



Strengthening pre-service teachers' characters through *Gusjigang* local wisdom: A phenomenological study in Indonesian higher education

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Abstract. Despite growing interest in integrating local wisdom into teacher education, little research explains how it is institutionalized as an integrated character education ecosystem and how pre-service teachers experience it. This study examines how *Gusjigang* local wisdom (comprising *Gus*, *Ji*, and *Gang*) is institutionalized as character education for pre-service primary teachers at Universitas Muria Kudus, Indonesia. The study adopted a qualitative phenomenological design to explore participants' lived experiences and the factors influencing character internalization. Data were collected from twelve purposively selected participants through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, and analyzed using the interactive model. The findings show that *Gusjigang* operates as an integrated character ecosystem rather than a stand-alone course. Institutional integration in semester learning plans, lecturer role modeling, and peer scaffolding supported

internalization. Cultural dissonance among non-local students, uncritical dependence on mobile devices and generative artificial intelligence, and low tolerance for iterative critique constrained the process. The study contributes a context-sensitive conceptual model demonstrating how moral, epistemic, and productive dimensions interact to strengthen future teachers' professional character, extending the theoretical understanding of local wisdom-based character education while informing its implementation in teacher education.

Introduction

Character education in teacher preparation goes beyond teaching moral terminology. In this context, teacher educators must prepare future teachers, or preservice teachers, to exercise sound judgment, demonstrate ethical conduct, and foster classroom environments grounded in consistent practices of responsibility, respect, and care. Previous research on character education emphasizes creating a coherent educational environment, providing ethical role models, offering opportunities for moral action, and maintaining institutional consistency rather than relying on isolated instructional activities (Shakilla et al., 2023; Yusuf et al., 2024). This responsibility is critical for primary teacher education because the pre-service teachers will eventually serve as daily moral role models for young learners. Thus, teacher education programs should develop professional identity and moral agency alongside pedagogical competence (Sofia & Fernandez, 2024; Fitriyah et al., 2022; Kanzunnudin et al., 2026; Mesenu & Yernawilis, 2025). International studies similarly emphasize that culturally grounded character education is most effective when local cultural values are

critically integrated with broader ethical competencies, democratic citizenship, and global responsibility, rather than taught as isolated cultural traditions. Such approaches enable students to develop moral reasoning while maintaining sensitivity toward diverse social and cultural contexts. This perspective positions local wisdom not only as cultural heritage but also as a pedagogical resource for preparing future teachers who are globally competent (Widana et al., 2023a).

Gusjigang is a local philosophy associated with the cultural and religious history of Kudus, Central Java. The term condenses three interdependent orientations: *Gus*, commonly linked to *bagus* or good ethical conduct; *Ji*, derived from *ngaji* and referring to disciplined spiritual and intellectual learning; and *Gang*, associated with *dagang* or productive entrepreneurial activity. Previous studies have consistently shown *Gusjigang's* educational potential by highlighting its contribution to soft skills development, entrepreneurial identity, Islamic values, and role modeling in pesantren and community settings (Falaq, 2023; Rozaq et al., 2024). Other studies have also shown that *Gusjigang* strengthens students' spirituality and social responsibility through culturally embedded educational practices (Fathurohman et al., 2026; Nauri & Fatmawati, 2022; Wardani & Falaq, 2023). However, these studies mainly focus on individual values, learning activities, or specific educational contexts and offer limited understanding of how *Gusjigang* operates as an integrated institutional ecosystem within university-based teacher education. Furthermore, previous research has rarely examined how local wisdom is internalized through curriculum, classroom interaction, mentoring, co-curricular experiences, and institutional culture simultaneously (Widana et al., 2023b). This unresolved issue represents an important research gap because character education is increasingly understood as a holistic institutional process rather than isolated instructional practices.

