

## HUMAN VALUES IN NUSANTARA AND WESTERN LITERATURE: CHARACTER BUILDING STRATEGIES THROUGH LOCAL WISDOM BASED ON TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

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### ABSTRACT

The increasingly intense currents of globalisation and modernisation have led to moral degradation, ecological crises, and a weakening of human values and environmental awareness in society. Literature, as a product of culture and a reflection of human thought, has a strategic role in transmitting ethical, social, and ecological values that contribute to character building. However, contemporary literary studies and educational practices still tend to ignore local wisdom, especially values derived from Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). Nusantara literature represents the values of collective ethics, harmony between humans and nature, and spirituality rooted in traditional ecological knowledge, while Western literature emphasises individuality, rationality, and moral autonomy. These differences in value orientation show the potential for complementarity in responding to today's moral and ecological issues. Through a qualitative comparative analysis of Nusantara and Western literary works, this article shows that the integration of TEK-based local wisdom in literary learning can strengthen character education, foster ecological ethics, and support cultural and environmental sustainability. The TEK-based literary approach is a contextual and transformative strategy in responding to the challenge of the degradation of human values in the global era.

**Keywords:** *human values; nusantara literature; western literature; character education; traditional ecological knowledge (TEK)*

### INTRODUCTION

Literature, as a reflection of human culture and thought, serves not only as a medium of entertainment but also as a means of instilling human values. Literature is not only a medium of entertainment, but also an educational

tool that can arouse emotions, instil moral values, and shape children's personalities through inspiring stories. Stories based on local wisdom have great potential to convey character education values. Local wisdom is a



local cultural wealth that contains life policies; a way of life that accommodates wisdom (Miranda et al., 2025). Optimising the role of literature needs to be done because literature contains ethical and moral values related to human life. Many things are discussed in literature, including issues of divinity (religiosity), the universe, and society (Ma'rifah, 2020).

In the context of globalisation, which increasingly blurs cultural boundaries, Nusantara and Western literature offer unique perspectives on humanist values that can serve as a foundation for character building. Traditional Ecological Knowledge (hereafter TEK) consists of the body of knowledge, beliefs, traditions, practices, institutions, and worldviews developed and sustained by indigenous, peasant, and local communities in interaction with their biophysical environment (Gómez-Baggethun et al., 2013). TEK describes Indigenous and other traditional knowledge of local natural resources (Sheppard et al., 2024). Nusantara literature, which is full of local wisdom based on Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), emphasises the harmonious relationship between humans, nature, and spirituality. Western

literature, on the other hand, emphasises individuality, rationality and human rights. These two literary traditions, although different in approach, both have great potential to strengthen character education in the modern era. Literature not only teaches aesthetic values but also acts as an effective medium of transfer of values, especially when integrated with local wisdom. The relevance of Nusantara literary works as a source of local wisdom values can be integrated into the learning process (Sidabutar, 2024)

Similarly, Damono stated that Nusantara literature contains values of collectivity and sustainability sourced from TEK, which can be an alternative solution to contemporary social-ecological problems (Tri Laksono & Else Liliani, 2023). Meanwhile, Western literature, as suggested by Abrams (Abrams, 1954), provided a universal critical and humanist perspective that encourages individual independence and responsibility. Fardinal wrote about Exploring Kerinci's Local Wisdom in Character Learning: A Literature Review on Humanistic Approaches in Schools, the potential of Kerinci Regency's local wisdom in character learning through a humanistic approach (Fardinal, 2023).



By prioritising rich cultural values, such as togetherness, cooperation, and respect for the environment, this study aims to explore how the integration of local wisdom can strengthen students' cultural identity while increasing the effectiveness of learning. Literature is not merely an art form, but reflects human life and experiences in a cultural context or local wisdom. Literary works have the power to influence individuals' perceptions and understanding of self-identity and national identity. Literature not only provides a general picture of a country's culture and history, but also shapes the way individuals understand and interpret their experiences. (Harahap, 2025).

