



THE URGENCY OF INSTILLING SA'O LOCAL WISDOM VALUES IN ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION EFFORTS FOR STUDENTS IN NGADA REGENCY

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Abstract. The traditional architecture of *Sa'o*, which is the traditional house of Bajawa, demonstrates the preservation of environmental sustainability through local wisdom. This study aims to: (1) examine the values of local wisdom in the development and governance of *Sa'o* and the environment in Bena Village, and (2) analyze the role of this local wisdom as respect for nature and its relevance as an educational medium for students. The study concludes that the local wisdom of Bena Village is a valuable form of social and ecological capital. Therefore, a strategy is needed to help students understand, appreciate, and preserve these values so they can face global environmental challenges. The findings reveal that local wisdom in *Sa'o* enables students to maintain harmony in their lives through traditions and rituals that have been passed down for generations. This wisdom can also serve as a reference for knowledge and understanding to overcome and anticipate current local environmental issues, particularly those related to pollution.

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INTRODUCTION

The environment currently faces various serious problems, including climate change, pollution, and increasingly widespread deforestation. This environmental damage is primarily caused by human activities that ignore the environment and tend to be unsustainable, such as land burning, excessive exploitation of natural resources, and uncontrolled waste disposal. The impacts are very noticeable, ranging from more frequent natural disasters to health problems caused by pollution, which are even reported to be worsening. The continued degradation of the natural environment, resulting from prolonged and ongoing damage, hurts the survival of living things, including humans. In line with this, the challenges of current environmental problems can raise awareness that environmental problems are not solely the responsibility of the environment but also have social and economic aspects that contribute to this problem (Utami & Supriatna, 2024). Human exploitation of the natural environment has led to various gaps in the relationship between humans and their environment. Therefore, there needs to be selective, integrative, sustainable, and consistent efforts to protect and manage the natural environment for students through the wisdom contained in local culture by local communities that are sustainable so that it can become a barometer in handling it in the future where Globalization and the digital revolution have created a phenomenon of cultural homogenization that threatens the sustainability of local traditions, especially among students (Cahyono, 2022). This threat is also felt by indigenous communities in Ngada-Flores Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, where students' understanding and appreciation of their noble cultural values are beginning to fade.

Social studies, particularly history, in the community is often trapped in grand national narratives that are textual in nature and do not address students' local historical contexts (Soviana et al., 2023). As a result, students struggle to find the relevance and meaning of history lessons for their lives, leading to the perception that local history is unnecessary and boring.

Natural diversity provides essential resources for human life and other living organisms, as well as unparalleled ecological value and beauty. Nevertheless, this sustainability has been jeopardized by human activities, including the overexploitation of

natural resources, urbanization, and climate change. Indonesia was ranked 162 out of 180 countries globally, with a score of 33.8 out of 100 points, according to the 2024 Environmental Performance Index (EPI). Indonesia is not as advanced as the other ASEAN countries. Additionally, ecosystem vitality, including the quality of biodiversity, air resources, agriculture, and fisheries, will be substantially affected. This low score serves as a reminder to us all to persist in our efforts to increase awareness of the significance of environmental protection, to take collective action to prevent damage, and to supervise pro-environmental policies.

The People Resources and Conservation Foundation (PRCF) Indonesia emphasizes seven environmental issues that require urgent attention: deforestation, air pollution, microplastic pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss, water crisis, and global warming. This fact is consistent with the findings of [Aragök \(2024\)](#) research, which states that: *“During the formation of the index, the determined goals and the policies formed for attaining such goals or the performances in sub-indicators should also be considered. Only in this manner can the decision-makers develop the correct policies for their strengths and weaknesses”*. This statement implies that policymakers are presented with all indicators of environmental damage at both the local and higher levels. This fundamental issue necessitates that we, as rational humans, take concrete steps to manage nature. The solution to the aforementioned issue can be achieved by contextually managing nature, which involves engaging in meaningful activities that are rooted in the reality of the surrounding community. These activities should be based on the fundamental experiences that encompass the culture and traditions of the local community. This fact can be linked to the local wisdom available, which can serve as a valuable source for learning and reflection on the ecological environment by examining historical traces and experiences in environmental protection.