Habitus provides a valuable theoretical lens for understanding this process. Repeated educational practices within a structured social environment can develop into embodied patterns of perception and action, although habitus should not be treated as a vague synonym for habit (Huang et al., 2023; Tan & Liu, 2022). Its analytical value lies in explaining how institutional expectations, cultural symbols, bodily practices, and lived experiences shape durable yet adaptable dispositions. From this perspective, respectful gestures, appropriate ways of addressing lecturers, and regular engagement with scholarly literature become educationally significant because they shape how students understand themselves and guide their responses without requiring constant external supervision. Role modeling and scaffolding provide the relational foundation for this process. Effective moral role modeling involves more than simple imitation because students actively evaluate whether educators demonstrate credible, contextually appropriate, and consistent ethical behavior that aligns with the values they teach (Carr, 2024; Suciati et al., 2023). Similarly, scaffolding requires educators to provide timely and appropriate support that enables learners to perform tasks they cannot yet accomplish independently (R. Li et al., 2024; Z. Li et al., 2024; Sun et al., 2023). Within a local wisdom program, lecturers and peers therefore act as cultural mediators by explaining unfamiliar norms, demonstrating their ethical significance, and gradually transferring responsibility to students as their competence develops. This interpretation is also consistent with international perspectives on character education that emphasize the interaction between institutional culture, social participation, and reflective learning in developing students' moral agency. Rather than viewing character formation as the transmission of moral values alone, contemporary studies describe it as a continuous process shaped by authentic educational experiences within supportive learning communities.

The digital environment presents new challenges for character education. Although generative AI supports learning through idea generation and feedback, it also raises concerns regarding academic integrity, critical thinking, and learner autonomy (Cotton et al., 2024; Kasneci et al., 2023; Wilson & Burleigh, 2025; Boonlue, 2024; UNESCO, 2023). From the perspective of *Gusjigang*, digital technologies should therefore strengthen disciplined inquiry (*Ji*) and productive value creation

(*Gang*) under appropriate educational guidance, rather than replacing students' reflective learning processes. Unlike previous studies that primarily examine *Gusjigang* as a cultural value or entrepreneurship-oriented philosophy, this study conceptualizes *Gusjigang* as an integrated character education ecosystem operating through curriculum, pedagogical interaction, institutional culture, mentoring practices, and digital ethics within primary teacher education. This perspective extends existing scholarship by explaining how local wisdom becomes institutionalized and transformed into sustainable professional dispositions among pre-service teachers.

This study addresses two research questions against the background: (1) how do teacher educators organize and how do pre-service primary teachers experience *Gusjigang*-based character education, and (2) what factors facilitate or hinder its internalization? The current study further examines the character outcomes that participants associate with the program. The study contributes theoretically by extending the discussion of character education by integrating local wisdom, institutional culture, and habitus into a comprehensive conceptual model of character internalization in teacher education. It also deepens understanding of how local wisdom functions as an institutional ecosystem rather than merely cultural content. Practically, the findings guide higher education institutions in designing curricula, mentoring systems, pedagogical practices, and digital ethics policies that support sustainable character development among future teachers.

Method

Research design and setting

This qualitative phenomenological research explores how participants understand and experience the implementation of *Gusjigang*. The phenomenological approach is adopted because this research aims to understand the meaning participants give to their life experiences in *Gusjigang*-based character education within the same institutional context. Phenomenology is suitable because the researcher seeks to interpret the structure of meaning from shared experiences. Thus, this research does not measure the frequency of predetermined variables (Quarta, 2026). The phenomenological design also aligns with the research objectives: to explore how teacher educators conduct *Gusjigang*-based character education, how prospective elementary school teachers experience its implementation, and how participants understand the process of character internalization. Thus, the research emphasizes participants' life experiences and the meanings that emerge from their interactions with institutional practices, rather than measuring behavioral outcomes. The study was conducted in the PGSD program at Universitas Muria Kudus, a teacher-education setting located within the cultural environment from which *Gusjigang* developed. The unit of analysis was the living and institutionally mediated experience of character formation across academic and non-academic activities. Accordingly, the study examined participants' experiences across multiple institutional contexts to understand how the values of *Gus*, *Ji*, and *Gang* were experienced, interpreted, and gradually internalized as part of professional character development.

Participants and sampling

The sample consists of twelve participants who have directly experienced the phenomenon being investigated, namely students and lecturers of the PGSD programme at Universitas Muria Kudus, academic leaders, cultural figures, and academic institutions. The researchers continued recruiting participants until additional interviews yielded no substantial new insights into the research questions. To maintain confidentiality, the researchers identified all participants using anonymous codes (D1, KPS1, B1, LKM1, and M1–M2) during data analysis and reporting.

