implementation of Wailaki Kema Sa'o, each community member is assigned specific roles and responsibilities.

This division of labor fosters an understanding of the importance of fulfilling entrusted duties effectively to achieve collective goals (Anwar, 2014). Responsibility toward Family. Responsibility toward family is reflected in the involvement of extended family members who contribute labor, building materials, and other forms of assistance. This demonstrates that house construction is perceived as a shared responsibility within the kinship system of the Ende community (Anwar, 2014). Responsibility toward Society, Active community participation in assisting house construction reflects social responsibility and concern for others. Community members recognize the importance of mutual assistance in achieving collective welfare (Yuhaniah, 2022). Responsibility toward the Nation and State. Preserving the Wailaki Kema Sa'o tradition represents a form of civic responsibility in maintaining local culture as part of national identity and contributing to community development through the spirit of mutual cooperation (Manihuruk & Setiawati, 2024). Responsibility toward the Environment and Living Beings. Environmental responsibility is reflected in the wise use of natural resources and the performance of the neka tanah ritual as a form of respect for nature. This practice illustrates the community's commitment to environmental sustainability (Rikantasari & Khokishudin, 2019).

Wailaki Kema Sa'o Local Wisdom as an Effort to Strengthen the Character of Social Care in Rukuramba Village

Based on the research findings, the local wisdom of Wailaki Kema Sa'o serves as an effective means of strengthening the character of social care within the Rukuramba Village community. This tradition instills values of mutual cooperation, solidarity, and concern for others through active participation in every stage of house construction. This is consistent with the view that local wisdom can function as a medium for character development and social care in community life (Mahaswa & Syaja, 2025; Busyaeri & Muharom, 2015).

Mutual Assistance. The implementation of Wailaki Kema Sa'o strengthens mutual assistance through contributions of labor, building materials, food, and moral support to individuals constructing houses. This reflects social concern and empathy toward others (Darmiatun, 2013; Wiyani, 2018). **Empathy and Consideration (Tenggang Rasa).** The value of empathy is reflected in respectful behavior, such as adhering to the guidance of the Mosalaki, honoring guests, and maintaining proper conduct throughout the tradition. These attitudes strengthen social relationships and mutual care among community members (Suhendri, 2017; Lickona, 2019).

Tolerance. Wailaki Kema Sa'o promotes tolerance through respect for religious and social differences. All community members are able to participate without discrimination, fostering unity and social solidarity (Permana & Riyani, 2023).

Social Action. Active community involvement in all stages of house construction reflects collective social action rooted in mutual cooperation. This collaboration serves as a medium for strengthening the character of social care in Rukuramba Village (Darmiatun, 2013; Yuniria et al., 2022).

Noble Character (Moral Virtue). Wailaki Kema Sa'o instills noble character through courteous behavior, respect for the Mosalaki and guests, as well as reverence toward God and nature through traditional rituals. These values reinforce the development of social care within the community (Raharjo, 2010; Darmiatun, 2013).

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of Wailaki Kema Sa'o Local Wisdom in House Construction in Rukuramba Village, East Nusa Tenggara

Based on the research findings, the implementation of Wailaki Kema Sa'o in house construction in Rukuramba Village is supported by various factors that sustain the tradition while strengthening the characters of responsibility and social care. However, several obstacles also influence its implementation. **Community Enthusiasm and Participation** High levels of community participation in every stage of the process reflect strong mutual cooperation and social concern. This enthusiasm is a key factor in sustaining the tradition (Suciati, 2018). **Community Awareness.** Awareness of the importance of preserving ancestral heritage and helping others encourages voluntary participation in Wailaki Kema Sa'o (Avner, 2006).

Village Government Support. The Rukuramba Village government supports the tradition through the provision of facilities and housing development programs aligned with the values of mutual cooperation inherent in Wailaki Kema Sa'o (Fariz et al., 2025). Inhibiting Factors, Economic Constraints. Limited economic capacity can hinder participation, as the implementation of Wailaki Kema Sa'o requires contributions of labor, materials, and food, all of which involve financial resources (Rolitia et al., 2016). Declining Youth Participation. The mobility of younger generations for education and employment outside the region has led to reduced involvement in traditional activities. This condition poses a risk to the transmission of cultural values to future generations (Mawarni et al., 2024).

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research and discussion regarding the local wisdom of Wailaki Kema Sa'o of the Ende ethnic group as an effort to strengthen the character of responsibility and social care in Rukuramba Village, East Nusa Tenggara, several conclusions can be drawn. First, the implementation of the local wisdom of Wailaki Kema Sa'o in house construction embodies values that support the strengthening of responsibility and social care within the community. These values include religious, aesthetic, mutual cooperation, moral, and tolerance values, all of which are reflected in every stage of the tradition. Second, the local wisdom of Wailaki Kema Sa'o plays a significant role in strengthening the character of responsibility among community members. This is evident in their involvement in carrying out tasks, fulfilling obligations, and actively participating in assisting house construction through collective cooperation. Third, the implementation of Wailaki Kema Sa'o also reinforces the character of social care within the community. Social care values are manifested through mutual assistance, empathy, solidarity, and concern for others, all of which are practiced voluntarily in social life. Fourth, the successful implementation of Wailaki Kema Sa'o is supported by high levels of community participation, collective awareness, the availability of facilities and infrastructure, and support from the village government. Meanwhile, the inhibiting factors include economic limitations and the declining involvement of younger generations in the tradition. Overall, the local wisdom of Wailaki Kema Sa'o not only functions as a cultural heritage of the Ende ethnic community but also serves as an effective medium for strengthening the character of responsibility and social care, and is highly relevant to be developed as a source of character education.

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