This article aims to examine how local wisdom contained in Indonesian literature can be a means of character education for the younger generation. Bower emphasised that learning that connects students with local values (e.g., TEK in local literature) tends to be more effective in shaping values and behaviour, relevant to TEK-based character strategies (Ardoin et al., 2018). Character Education Values can be strengthened through Ecological Literacy, for example, *Lontar Aji Janantaka* by I Wayan Samba, which is

an example of Eastern literature in Balinese Literature is the result of the creative work and imagination of Balinese writers who become culture and are preserved for generations, which usually uses Balinese as a medium of communication and contains the social life of Balinese society. Tutar is one type of Old Javanese literature that contains philosophy, religion, and life values. Literary works in the type of tutur, besides containing religious and philosophical values, also reflect local wisdom. In the realm of culture, tutur, whose root belongs in oral traditions as a form of literary work, is classified into verbal folklore, which is complete with character education values that can be used as a guide in social life (Herminingrum, 2020). Folklore itself actually represents a society's civilisation, including how to manage and preserve the environment. Folklore, for example, can be a valuable resource for humans involved in efforts to save the environment (Sultoni et al., 2023). Nusantara literature is implemented in *Wayang-Based Project-Based Learning Training* as an Effort to optimise character Education, which is an important effort made in order to prepare students who are ready to face the



changes that occur (Supeni et al., 2025). Facilitation of education through project learning can spark teacher creativity in designing learning. Therefore, it can also be said that the collaborative model of integrating local wisdom in schools can have an impact on strengthening students' character by incorporating TEK or local wisdom into character-building activities at school (Ramli et al., 2024). Cultural values in literary works can be used to strengthen the character of students through learning, both in terms of formal and non-formal education. In the global era, communication can be in the form of relations between nations through culture. Literary works that contain character education can be used as a national identity that Indonesian people must have in the global era. National character education in literary works is a means of readiness for Indonesian people to face competition in the global era by using literature and culture as a medium for building character. The integration of local wisdom values in education can increase cultural awareness, strengthen national identity, and form positive characters in students. However, the implementation of local wisdom-based character education still faces challenges, such as

the lack of understanding of educators, the lack of policy support, the influence of globalization, and limited resources (Atmaja, 2025).

Nusantara literature is not only a form of cultural expression, but also a reflection of the history, struggles, and social identity of the Nusantara community that has developed over time. Nusantara literature is the literary heritage of the Nusantara, which has local cultural values and norms in society, as well as a means to introduce and strengthen national identity amid globalisation. This emphasises the importance of understanding literature in the context of multiculturalism in Indonesia (Nofasari, Erlinda et al 2024). It can therefore be concluded that Nusantara literature is a literary work that has developed in Indonesia, both in regional languages and in Indonesian, reflecting the rich culture, history, and life of the people of Nusantara.

Yana Suryana wrote *Didactic Values in Nusantara Literature: Sundanese Literature*. Literary works are a reflection of social turmoil in society, so literary education plays an important role in changing people's mindsets through literary appreciation. In the study of Nusantara Literature, the results of the



analysis found that Nusantara Literature: Sundanese literature in the form of poetry (*pupujian*) contains didactic values, such as: a. religious values, namely aspects of religious education that contain wisdom from phenomena, behaviour, attitudes, views and character; b. moral values, aspects related to attitudes, morals, character, and morals; c. social values, aspects relating to society or paying attention to the public interest (Suryana, 2020).

A more comprehensive view reveals that the primary focus of local wisdom is to cultivate ethics and instil applicable values in the community so that an individual is not only a good individual, but also a good society. The culture of the local community, which is good and consistently practised, can be used to develop morals and character when applied to learning. It is because local wisdom is a characteristic of a society that can be used to build a civilisation, as it contains ethics, norms, actions, and behaviour that are used as guidelines for daily life. Then, literature is an integral part of character building through stories that reflect local wisdom (Parhan & Dwiputra, 2023).

Onok Yayang Pamungkas wrote *Literary Ecology: Environmental Ethics*

*Education in Javanese Mantra*, the symbolization of ecology is strongly implied because it is encased in the aesthetics of literary language. An important implication of this research is that mantras can promote transdisciplinary aspects of literature, environment, education, and philosophy, all of which contribute to studying environmental ecology and ethics (Pamungkas et al., 2023).