Data generation

Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. These complementary techniques allow researchers to examine both the institutional implementation of *Gusjigang* and participants' lived experiences. Observations focus on academic and non-academic activities where *Gusjigang* values are applied, while semi-structured interviews explore participants' experiences, interpretations, and reflections related to the two research questions. Documentation, including curriculum documents and institutional records, was used to strengthen the evidence obtained from observations and interviews. The interview protocol consists of open-ended questions that allow participants to describe their experiences freely, with follow-up questions used to clarify emerging issues and deepen understanding. Data were collected repeatedly until no substantial new insights emerged from subsequent interviews.

Data analysis and trustworthiness

The researchers manually analyzed data using the interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing proposed by Miles et al. (2023). The researchers repeatedly reviewed, coded, and organized interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents into categories before synthesizing them into themes that addressed the research questions. Repeated comparisons across data sources ensured these themes accurately reflected participants' lived experiences. The researchers then asserted credibility through triangulation of sources and methods, and member checking. These procedures are consistent with the broader criteria of credibility and dependability in naturalistic inquiry (Beuving & de Vries, 2025).

Ethical statement

Author action required before submission: insert the approving institution or research-permission authority, approval/permission number where applicable, informed-consent procedure, and data-protection measures. These details were not available in the source manuscript and have therefore not been inferred.

Results and Discussion

Gusjigang as an Institutional Character Ecosystem

The central finding of this study is that participants experienced *Gusjigang* as an integrated institutional character ecosystem rather than as a discrete subject or a collection of independent moral values. Institutional documents placed its values in semester learning plans and student activities, while the campus environment reinforced them through visual narratives, religious routines, interpersonal expectations, and project work. Participants consistently described *Gus*, *Ji*, and *Gang* not as separate educational components completed sequentially but as mutually reinforcing dimensions that shaped their daily academic and social experiences. Ethical conduct (*Gus*) influenced how students pursued knowledge, disciplined inquiry (*Ji*) strengthened productive engagement, and entrepreneurial practice (*Gang*) cultivated responsibility, honesty, perseverance, and professional commitment.

This institutional integration was evident across several interconnected domains. Within the formal curriculum, lecturers embedded *Gusjigang* into learning outcomes, classroom routines, reading assignments, assessment practices, and instructional-media projects. Co-curricular activities extended the values through exhibitions and collaborative production. Extracurricular and campus practices supplied a wider moral atmosphere through prayer routines, student interaction, and symbols of Kudus culture. Consequently, participants experienced character education as a continuous institutional process rather than as isolated moral instruction, reducing the gap between institutional expectations, repeated educational practice, and students' everyday experiences. The findings support the view that effective character education requires institutional coherence. The

PGSD program did not rely on a single moral-education course; it aligned policy, routines, relationships, learning tasks, and public symbols. This configuration resembles the whole-environment principles identified in character-education research and the emphasis on teacher identity in moral preparation (Shakilla et al., 2023; Sofia & Fernandez, 2024; Yusuf et al., 2024). The present findings demonstrate that such coherence can be achieved through a locally grounded philosophical framework rather than through externally prescribed character education programs alone.

From a habitus perspective, this institutional arrangement enabled students to experience character formation through repeated participation in meaningful educational practices rather than merely receiving moral instruction (Huang et al., 2023; Tan & Liu, 2022). The findings indicate that character internalization was neither immediate nor automatic. Students continually interpreted, negotiated, and reconstructed the meaning of *Gusjigang* as they interacted with lecturers, peers, and institutional practices. Previous studies have primarily discussed *Gusjigang* as a cultural philosophy, entrepreneurial value, or local wisdom embedded within particular learning activities. In contrast, the present findings demonstrate that *Gusjigang* functions as an institutional character ecosystem in which curriculum design, pedagogical interaction, campus culture, co-curricular engagement, extracurricular activities, and authentic professional practice operate as mutually reinforcing mechanisms for character development.