Indigenous communities have traditional ceremonies or rituals that are designed to foster a harmonious relationship with nature and request blessings from natural resources, which are also depicted in figurative carvings ([Sianipar et al, 2015](#)). This fact is a prevalent practice among specific community groups. Traditions or customs passed down through generations can serve as a mirror for individuals to gain a deeper understanding of their own nature. The characteristic values of a specific society are embodied in the local wisdom expressed by [Wijaya et al. \(2025\)](#). These values are formed through knowledge and habits that are subsequently passed down to the next generation. Local wisdom is associated with the order of life values that are passed down from ancestors and are beneficial to each individual or group, as per ([Hetarion et al., 2020](#)). Local wisdom is consistently linked to patterns of social relationships (between individuals and other individuals), relationships with nature (between humans and nature), and relationships with God (between humans and God) ([Susilaningtiyas & Falaq, 2021](#)). Consequently, local wisdom is perceived as a societal guide that imparts the principles of wisdom and goodness, particularly in the context of developing one's character to become virtuous. Local wisdom has advantages for individuals in this instance. Consequently, it is imperative to preserve and acknowledge the existence of local wisdom in the face of modernization and globalization. The education pathway can be employed to preserve local wisdom, ensuring that it continues to develop and expand within the community. The incorporation of local wisdom into education, particularly in the learning process, will foster the development of students who can embody the principles of local wisdom in their daily lives ([Sriartha et al., 2017](#); [Bhoga, 2005](#)).

The following are a few of the novelties of this research: Initially, the distinctiveness of its customs. The author concentrates on a variety of traditional activities that are present in the Bena village community. The author observes that there is still a significant lack of previous research and studies on the relationship between local wisdom and nature, as evidenced by the traditional rituals of the *Sa'o*. The author consulted the following sources for this article: [Smedal \(2000\)](#) and [Vianey \(2024\)](#). The figurative (and non-figurative) carvings in the *Sa'o ngaza* (traditional houses) of the Ngada people are revealed to have a multitude of meanings in both of these studies.



By utilizing local wisdom-based education, students are motivated to establish *Sa'o* values as the cornerstone of their morals and virtues. The objective of values education is to assist students in the comprehensive comprehension, realization, and integration of values into their religious, ethical, and aesthetic conduct (Kosasih, 2015). This result is consistent with this objective. In addition to being recipients of values, students are also agents of change who preserve and actualize them in the contemporary context. This result is achieved through their active participation. Instilling the values inherent in the local culture of the region is one of the numerous solutions that can be implemented. By internalizing ecological values embedded in local wisdom, it is possible to cultivate public awareness of natural environment management, thereby fostering a positive attitude toward ecological living.

This study aims to address the issues that arise as a result of literacy studies conducted by a variety of relevant sources. It does so by elucidating the significance of internalizing local wisdom values, which are supported by empirical evidence and observation results. These results are related to the efforts to preserve the natural environment of a *Sa'o* traditional house. According to the empirical study and observation results, the internalization of local traditional values through *Sa'o* local wisdom can positively impact the preservation of the natural environment by embodying the customs and traditions of local indigenous communities for students. The author aims to make this paper a valuable contribution to character development by addressing the moral issues that continue to afflict the Indonesian nation, as previously mentioned.

RESEARCH METHODS

The library research method was employed in this investigation. The methodology employed was qualitative descriptive-analytical, which involved the description, analysis, and synthesis of qualitative data from a variety of recent sources of literature. The primary data sources employed were national scientific journals that addressed Ngada local wisdom, history learning, and cultural education, as well as textbooks and reference books that were pertinent to the research topic. Furthermore, articles from regional publications and reputable online media that emphasized Ngada culture were implemented. Three stages were employed to implement data analysis techniques: (1) data reduction by selecting the most pertinent data; (2) data presentation in the form of structured narrative descriptions; and (3) drawing conclusions or verifying the research objectives.

