



Didong Gayo Culture as a Foundation for Developing Youth Civic Character

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ABSTRACT

The rapid influence of globalization, the decline of local cultural awareness, and the weakening of civic character among the younger generation have become critical challenges in contemporary society. This study aims to analyze the role of Gayo Didong local culture as a foundation for developing the civic character of the younger generation. Didong is an oral art form of the Gayo community that not only serves as entertainment but also conveys moral, religious, and social values while shaping identity and self-concept. This study employed a systematic literature review by analyzing 48 scientific articles published between 2020 and 2025. The findings indicate that most studies utilized qualitative and literature review approaches focusing on the exploration of values, social meanings, and cultural functions in character development. In conclusion, Didong local culture serves as a strategic and contextual foundation for strengthening civic character and national identity among the younger generation in the era of globalization. Didong embodies noble values such as honesty, deliberation, mutual cooperation, social responsibility, and religiosity, which align with the principles of civic education. The integration of Didong cultural values into formal and non-formal education is considered effective in enhancing nationalism, social solidarity, and civic awareness among students. In the era of globalization, Didong also functions as a moral shield and cultural identity that helps the younger generation navigate modernization without losing their identity.

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Introduction

Indonesia is widely recognized as a country rich in cultural diversity, languages, and local traditions. Each region possesses forms of local wisdom that serve as sources of moral values and community identity. One manifestation of this cultural richness is Didong Gayo, a traditional oral art form from Central Aceh that conveys moral, religious, and social messages relevant to the character development of today's younger generation. Such cultural practices are not merely forms of entertainment but also function as media for value-based, moral, and spiritual education aligned with the principles of Pancasila, while simultaneously strengthening national identity amid the rapid currents of globalization (Shaumiwaty, 2021).

Civic education plays a crucial role in instilling moral values, nationalism, and social responsibility among the younger generation. When integrated with local cultural practices such as Didong, civic education not only delivers theoretical knowledge but also demonstrates how national values are practiced in everyday community life (Mustari, 2024). This approach enables students to understand citizenship concepts within their own cultural context, thereby fostering pride in national identity and strengthening unity in diversity (Taufika & Amin, 2023). Recent studies further indicate that civic education is currently facing challenges such as declining civic engagement and the need for more contextual and culturally relevant learning approaches in the era of globalization (Mutthoimah et al., 2025; Ihwan et al., 2025).

Local wisdom such as Didong contains ethical and moral messages that can serve as a foundation for national character development. The poetic verses in Didong incorporate religious values, moral conduct, and social responsibility, all of which are essential in shaping good citizens. Moreover, Didong can function as a medium for character education by integrating religious, nationalistic, and socio-cultural values into a unified framework (Kasih et al., 2023). Previous studies have demonstrated that culturally based traditional arts like Didong have significant potential to foster civic awareness among the younger generation in a more contextual and meaningful way (Maulidha, 2024). However, most of these studies are still limited to descriptive analyses and have not comprehensively examined the role of Didong culture as a systematic foundation for civic character development.

The increasing influence of foreign cultures, the rise of individualistic attitudes, and rapid technological advancements pose significant challenges to the preservation of national identity. Therefore, the younger generation must develop cultural resilience to avoid losing their sense of identity. In this context, character building through the introduction of local culture becomes essential. The integration of local wisdom values into both formal and non-formal education can serve as a protective mechanism, preventing the erosion of moral and cultural values due to globalization (Mutthoimah et al., 2025). Accordingly, research on Didong culture as a foundation for developing civic-minded young generations is both relevant and necessary, particularly as a model for culturally based education in Indonesia (Ihwan et al., 2025).

There is still a lack of studies that synthesize findings from various research systematically to explain how Didong can function as an integrated framework for civic character development. This condition indicates a clear research gap, particularly in positioning Didong not only as cultural heritage but also as a strategic foundation for civic education. Based on this gap, this study seeks to answer the following research question: How does Gayo Didong local culture function as a foundation for developing civic character among the younger generation? The objective of this study is to analyze the values embedded in Didong culture and examine their relevance to civic education and character development.

The novelty of this research lies in its use of a systematic literature review approach to synthesize various studies published between 2020 and 2025. Unlike previous studies that are generally descriptive and partial, this study provides a more comprehensive and integrative analysis by positioning Didong as a contextual and value-based foundation for strengthening civic character and national identity in the era of globalization.