The empirical findings further suggest that this ecosystem operates through three interrelated dimensions. *Gus* provides the ethical orientation that governs interpersonal relationships and professional conduct; *Ji* establishes the epistemic orientation through disciplined inquiry and responsible knowledge construction; while *Gang* develops productive agency through authentic project engagement and educational entrepreneurship. Together, these dimensions explain how local wisdom is translated from institutional policy into students' lived experiences and, ultimately, into professional character formation. The following sections discuss each dimension in greater detail by integrating participants' experiences with their broader theoretical implications.

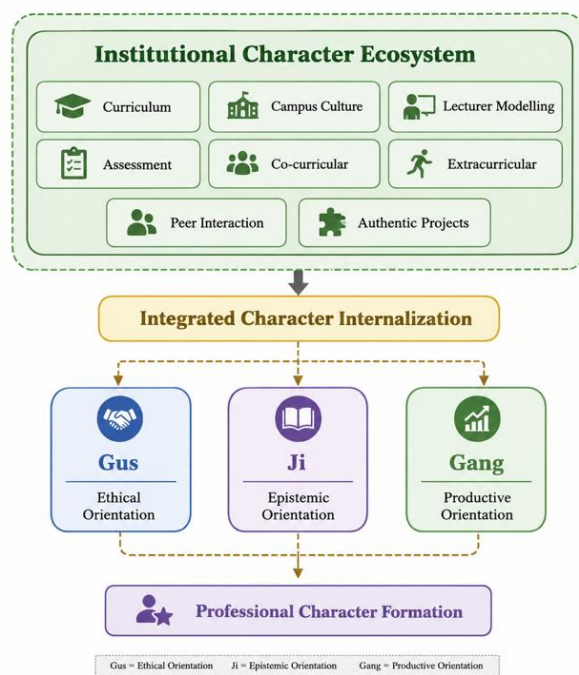


Image 1. Institutional Character Ecosystem of *Gusjigang*-Based Character Education Developed

Through constant comparison across participants and data sources, these practices were interpreted as mutually reinforcing components of a broader institutional ecosystem rather than as isolated educational activities. The subsequent thematic synthesis revealed that this ecosystem operates through three inseparable dimensions (*Gus*, *Ji*, and *Gang*) which collectively contribute to the development of professional character among pre-service primary teachers.

Experiencing Gus: From Cultural Practice to Professional Habitus

Across interviews and observations, *Gus* was enacted through everyday practices. *Gus* was visible in 5S culture (*senyum, salam, sapa, sopan, and santun*). Some behavioral actions were also visible in *ndhingkluk*, a slight bow that lowers the head to express respect when passing lecturers or senior members of the academic community. These repeated experiences indicate that ethical values were introduced not as isolated moral lessons but as integral elements of daily academic life. The transformation became particularly visible in the practice of *ndhingkluk*. Participants initially perceived this gesture as a local cultural convention; however, ongoing classroom interaction, school-based teaching practice, and lecturer guidance gradually changed this perception. The impact did not result solely from performing the gesture itself but from repeated explanations, consistent lecturer role modeling, and opportunities to apply these values in authentic educational settings. Consequently, *ndhingkluk* evolved from an external behavioral expectation into an expression of mutual respect and professional attentiveness.



Image 2. Documentation of classroom learning activities

Gus also appeared in communication etiquette, dress, punctuality, and how disagreement was expressed in class. Participants linked these practices to dignity and trustworthiness rather than mere conformity. Lecturers who responded patiently to mistakes strengthened this interpretation. When courtesy was imposed without explanation, it could be read as feudal. When lecturers showed reciprocal respect and linked etiquette to caring for pupils, the same practice became intelligible as professional ethics. Consistent with the concept of *habitus*, students' dispositions developed through continuous interaction between institutional expectations, lecturer responses, peer interpretation, teaching practice, and repeated everyday experience (Huang et al., 2023; Tan & Liu, 2022). Character formation therefore emerged through an ongoing process of interpretation rather than immediate acceptance.