The interactive analysis model of Miles et al. (2014) was employed to analyze the data. This model comprised three primary stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The researchers selected information that was pertinent to the research focus during the data reduction stage. The data were subsequently presented in the form of a narrative description that exemplifies the values of local *Sa'o* wisdom. Ultimately, the research findings were connected to existing theories and literature to derive conclusions, which included recommendations for the effective transmission of *Sa'o* values to students. This analysis model was effective in revealing socio-cultural meanings and patterns within a specific societal context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Traditions in *Sa'o* Relating to Nature

a. The Development of *Sa'o*

The construction of a *Sa'o* (traditional house) in Ngada is not merely a physical activity; it is a socio-cultural event that mobilizes the village community and kinship. Each stage of construction activates the values of cooperation, solidarity, and respect for tradition, as the *Sa'o* is the focal point of tribal identity, linked to traditional leadership structures and ancestral symbols. The spatial patterns and forms of the *Sa'o* in numerous villages, including Bena, serve as evidence of the continuity of inherited knowledge and symbolic meanings that preserve social unity (Tandafatu, 2023).

Sa'o are conceptually identified by names and hierarchies, such as *Sa'o Pu'u* (source house), *Sa'o Dhoro* (descendant house), and *Sa'o Lobo* (terminal house), which denote their



socio-spiritual functions and origins. The house's connection to genealogy, rituals, and the rights and responsibilities of community members is underscored by these names. As a result, the construction of a *Sa'o* necessitates the preservation of the lineage, customary authority, and networks of exchange and mutual assistance among relatives who are direct descendants of the *Sa'o*.

In a technical sense, *Sa'o* construction underscores the logic of bamboo and wood structures that are intended to promote communal efficiency, stability, and strength. The stages encompass the following: the selection of materials, the assembly of the frame, the installation of the roof, the interior work, and the determination of the site in the traditional courtyard (*Nua*). Rituals are frequently performed at critical junctures. The knowledge of a traditional artisan must be put to the test and combined with the participation of a broad community in order to facilitate the collective completion of large-scale projects (work-party). Research on vernacular architecture demonstrates that a highly sacred local cosmology is interwoven with technical decisions regarding materials, connections, and orientation.

The moral dimension of *Sa'o* development is further emphasized by a series of rituals, including the *Reba* cultural celebration and *Ka Sa'o*, which serve to affirm the dedication to cooperation, unity, and reverence for ancestors. In practice, the mobilization of labor, materials, and consumption is facilitated by kinship networks, including matrilineal ones in numerous regions of the Ngada region. Consequently, development projects serve as a form of intergenerational social education, which encompasses the marriage system as kinship (Wati & Hoban, 2021). *Sa'o* represents a socio-cultural construction that persists through the internalization and socialization of the younger generation, as a value that is passed down through generations (Buku, 2016). In this process, students, particularly school children, can respond to the dynamics of modern culture and accept, comprehend, and transmit the values that have been institutionalized in indigenous communities. This socialization allows them to recognize local values and incorporate them into their daily lives.

Sa'o's functional existence is as a residence, a center for deliberation, and a cultural asset that promotes economic independence (cultural tourism) when managed wisely and prudently by its followers, in addition to ritual activities. Consequently, the construction and restoration of the structure should adhere to traditional principles, prioritize environmental sustainability, and involve all residents as participants. This method preserves the integrity of form and meaning, while also providing the local community with opportunities to add value. Additionally, the *Sa'o*, or traditional house, is a manifestation of the rich and profound treasure trove of local wisdom that Ngada Regency possesses. *Sa'o* is not merely a residence; it is a microcosm that embodies the cosmos, an orderly social structure of society, spiritual values, and remnants of ancestral history. Life in the vicinity of *Sa'o* is characterized by the practice of values such as cooperation, deliberation for consensus (*Dheke*), equality, respect for nature and ancestors, and community resilience. As a cultural heritage, the symbols of *Sa'o* (traditional houses) are essential for students to comprehend and apply the values they represent. Cultural symbols are not merely visual ornaments; they are also replete with moral and spiritual teachings that have the potential to influence the character and identity of students when approached through an ethno-pedagogical perspective (Lina et al., 2025). Consequently, students not only acquire cultural values from books, but they also experience the symbolic significance in the context of their daily lives.