Method

To gain an in-depth understanding of Didong local culture as a foundation for developing the civic character of the younger generation, this study employed a systematic literature review method (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Matang et al., 2025). This study adopted a systematic literature review design following a structured and transparent process, which includes planning, identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages to ensure the rigor and validity of the review process. The literature review was conducted by identifying, examining, and analyzing a total of 48 scientific journal articles published between 2020 and 2025. The data sources were obtained from reputable academic databases such as Google Scholar, using keywords including “Didong Gayo,” “local wisdom,” “civic education,” “civic character,” and “cultural values.” This method was selected because it enables researchers to systematically identify, collect, and critically analyze relevant and credible academic sources.

Through this approach, the authors re-examined the cultural, moral, social, and religious values embedded in Didong based on previous studies, while also exploring how these values can be integrated into the development of civic character among the younger generation in response to contemporary societal changes and the influence of modernization.

The data collection technique was carried out through documentation methods, by systematically collecting, recording, and organizing relevant literature based on predetermined criteria. Each selected article was reviewed and classified according to themes such as cultural values, civic education, and character development.

The literature review method provides opportunities for in-depth synthesis of concepts and theories without focusing on primary data collection or field experiments. This approach facilitates the development of a holistic understanding of the role of Didong in character education and civic education, as well as its implementation across various social and educational contexts.

The data analysis technique used in this study was qualitative content analysis, which involved data reduction, data categorization, data display, and drawing conclusions. The researchers analyzed patterns, similarities, and differences across the selected studies to identify key themes and relationships between Didong culture and civic character development. Thus, Didong is not only viewed as a cultural heritage but also as a source of national values that can be instilled through both formal and non-formal educational practices.

Results and Discussion

Results of Publication Data on the Exploration of Didong Local Culture

Based on the analysis of 48 scientific journal articles, it is evident that studies on the exploration of local culture and the development of civic character predominantly employ qualitative research methods and literature reviews. This indicates that existing research tends to focus on exploring social meanings and cultural values. Literature review has become a frequently used method due to its effectiveness in identifying and analyzing national character

values embedded in local cultures such as Didong Gayo, as well as their relevance to civic education. In contrast, quantitative approaches are used in only a limited number of studies, primarily those measuring the effectiveness of culture-based learning or surveying students' understanding of civic character values.

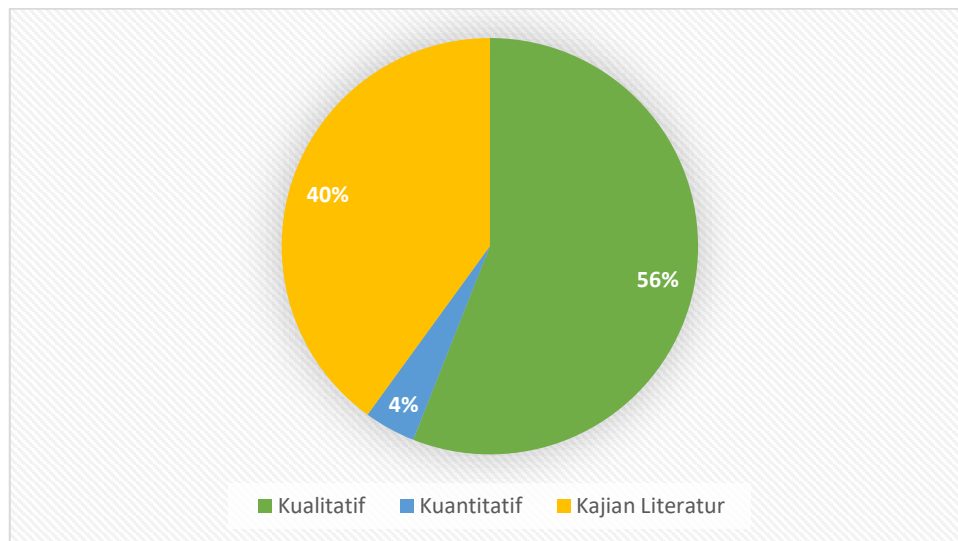


Figure 1. Methods Used in Research on the Exploration of Didong Local Culture

Figure 1 illustrates that qualitative methods are the most dominant (56%), followed by literature review approaches (40%), and quantitative methods (4%). This suggests that the majority of studies in this field emphasize the exploration of lived experiences, perspectives, and social realities within communities. Quantitative approaches remain limited, as research is largely oriented toward contextual understanding and the interpretation of social meanings emerging from cultural interactions.