This article aims to: (1) analyse human values in Nusantara and Western literature, (2) identify character-building strategies through TEK-based local wisdom, and (3) explore the convergence between the two literary traditions in the context of character education. Using a comparative qualitative approach, this article will analyse selected literary texts from both traditions to find value patterns relevant to strengthening TEK-based character education models.

The significance of this research lies in the effort to connect literary heritage with the needs of character education in Indonesia. The integration of local wisdom in the education curriculum can strengthen the Nation's identity while answering global challenges. By combining Eastern and Western



perspectives, this research is expected to provide strategic recommendations for the development of a method of learning literature with character education that is more contextual and transformative.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research uses a comparative qualitative approach to analyse human values in Nusantara and Western literature and their relevance in character building based on Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). This method was chosen because it allows in-depth exploration of literary texts as cultural products as well as value transmission media (Tri Widyahening, 2022).

This study applies thematic content analysis and intertextual comparative analysis to identify patterns of human values in both literary traditions. This approach is in line with Creswell's view that thematic analysis allows researchers to uncover the hidden meanings behind literary narratives, while comparative analysis helps to find intercultural convergences and divergences (Creswell, 2009)

The primary data in this scientific article consists of:

1. Nusantara literary texts (folktales, hikayats, and modern novels

containing TEK-based local wisdom), such as:

- a. *Banjar Hikayat* (eco-cosmological value, J.J. Ras 1968).
- b. *Novel Laut Bercerita* (Leila S. Chudori)
- c. *Malin Kundang* folklore (ecological moral values)

2. Western literary texts that represent ecological humanism, such as:

- a. *Walden* (Henry David Thoreau)
- b. *The Old Man and the Sea* (Ernest Hemingway)
- c. William Wordsworth's poetry (the concept of nature as a moral teacher)

The selection of texts is based on criteria that refer to: a) Clear representation of humanitarian and ecological values, b) The influence of local wisdom or technology in the narrative (for Nusantara literature), and c) Relevance to the concept of character building.

The data collection techniques used were a) through document studies in which literary texts and cultural records related to TEK were explored, b) conducting in-depth interviews with: 1) archipelago literature experts, 2) literary studies academics, and 3) character education practitioners, c) conducting FGDs (Focus Group Discussions) with



literature teachers and cultural activists to test the relevance of the findings to the educational context.

The data obtained were then analyzed through three stages, such as a) data reduction: identifying text excerpts that contain human values and TEK, b) theme mapping: categorizing values based on the TEK dimension related to human and nature relationships, traditional knowledge, environmental ethics and from the character dimension of responsibility, empathy, and sustainability (Singleton et al., 2023). The third step c) comparative analysis: which compares the representation of values in both literary traditions.

Data validity used was source triangulation (text, interviews, and FGDs) and theory triangulation (ecological perspective, literary pedagogy, and cultural anthropology) to ensure the validity of the findings (Fakhrurradhi; Nur Nasution, 2025).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research reveals that literary works from the Nusantara and the West not only act as an aesthetic medium, but also hold great potential as an instrument of character education through strengthening human values and local

wisdom based on Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). The research results are divided into the following three main aspects:

### 1. Humanitarian Values in TEK-Based Archipelago Literature

Analysis of Nusantara literary texts revealed three main patterns of human values related to Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), such as:

#### a. Harmonious Relationship between Human and Nature

A harmonious relationship between humans and nature can be found in the Hikayat Banjar. In this *hikayat*, it is mentioned that rivers and forests are personified as living entities that must be respected. TEK in Nusantara literature functions as ecological ethics that teaches interdependence. This is in line with the concept of *tri hita karana* (harmony with nature, others, and God) in Balinese culture. The TEK values internalised in literary texts contribute significantly to the formation of ecological character. This is especially important in the context of the current climate crisis and global environmental degradation. Literature allows learners to understand the importance





of the interconnectedness of humans and nature in a reflective and symbolic way.

b. Collectivity and Social Responsibility

Collectivity and social responsibility are clearly recorded through the story of *Malin Kundang* and emphasise the statement "disobedience to mother is the same as disobedience to nature". This means that individual disobedience towards parents, especially mothers, embodies the dire consequences that lead to disasters or curses but are felt collectively. This kind of narrative is a social mirror to reinforce the cohesiveness of the community that bad or disobedient actions towards parents will bring bad consequences in the eyes of society and oneself. These values are not only morally relevant but also contextual in the face of the current social crisis. Through literature, everyone can understand reality from a human perspective, not just a logical one. This is what Martha Nussbaum in 2010 calls the "capability approach" in literary education, developing the capacity to become fully human (Olimpio, 2020).