Lecturer exemplarity was a central bridge between institutional discourse and student interpretation. The present findings reinforce arguments that role modeling in moral education requires attention to what learners notice, admire, and judge worthy of emulation (Carr, 2024;

Suciati et al., 2023). Students became more willing to reinterpret unfamiliar local etiquette when lecturers consistently demonstrated patience, fairness, empathy, and respect. In this sense, lecturers functioned not merely as transmitters of cultural knowledge but as living representations of the ethical commitments embedded within *Gus*. Scaffolding research emphasizes the importance of providing support that responds to learners' needs and gradually decreases as their competence develops (R. Li et al., 2024; Z. Li et al., 2024; Sun et al., 2023). In this study, local peers explained tacit cultural norms, demonstrated appropriate communication, and supported classmates during emotionally demanding project tasks. Through these actions, peer scaffolding expanded the sources of cultural guidance and prevented adaptation from becoming a one-way process directed solely by lecturers. It also enabled students to practice care, cooperation, and responsibility as integral parts of their learning community. This interpretation extends previous studies that predominantly describe *Gusjigang* as cultural heritage by demonstrating how ethical values become institutionalized through repeated pedagogical interaction, ultimately forming durable professional dispositions among pre-service primary teachers.

Accordingly, *Gus* should be understood as more than respectful behavior. It establishes the ethical orientation upon which the subsequent dimensions of *Ji* and *Gang* are constructed. Once students understand why respectful interaction, humility, and responsibility matter in professional practice, they are better prepared to develop epistemic responsibility through *Ji* and productive agency through *Gang*. This progression explains why participants consistently described the three dimensions not as separate educational components but as interconnected stages of a single institutional character ecosystem.



Image 3. Discussion activities as an implementation of *Ji* values

Experiencing Ji: Spiritual Inquiry and Epistemic Responsibility

Ji was enacted through a deliberate conjunction of spiritual and intellectual practice. Across interviews and classroom observations, *Ji* was enacted through *ngaji*, critical reading of academic literature, reflective discussion, and continuous engagement with scientific evidence. Lecturers expected students to examine reputable journal articles, evaluate evidence, question claims, and support their arguments with research. This practice put spirituality not as an alternative to critical thinking but as an ethical foundation that guided rigorous intellectual inquiry. The data therefore suggest that *Ji* functioned simultaneously as spiritual discipline, intellectual humility, and research literacy. In practical terms, students were encouraged to ask not only whether a claim was useful, but also whether it was supported and responsibly communicated. Digital technology posed the greatest challenge within this dimension. Classroom observations revealed some students used

social media during academic instruction. In contrast, interviews also found that students relied on smartphones and generative AI to complete tasks immediately. However, lecturers responded to AI use by teaching responsible AI use. The lecturers argued that AI-generated content should serve only as an initial resource. Thus, students must verify accuracy with credible literature, acknowledge their use transparently, and apply critical judgment throughout the learning process. These experiences demonstrate that *Ji* extends beyond the traditional understanding of religious study. Within the present institutional context, *ngaji* functioned as an epistemic practice through which students learned to question information, evaluate evidence, and construct knowledge responsibly.

This arrangement extends existing *Gusjigang* scholarship, which has primarily emphasized soft skills and social values [Falaq \(2023\)](#); [Rozaq et al. \(2024\)](#), by highlighting its epistemic dimension. Specifically, it positions knowledge acquisition as a morally accountable practice. From this perspective, intellectual humility, careful source verification, and honest acknowledgment of evidence express character rather than merely technical research skills. This ethic is highly relevant to generative AI. Current research identifies both educational opportunities and academic-integrity risks in large language models ([Cotton et al., 2024](#); [Kasneci et al., 2023](#); [Wilson & Burleigh, 2025](#)). The observed tendency toward instant completion confirms that unrestricted access can weaken cognitive engagement, but prohibition would ignore legitimate benefits. UNESCO's human-centered guidance emphasizes agency, transparency, and verification ([UNESCO, 2023](#)). The current research AI-literate interpretation of *Gusjigang* is consistent with that direction: students may use AI as an assistant, but responsibility for claims, sources, reasoning, and consequences remains human.