Table 1. Number of Articles on the Exploration of Didong Local Culture by Year of Publication

Year	Number of Articles
2020	1
2021	7
2022	6
2023	9
2024	16
2025	9
Total	48 Articles

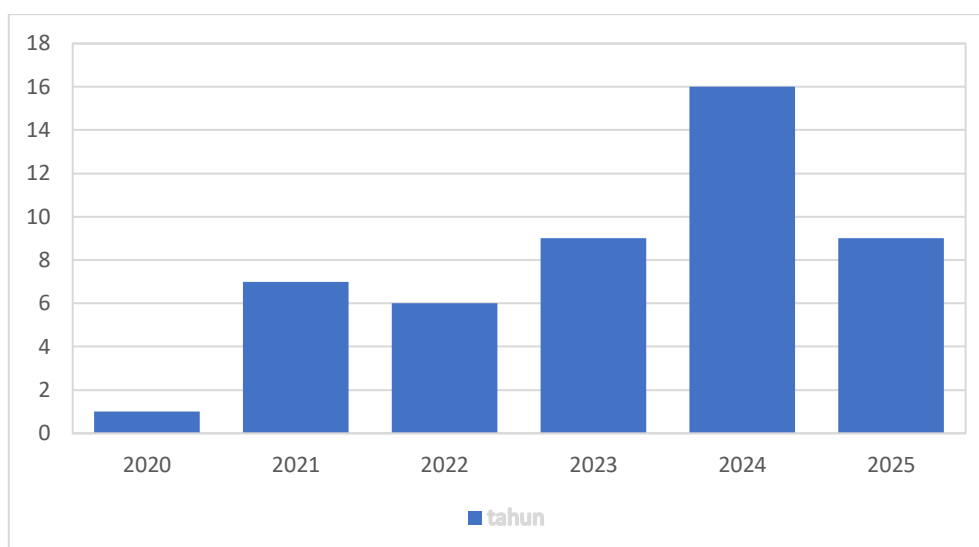


Figure 2. Number of Articles on the Exploration of Didong Local Culture

The data presented in the table and figures indicate a significant increase in research publications from 2023 to 2024, followed by a decline in 2025. The rise in publications in 2023 is likely associated with the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Pancasila Student Profile Program, both of which emphasize the importance of character education and local culture-based learning. However, the slight decrease observed in 2025 does not necessarily reflect a decline in interest in local cultural topics. Rather, it may indicate a shift in research focus toward the integration of digital technology in cultural preservation and civic education.

Overall, the publication data demonstrate that research on the exploration of Didong Gayo has received considerable attention in academic discourse, particularly due to its perceived role in instilling moral, religious, and communal values among the younger generation.

Exploration of Didong Local Culture as a Foundation for Developing Civic-Minded Youth

The analysis of journal publication data on Didong local culture as a foundation for developing civic-minded youth reveals that Didong Gayo is a traditional art form that continues to exist and evolve within the Gayo community in Aceh. This cultural practice functions not only as entertainment but also as a medium for transmitting moral, religious, social, and educational values across generations (Shaumiwaty, 2021). The poetic verses embedded in Didong contain moral and spiritual messages that educate younger generations to develop good character, politeness, faith, and ethical behavior in social life (Kasih et al., 2023). Therefore, Didong can be regarded as a character education medium deeply rooted in the local values of the Gayo community, making a significant contribution to the development of civic character (Saputra & Zulmaulida, 2023).

Local culture such as Didong plays a crucial role in instilling values of mutual cooperation, responsibility, and respect for others, which are fundamental to national life (Kamila et al., 2023). Mustari (2024) emphasizes that civic education has a strategic role in shaping young generations who possess legal awareness, social responsibility, and a strong sense of patriotism. Within Gayo culture, these values are reflected in the collective traditions

of Didong, which promote deliberation (*musyawarah*), respect for differing opinions, and social harmony (Taufika & Amin, 2023). Furthermore, Mutthoimah et al. (2025) argue that the internalization of Pancasila values through local cultural media enables younger generations to navigate globalization without losing their identity. This is consistent with the findings of Sakinah and Dewi (2021), which demonstrate that embedding Pancasila values through cultural practices can foster individuals who are critical, honest, just, and religious. Accordingly, the integration of Didong values into both formal and informal education can serve as a strong foundation for developing civic character characterized by integrity.