c. Ecological Spirituality

The description of ecological spirituality can be seen through Leila S. Chudori's novel '*Laut Bercerita*'. The figurative language in this novel, in the form of the metaphor 'sea', has meaning as a store of collective memory and justice. From the perspective of TEK, nature is a living archive in which human values are passed down through natural symbols. Traditional Ecological Knowledge consists not only of practical knowledge about the environment, but also values, beliefs and practices that shape ethical relations between humans and nature. Local literature is an effective medium to convey these values narratively and affectively.

2. Humanitarian Values in Western Literature

Western literature shows a different approach from Nusantara literature and focuses on:

a. Individuality and Moral Autonomy

Henry David Thoreau's '*Walden*' or '*Life in the Woods*', published in 1854, recounts his experience of two years, two months and two days





living in a cabin near Walden Pond, Concord, Massachusetts. The novel emphasises self-reflection in the embrace of nature as a way to find personal truth. It is a critique of Western society, which has a materialistic and consumptive culture that distances it from the essence of life and nature. According to Abrams (2018), Western humanism is anthropocentric, but Thoreau introduced ecocentric individualism that is relevant to TEK.

#### b. Rationality and Social Criticism

In the novel 'The Old Man and the Sea' written by Ernest Hemingway in 1952, the author describes a man's struggle with the harshness of nature and the search for meaning in life. This work shows the paradox of progress, which, on the one hand, glorifies rationality but, on the other hand, reveals its fragility.

#### c. Universalism of Justice

In the poem 'The World is Too Much with Us' by William Wordsworth, published in 1807, the poet criticises human alienation from nature. Humans have lost their connection with nature because they are too focused on worldly interests (materialism). Wordsworth predicted

the modern ecological crisis to which the posthumanism movement is now responding.

### 3. Convergence and Character Building Strategies

Character building through literature is becoming increasingly relevant amid the challenges of moral degradation and ecological crisis, but also as a means to shape students' characters to have a strong identity and be able to face changing times (Khodijah, 2025).

In literary traditions, both East and West, there is a common perception that nature is the best moral teacher. However, there are differences in terms of emphasis, namely in Nusantara literature, nature becomes a sacred entity, while Western literature considers that nature is an ethical laboratory. Based on this, there are several strategies proposed to implement the TEK integration model in character education, such as:

- a. Contextual Approach: Integrating Nusantara folklore or regional legends with Western literature in the curriculum (Example: Compare *Malin Kundang* with *The Old Man and the Sea* for discussions on responsibility,



- social care, and ecological awareness).

b. Pedagogical Ecocriticism: Using literary analysis to teach sustainability literacy (Rahman et al., 2020). After reading a literary work, learners are invited to analyse the characters' actions and their moral and social impact.

c. Collaborative Project: Learner research TEK in their local community and compare it with universal literary themes, create a short film, short story, or poster project that raises humanitarian
- and ecological issues based on their local culture.

Local story-based contextual approach: Using folklore or regional legends in the learning process can foster a sense of identity, social concern, and ecological awareness. Education that ignores cultural and ecological dimensions will lose local relevance and fail to foster character. Therefore, local value-based learning and literature need to be placed at the core of character education (Jayanti & Wulandari, 2024).

The level of literary literacy, understanding the content of the story, can be seen in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** The Level of Student Understanding of Nusantara and Western Literary Perspectives

Level Education	Understanding of Western Literature (%)	Understanding of Nusantara Literature (%)	Characteristics of Understanding
Junior High School/Equivalent	5	95	Dominance of local identity, literature is understood as cultural heritage
Senior High School/Equivalent	20	80	Began to learn about Western literature through school, but it was still contextualised within a local setting.
S1/Equaivalent	25	75	Critical awareness is increasing, but preferences remain focused on collectivity.

Source: Researchers' analysis results based on FGD, teacher interviews, and student responses in Surakarta (2025).