An important contribution of this study is reconceptualizing *Ji* as an epistemic orientation within character education. Previous discussions of *Gusjigang* have predominantly associated *Ji* with religious devotion or Islamic scholarship. The present findings extend this perspective by demonstrating that *Ji* also encompasses ethical knowledge construction, critical literacy, and responsible engagement with digital technologies. Consequently, *Ji* functions not only as spiritual cultivation but also as a mechanism through which future teachers develop the epistemic dispositions required for professional decision-making in contemporary educational contexts. This interpretation also strengthens the broader conceptualization of *Gusjigang* as an institutional character ecosystem. Within this ecosystem, epistemic responsibility emerges through interactions among curriculum design, lecturer guidance, classroom dialogue, academic literacy, and reflective technology use, rather than through isolated instruction on academic integrity. Students gradually learned to connect intellectual discipline with ethical responsibility, illustrating that character formation in teacher education extends beyond interpersonal conduct to include the moral dimensions of knowledge production itself. Together with *Gus* as the ethical orientation, *Ji* establishes the epistemic foundation of professional character formation. Once students recognize that knowledge carries ethical responsibilities, they become better prepared to transform that knowledge into productive educational practice through the entrepreneurial and innovative dimension of *Gang*, discussed in the following section.

Experiencing Gang: Developing Teacher Agency through Edupreneurship

Participants experienced *Gang* as the productive dimension of *Gusjigang*-based character education, where knowledge and ethical values were translated into authentic educational practice. Across interviews and observations, students designed instructional media, organized educational exhibitions, presented their work publicly, and reflected on feedback from lecturers, peers, and external audiences. This education framework suggests that students investigate learning difficulties and design tangible instructional media as potential solutions. Thus, the students had to extend their learning beyond a written assignment. In this mechanism, the students had to produce, examine, present, revise, and disseminate their products. This activity connects pedagogical

knowledge with ingenuity, economic awareness, communication, and accountability towards quality, providing a meaningful experience. This structure shares the authenticity, sustained inquiry, collaboration, and tangible output associated with project-based learning (Jia et al., 2023; Purnadewi & Widana, 2023; Rosdiana & Sumiyati, 2026). It also corresponds with research showing that entrepreneurship education is more influential when learners engage in experiential and action-oriented tasks rather than only studying business concepts (Arendt et al., 2024; Dai et al., 2025; Maragh, 2025; Nguyen et al., 2025). *Gang* became educationally meaningful when lecturers and peers supported students throughout this process, helping them persist through failure, refine their work, and ultimately transform setbacks into evidence of growing competence.

These findings illustrate that productive agency emerged through sustained engagement with authentic educational challenges rather than through direct instruction about entrepreneurship. Consistent with experiential learning perspectives, participants developed confidence by repeatedly confronting real problems, negotiating collaborative solutions, and reflecting upon the outcomes of their decisions. Lecturer guidance remained important throughout this process; however, responsibility for improvement gradually shifted toward students themselves, illustrating the progressive development of autonomous professional agency. The educational significance of *Gang* therefore extends beyond innovation or creativity alone. Within the institutional character ecosystem, productive activity functioned as the arena in which ethical orientation (*Gus*) and epistemic responsibility (*Ji*) were continuously tested, refined, and demonstrated through concrete educational action. Students were expected not only to produce instructional innovations but also to justify pedagogical decisions, respond constructively to criticism, and maintain responsibility throughout iterative project development. Such experiences contributed directly to the formation of professional judgment expected of future primary school teachers. Taken together, the findings indicate that *Gang* represents the productive culmination of the *Gusjigang* character formation process. Ethical orientation established through *Gus* and epistemic responsibility developed through *Ji* were translated into authentic educational action through *Gang*. This interconnected relationship explains why participants consistently viewed the three dimensions as inseparable components of a single institutional character ecosystem rather than as independent educational values.

Factors Facilitating and Hindering Character Internalization

Cross-theme analysis shows that *Gusjigang*-based character education is internalized through the interaction of multiple educational processes rather than isolated instructional activities. Across the three experiential dimensions, participants consistently experienced ethical orientation (*Gus*), epistemic responsibility (*Ji*), and productive agency (*Gang*) as mutually reinforcing aspects of professional development. These findings indicate that successful internalization depended primarily on the coherence of the educational environment, where institutional values were consistently embedded across curriculum, campus culture, pedagogical interaction, and authentic learning experiences. Rather than encountering fragmented moral messages, participants experienced *Gusjigang* as a unified educational system that helped them connect cultural values with their emerging professional identity. This synthesis supports the argument that sustainable character education requires institutional consistency in translating educational values into everyday academic practice (Jayanti & Wulandari, 2024; Mansur & Sholeh, 2024; Mesenu & Yernawilis, 2025).