The role of Didong as a medium for character education is further supported by Albayan and Hakim (2024), who highlight that government policies supporting Didong arts have positively contributed to the preservation of local identity and the well-being of the Gayo community. In this context, Didong not only preserves cultural heritage but also strengthens nationalism and regional pride. Ihwan et al. (2025) add that Didong performers (poets) hold important social and moral roles as conveyors of *dakwah bil hikmah*. A form of religious communication delivered with wisdom, gentleness, and cultural sensitivity. Through this approach, moral and religious messages can be effectively communicated without diminishing the entertainment value of the cultural performance (Akhir et al., 2025).

Didong art also embodies profound Islamic values that are aligned with universal principles of goodness. For instance, in the Didong Jalu performance, Islamic teachings (*sharia*) and the social norms of the Gayo Lues community are carefully preserved, even as the mode of presentation becomes increasingly modern (Akhir et al., 2025). The moral messages conveyed through Didong poetry, which emphasize *tawhid* (the oneness of God) and politeness, serve as an effective medium for instilling religious values from an early age (Shaumiwaty, 2021). Thus, this local culture performs a dual function: strengthening Islamic character while simultaneously fostering social morality in alignment with the philosophical values of Pancasila (Tamlekha et al., 2025).

According to Saputra et al. (2024), art as a cultural element plays a crucial role in maintaining local identity amid modernization. In this regard, Didong serves as a bridge between tradition and innovation, preserving local values while adapting to contemporary developments (Eb, 2023). This phenomenon supports Hasan et al. (2024), who argue that globalization can erode local cultural identity if not balanced with conscious preservation efforts. Therefore, familiarity with Didong culture can act as a cultural safeguard for the younger generation, preventing the loss of identity and reinforcing their connection to national values (Farhaeni & Martini, 2023; Zulkarnaen, 2022).

Character education grounded in local culture has proven to be an effective approach to maintaining the integrity of the younger generation. De Liska et al. (2024) demonstrate that values such as mutual cooperation, politeness, and social awareness embedded in local wisdom contribute to shaping ethical and socially responsible students. Jusmawati et al. (2024) further emphasize that character education should be integrated with social and cultural activities within the community. This is consistent with Handayani et al. (2022), who highlight the importance of incorporating local wisdom into the Merdeka Curriculum to realize the Pancasila Student Profile.

Moreover, Rohmiyati et al. (2024) found that empowering youth to participate in preserving local arts and culture enhances their awareness of national identity. Didong represents a concrete example of youth engagement in the preservation of traditional arts. In every Didong performance, adolescents actively participate, fostering a strong sense of

ownership toward their cultural heritage. Consequently, Didong is not merely a cultural legacy but also an educational medium that contributes to the formation of civic character among the younger generation (Briya, 2020; Kusrina & Samidi, 2021).

The values embedded in Didong also reinforce the function of civic education in building national character (Murtiningsih, 2024). Civic education plays a vital role in fostering a generation that is not only intellectually competent but also morally grounded, capable of harmonizing local and national values (Kadji, 2022). Through the internalization of values such as tolerance, mutual cooperation, and social justice, young people are encouraged to think critically and actively participate in social life (Kurniati et al., 2021). Furthermore, Didong values such as deliberation (*musyawarah*) and togetherness contribute to the development of a democratic and civically engaged society (Darliana et al., 2022).

The integration of Didong culture into educational practices can be implemented through extracurricular activities or community-based projects (Juangga et al., 2024). Direct cultural engagement enables students to better understand the meaning of solidarity, cooperation, and social responsibility (Adelia & Muthi, 2024). Learning approaches that incorporate local culture make educational values more relatable, as they are rooted in students' immediate social environments (Neviyarni & Zen, 2025).

Moreover, the character values found in Didong align closely with the principles of Pancasila, particularly the second and third principles, which emphasize humanity and unity (Mutthoimah et al., 2025). Character education derived from local culture can therefore strengthen the realization of the Pancasila Student Profile (Jusmawati et al., 2024). These values not only shape students into responsible citizens but also nurture individuals who possess empathy, accountability, and social awareness (Tamlekha et al., 2025; Saputra et al., 2025).

Civic culture, as described by Kurniati et al. (2021), functions to promote active citizen participation. The values embedded in Didong such as respect for others' opinions, cooperation, and social contribution. Represent practical forms of civic education that are both relevant and impactful. In line with Zuhry et al. (2024), culture-based civic education has been shown to enhance social solidarity and strengthen students' national identity. Anugrah and Rahmat (2024) further emphasize that the integration of cultural values into formal education requires the support of teachers, schools, and the broader community. Teachers act as facilitators who guide students in understanding these values, while families play a crucial role in instilling moral and spiritual foundations from an early age (Wardani et al., 2024). In this context, Didong values such as politeness and sincerity serve as effective media for value internalization.