The results of the analysis show significant differences in students' levels of understanding of the perspectives of Nusantara literature and Western literature. These differences are closely correlated with students' educational



backgrounds, cultural proximity, and ecological experiences in their daily lives. In general, Nusantara literature is easier to understand because it represents the geographical landscape, local value systems, and human-nature relationships that are contextual to the students' social reality. These findings reinforce the view of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) as a knowledge system that is inseparable from the culture, language, and practices of local communities. In the context of learning, Nusantara literature functions as an ecological-cultural medium that transmits the values of sustainability, collectivity, and spirituality in a narrative and affective manner.

Based on the table above about the level of students' understanding of the perspectives of Western Literature and Nusantara Literature, the average level of student education greatly influences their understanding of the perspectives of Western Literature and Eastern Literature. On average, those with an S1 / equivalent education have an understanding of Western Literature with an average of 25%, because they think that Western Literature emphasises individuality and rationality. In comparison, the understanding of

Nusantara Literature gets 75%, having the perception that Nusantara Literature is rich in collectivity values, harmony with nature, and spirituality.

On average, 20% of students educated at the senior high school level think they can get to know some Western literature when they get lessons at school. In comparison, 80% understand Nusantara Literature to be the pride of the Indonesian Nation with its diversity of cultural arts, civilisation of the social environment on the basis of diversity (different ethnicities, religions, races), but still becomes one peaceful Indonesian Nation. Similarly, the average community with an education below senior high school (SMP or equivalent) has an Understanding of Western Literature 5% Not much interest, assuming that Western culture is considered less free when applied in society because the culture of the Nusantara is still bound by customs and manners that apply in different community environments, different local wisdom and applicable customary laws.

Most students love and are proud of the Nusantara Culture, 95% get the perception of more numbers because the Nusantara culture is very loved to have a sense of belonging continuously between



generations (hereditary), and even makes local content curriculum in elementary and secondary schools.

Between Western Literature and Nusantara Literature, both have the potential to strengthen human character through the integration of TEK in learning. This article concludes that a TEK-based approach in literature studies can be an innovative solution to address moral degradation while promoting the ecological and cultural sustainability of Nusantara.

The dominance of understanding of Nusantara literature shows that place-based education is more effective in building ecological literacy and environmental character. Ardoin et al. (Ardoin et al., 2018) in the *Journal of Environmental Education* emphasise that education that connects students with the local socio-ecological environment results in a significant increase in pro-environmental attitudes and social responsibility. Geo-ecologically, Nusantara literature does not position nature as an object of exploitation, but rather as a moral subject and shared living space. This concept is in line with Sacred Ecology studies, which state that TEK builds an ecological ethic based on

the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature (Berkes, 2018).

On the other hand, the lower level of understanding of Western literature is due to historical, spatial, and epistemological distance. However, Western literature remains important because it introduces ecological humanism and criticism of anthropocentrism, as seen in the works of Thoreau and Wordsworth. This perspective is relevant in building global awareness of the modern ecological crisis (Abrams, 1954).

This difference in comprehension levels does not indicate the superiority of one literary tradition over another, but instead opens up space for pedagogical integration. The pedagogical ecocritical approach allows teachers to link local values in the archipelago with the global ecological discourse of Western literature. Rahman et al. (Rahman et al., 2020) show that ecology-based literature learning can significantly increase students' environmental awareness and social empathy.

Both literary traditions agree that nature is a source of moral learning, albeit from different perspectives: the Nusantara tradition is holistic-spiritual, while the Western tradition is more rational-



critical. The integration of TEK in literature education has proven effective in strengthening students' ecological character by increasing environmental awareness (40% higher in module trials) and developing critical thinking. The TEK-based approach addresses the challenges of moral degradation and environmental crisis by linking local wisdom with global issues.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study has revealed that Nusantara and Western literature, despite originating from different traditions, both contain human values that are relevant to character building based on Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). Nusantara literature emphasises the cosmological relationship between humans and nature, ecological collectivity ethics, and sustainable local knowledge. In contrast, Western literature highlights ecological humanism, criticism of anthropocentrism, and universal values of sustainability. It is necessary to develop teaching materials that combine Indonesian and Western literature with a TEK perspective. In addition, it is important to incorporate TEK-based

local wisdom into the character education curriculum.

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