The findings further reveal that character internalization was fundamentally developmental and negotiated rather than linear. Participants described the process as involving continuous interpretation, reflection, and adaptation as they engaged with unfamiliar cultural practices, academic responsibilities, and authentic educational experiences. Rather than functioning as barriers, these challenges encouraged students to critically examine their assumptions and

progressively reconstruct professional dispositions through sustained participation. Consequently, facilitating and hindering conditions should not be understood as opposing forces but as complementary processes that collectively shaped ethical judgment, reflective inquiry, and productive engagement. This interpretation is consistent with the discussions of habitus and epistemic responsibility presented throughout the study, which emphasize that professional character develops through repeated participation, reflective meaning-making, and responsible knowledge construction (Huang et al., 2023; Tan & Liu, 2022).

Taken together, these analytical patterns provide a comprehensive answer to the second research question by demonstrating that the internalization of *Gusjigang* depends upon the dynamic interaction between institutional coherence, students' active engagement with authentic educational experiences, and their capacity to negotiate cultural, epistemic, and professional challenges. Professional character therefore did not emerge from a single educational intervention but gradually developed through the cumulative integration of *Gus*, *Ji*, and *Gang* across students' lived experiences. This cross-theme synthesis extends previous discussions of local wisdom by positioning *Gusjigang* as an integrated process of professional character formation rather than a collection of cultural values alone. These analytical relationships subsequently became the empirical foundation for constructing the conceptual model of *Gusjigang*-based character education presented in the following section.

A Conceptual Model of Gusjigang-Based Character Education

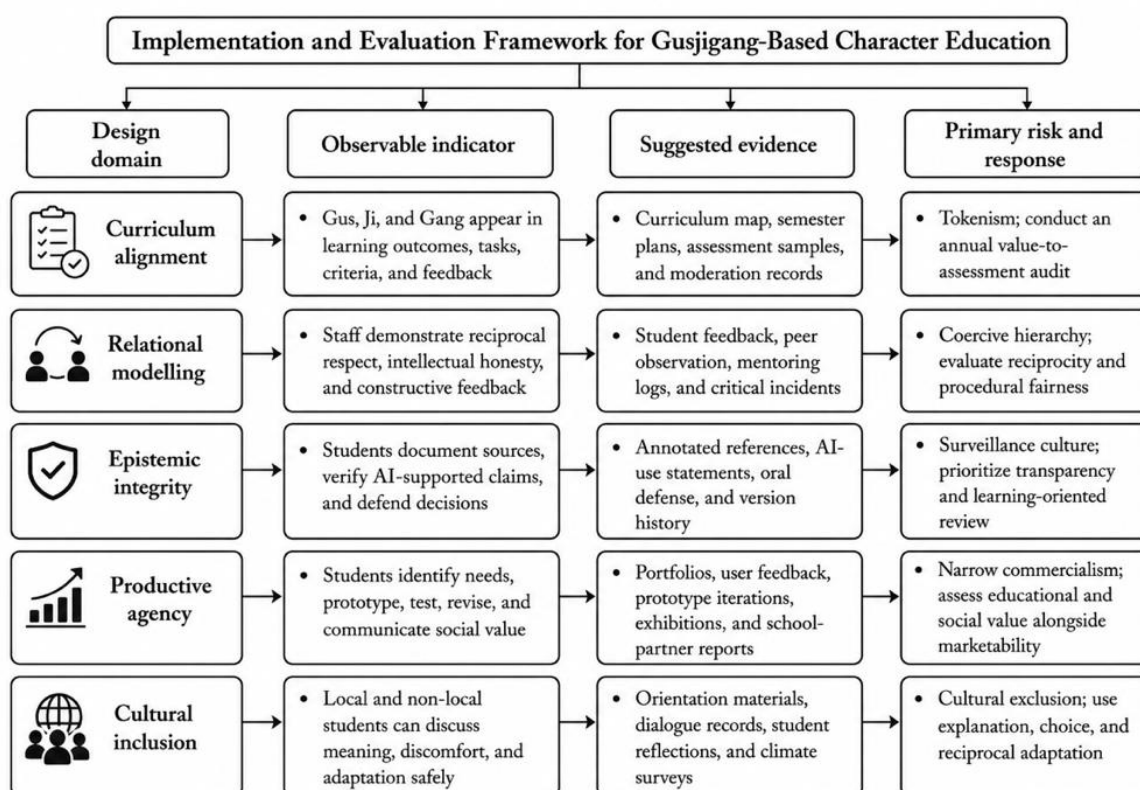


Image 4. Implementation and evaluation framework for *Gusjigang*-based character education