Beyond its role in cultural preservation, Didong also serves as a powerful medium for developing civic character among the younger generation. When values such as honesty, deliberation, responsibility, and religiosity embedded in Didong are integrated into character education, they contribute to the formation of a generation that is resilient, ethical, and proud of its identity as part of the Indonesian nation (Rahimah, 2025; Saputra, Hasanah, & Azis, 2024; Ridwansyah, 2023).

Didong represents a concrete example of how local culture can serve as a foundation for character education aligned with the values of Pancasila and the spirit of nationalism. By integrating culture into education, the younger generation not only inherits cultural traditions but also develops into democratic citizens capable of competing in the global arena (Maulidha, 2024; Ihwan et al., 2025). Therefore, beyond its importance as a regional cultural heritage,

Didong can also be viewed as a strategic investment in the development of civic character at the national level.

Furthermore, Didong local culture can support the continuous implementation of character education across all levels of education, thereby strengthening national identity. Safitri et al. (2021) demonstrate that civic education at the primary school level can instill values such as discipline, responsibility, and nationalism from an early age. By integrating Didong values into early education, children can learn to respect others, understand cooperation, and become familiar with their local cultural heritage. These locally grounded values, when introduced early, are effective in shaping a strong sense of identity and national character during adolescence (Adelia & Muthi, 2024).

In addition, Bachrudin and Kasriman (2022) argue that a multicultural approach in civic education can enhance students' critical thinking and tolerance in responding to social diversity. Teaching local culture enables students not only to understand diversity but also to appreciate how local values can interact with other cultures without losing their identity (Savitri et al., 2024).

Zuhry et al. (2024) further emphasize that integrating culture into civic education strengthens students' identity as citizens who love their country. Similarly, Hubi et al. (2023) highlight that civic education courses at the higher education level also play a significant role in shaping students' character and ethics. In this context, understanding Didong local culture enriches students' perspectives on national and humanitarian values.

Sinaga et al. (2021) assert that character education in the contemporary era must be capable of addressing global challenges while maintaining local values. Social values embedded in Didong such as togetherness, solidarity, and responsibility. Represent forms of local wisdom that can strengthen the character of today's younger generation (Saputra et al., 2025). Ramadhani et al. (2025) further argue that learning approaches integrating local cultural values are effective in developing character-based education. Culture-based learning, such as Didong, enables students to understand social values within real-life contexts, thereby increasing their sensitivity to civic issues in their surroundings.

Ningtyas et al. (2022) argue that the values embedded in Didong can strengthen the spirit of nationalism. Pancasila values should serve as the foundation for shaping a character-driven younger generation. Cultural practices such as Didong function as effective media for reinforcing these values through everyday life, both through poetic expressions containing moral messages and the sense of togetherness embodied in its performances. Bria (2020) further found that integrating local wisdom into civic education significantly enhances students' sense of nationalism.

Dewi et al. (2021) and Zuhry et al. (2024) emphasize that fostering civic awareness must begin at an early stage, particularly at the primary education level. Civic education taught in elementary schools plays a crucial role in developing children's character, ensuring that they are not eroded by the forces of globalization. In this context, Didong can serve as an accessible medium for teaching moral and social values closely related to children's daily lives, enabling them to understand their national identity from an early age. Sustainable character education also requires collaboration among families, schools, and communities. Wardani et al. (2024) highlight that cultural literacy within the family plays a significant role in shaping children's character. Parents who introduce Didong poetry to their children from an early age indirectly instill values of politeness and appreciation for local culture. Such values form the foundation for developing responsible and well-characterized citizens (Rohmiyati et al., 2024).

Civic culture, as described by Darliana et al. (2022), serves as a fundamental basis for nurturing a democratic younger generation. Didong, with its emphasis on deliberation (*musyawarah*), represents a tangible expression of democratic cultural practices aligned with the principles of civic education (Kurniati et al., 2021). Furthermore, Murtiningsih et al. (2024) assert that character education grounded in Pancasila values must be consistently implemented to develop a resilient and nationalistic generation. Zulkarnaen (2022) also highlights the importance of local wisdom-based character education in maintaining the moral integrity of youth in the modern era. Cultural practices such as Didong enable young people to understand their cultural roots before engaging with global values that may challenge their moral foundations (Neviyarni & Zen, 2025). This perspective aligns with Saputra et al. (2025), who argue that character education should also foster creativity and ethical entrepreneurial spirit by utilizing local values as sources of inspiration.

Cultural literacy also plays a significant role in shaping national character. Rahimah (2025) notes that arts and cultural literacy can enhance appreciation for national cultural heritage and raise awareness of the importance of preserving local traditions. For instance, cultural literacy programs centered on Didong can help younger generations recognize their cultural identity while fostering national pride (Handayani et al., 2022). Additionally, local wisdom such as Didong can function as a medium for social and spiritual counseling within the community. Kasih et al. (2023) demonstrate that Islamic counseling values embedded in Didong poetry emphasize ethics, compassion, and social harmony. These values directly contribute to the development of peaceful and civilized citizens (Akbar et al., 2025). Similarly, Ridwansyah (2023) confirms that Didong poetry contains social and religious values that remain highly relevant for contemporary character education.

Didong also serves as an effective medium of social communication within the Gayo community (Maulidha, 2024). Through its poetic expressions and performances, communities can convey social messages and critique societal conditions without generating conflict. This demonstrates that Didong is not merely a form of entertainment but also a medium for learning democratic values in a respectful and dignified manner (Albayan & Hakim, 2024). The role of educational institutions and communities is therefore essential in ensuring the sustainability of cultural values such as Didong. As noted by Juangga et al. (2024), the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project can be optimized through the integration of local wisdom. Students can understand Pancasila values contextually through engagement in regional arts and cultural activities. This approach is further supported by Saputri et al. (2024), who found that integrating cultural and civic literacy fosters students' appreciation for local culture. Through value-based learning grounded in local traditions, younger generations not only recognize their cultural heritage but also develop a comprehensive understanding of their identity as Indonesian citizens (Mustari, 2024; Mutthoimah et al., 2025; Tamlekha et al., 2025). Didong instills values of honesty, cooperation, religiosity, and patriotism, which form the foundation for future generations (Shaumiwaty, 2021; Akhir et al., 2025).

Overall, the findings from the analysis of 48 journal articles indicate that the exploration of Didong local culture has a significant relationship with the development of civic character among the younger generation. Beyond its role as a historical and cultural heritage, Didong represents a valuable source of moral values and national identity that must be preserved and transmitted to future generations. Theoretically, these findings contribute to the development of civic education studies by emphasizing the importance of integrating local wisdom as a contextual and value-based foundation for civic character formation. This study strengthens

the conceptual understanding that cultural practices such as Didong can serve as an effective medium for internalizing civic values in a holistic manner. Practically, these findings provide implications for educators, policymakers, and communities to integrate Didong into educational practices, such as through curriculum development, project-based learning, and cultural activities, in order to enhance students' civic awareness, social responsibility, and national identity in the era of globalization.

Conclusion

Didong is a traditional art form originating from the Gayo Highlands, particularly in Central Aceh, Bener Meriah, Gayo Lues, and Southeast Aceh. This cultural practice functions not merely as entertainment but also as a medium for transmitting moral, religious, and social values that contribute to shaping the civic character of the younger generation. The core values embedded in Didong such as honesty, deliberation (*musyawarah*), social responsibility, and religiosity are closely aligned with the principles and objectives of civic education. The integration of local culture such as Didong into educational practices can enhance public awareness and foster a sense of pride in national identity, while also strengthening social cohesion and promoting democratic values in everyday life.

The active involvement of teachers, families, and communities in integrating Didong into educational contexts is essential for both cultural preservation and the development of civic character characterized by integrity, responsibility, and democratic attitudes. As a living cultural heritage, Didong serves not only as a medium for social and religious guidance promoting ethics, compassion, and social harmony but also as a platform for communicating moral messages and social criticism in a respectful and culturally appropriate manner.

Therefore, Didong should not only be preserved as a cultural legacy but also recognized as a strategic investment in developing a resilient, competitive, and civically responsible younger generation that takes pride in its Indonesian identity. These findings confirm that Didong culture plays a significant and contextual role in strengthening civic character through the integration of local wisdom into civic education, thereby providing a meaningful contribution to the development of culturally based civic education frameworks.

This study has several limitations, particularly its reliance on secondary data from literature sources and the absence of direct empirical investigation in the field, which may limit the depth of contextual analysis. Therefore, future research is recommended to conduct empirical studies, such as field research or experimental approaches, to further examine the effectiveness of integrating Didong culture in educational practices and its impact on students' civic character development.

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