The conceptual model presented in Image 2 emerged from phenomenological analysis of participants' lived experiences rather than from a predetermined theoretical framework. Following iterative coding, category refinement, and thematic integration, three interrelated experiential orientations (*Gus*, *Ji*, and *Gang*) emerged as the core dimensions through which pre-service primary

teachers interpreted and internalized *Gusjigang*-based character education. The model synthesizes the empirical findings by illustrating how institutional conditions, relational processes, and students' lived experiences interacted to shape professional character formation. The upper section of the model represents the institutional character ecosystem that continuously exposed students to *Gusjigang* values throughout their educational journey. As shown in the preceding findings, institutional consistency enabled students to interpret *Gusjigang* not as isolated cultural practices but as a coherent educational environment that supports professional identity formation. This interpretation reinforces previous discussions highlighting the importance of institutional coherence in sustaining character (Shakilla et al., 2023; Sofia & Fernandez, 2024; Yusuf et al., 2024).

The central section of the model illustrates the progressive internalization of the three *Gusjigang* dimensions. The findings demonstrate that *Gus* functions as an ethical orientation through which students develop respectful interpersonal relationships and professional habitus. *Ji* subsequently establishes epistemic responsibility by integrating reflective inquiry, critical literacy, and responsible knowledge construction. Finally, *Gang* translates these ethical and epistemic orientations into productive educational practice through innovation, collaboration, and teacher agency. The sequential arrangement does not indicate rigid stages but illustrates the mutually reinforcing relationship among the three orientations that collectively shape professional character. The model also incorporates the facilitating and hindering factors identified in the phenomenological findings. Institutional coherence, lecturer exemplarity, and peer collaboration strengthened character internalization, whereas cultural dissonance, uncritical technology use, and challenges encountered during repeated project revision required continuous negotiation before professional dispositions became embodied.

The principal contribution of this conceptual model lies in its reconceptualization of *Gusjigang* as an institutional character ecosystem rather than a collection of local cultural values. The model extends existing discussions by demonstrating how local wisdom becomes institutionalized through the interaction of curriculum, pedagogical relationships, and authentic educational practice, ultimately shaping ethical orientation, epistemic responsibility, and productive agency among pre-service primary teachers. Accordingly, the model offers both a theoretical framework for understanding culturally grounded character education and a practical reference for higher education institutions seeking to integrate local wisdom into teacher education without separating character formation from everyday academic practice.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. The researchers conducted the study in a single teacher education program at one university and included only twelve purposively selected participants. Consequently, the findings offer analytical insights that may transfer to similar contexts but do not support statistical generalization. Because the study used a qualitative design, it identified participants' experiences and observed changes without establishing causal relationships or measuring the extent of character development. In addition, participants may have provided socially desirable responses because the study examined values that the institution explicitly promotes.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that *Gusjigang*-based character education functions as an integrated institutional ecosystem in which the moral (*Gus*), epistemic (*Ji*), and productive (*Gang*) dimensions interact to foster the professional character of pre-service teachers. Implementing *Gusjigang* through curriculum, campus culture, lecturer role modeling, peer interaction, and authentic learning provides a strong foundation for character education while supporting students' responsibility,

integrity, initiative, empathy, and independence. The findings contribute a context-sensitive conceptual model that extends the theoretical understanding of local wisdom-based character education from value transmission to institutional character formation. Practically, the study offers guidance for teacher education institutions (LPTKs) and educational policymakers in systematically embedding local wisdom into curriculum, learning environments, and professional preparation. Future research should examine the model's transferability across different educational and cultural contexts and evaluate its long-term influence on teachers' professional identity and practice.

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