b. *Reba* Ritual

The *Reba* ritual is an annual rite focused on the *Sa'o* social space, with the intention of conveying memory, solidarity, and aesthetic and ecological values pertinent to the advancement of knowledge for the younger generation. Research on traditional rituals demonstrates that *Reba* unites cultural, spiritual, and natural dimensions through ceremonial stages (e.g., *Kobe Dheke*) that maintain intergenerational relationships and affirm the Ngada identity. This learning unit collaborates to map the chronology, actors, and artifacts of *Reba* in the *Sa'o* environment, encouraging students to construct local historical narratives that are both evidence-based and



reflective. This practice fosters a sense of continuity that is essential for historical awareness (Nia et al., 2025; Mite et al., 2024; Sabono, 2022).

Nia et al. (2025) and Mite et al. (2024) stated that the *Reba* ritual is an annual rite focused on the *Sa'o* social space, with the intention of conveying memory, solidarity, and aesthetic and ecological values pertinent to the advancement of knowledge for the younger generation. Research on traditional rituals demonstrates that *Reba* unites cultural, spiritual, and natural dimensions through ceremonial stages (e.g., *Kobe Dheke*) that maintain intergenerational relationships and affirm the Ngada identity. This learning unit collaborates to map the chronology, actors, and artifacts of *Reba* in the *Sa'o* environment, encouraging students to construct local historical narratives that are both evidence-based and reflective. This practice fosters a sense of continuity that is essential for historical awareness.

Additionally, the core *Reba* celebration is comprised of two components: *Kobe Dheke/Dheke Reba* (the first night of the *Reba* Ceremony), *Sedo wi or woko uwi* (the Thanksgiving dance), and *Su'i uwi* (the cutting of sweet potatoes). It is clarified that *Kobe Dheke/Dheke Reba* on the first night. *Kobe Dheke* is composed of two words: *Kobe*, which means night, and *Dheke*, which means to climb. This result means that the term "*Dhek'e*" is always used to refer to the act of entering a traditional house or *Sa'o*, as it necessitates climbing stairs, particularly to the innermost part (one *Sa'o*), which is the highest elevation. On that evening, all families or *Sa'o* residents, including those who reside in the village and those who travel from outside the area due to their employment abroad, will convene (Noywuli et al. 2025; Mopa et al, 2020).

Dheke Reba is a night of a plenary family reunion that is held in each traditional house. Secondly, *Sedo Uwi* is a mass performance art that is performed by the entire community, including children, young people, and adults, and is a special dance that is performed during the *Reba* celebration. The dancers must be fully dressed in traditional clothing. Following the *Dheke Reba* in the village courtyard, they form a circle and perform foot-stomping movements in a rhythmic forward and backward step, alternating the left foot forward and the right foot backward (Mopa et al., 2020). While singing "*o uwi e*" (*o ubi e*), the movement rotates to the right. The final ceremony in the series of *Reba* ceremonies is *pojo tebu* (vegetable binding), which is a process of cleaning and disposing of the garbage or dirt that has been collected during the *Reba* celebration. Cassava skins, bones, chicken feathers, bean leaf bones, and other items comprise the garbage. Any discussion regarding the *Reba* celebration should cease following the *pojo tebu* ceremony, as it has the potential to result in catastrophe. The villagers retire to the village after the *pojo tebu*. The *Reba* ritual is essential for the Ngada people to preserve their cultural identity and to reinforce national values in a broader context. The *Reba* ritual establishes a synergy between environmental, cultural, and religious values, thereby demonstrating respect for the natural world.

2. Respect for Nature

In general, Ngada society acknowledges the existence of various social levels or strata within the community. *Ga'e Kisa* is the middle or intermediate level, followed by *Ga'e Meze*, the highest social level, and *Azi Ana* or *Ho'o*, the lowest level (Sile et al., 2020). In addition to these structures, some people are referred to as "*Mori Lengi*" or "*Mori Nua*" (they are respected because they are the oldest tribe or people who founded the main village), "*mori wesu tana*" (landlord), "*mori wesu sudu*" (determining the time for boxing), "*mori sobhi*" (holder of the traditional calendar), and "*mori sao saka puu*" (head of the traditional house).

The vertical and horizontal relationships in religion, which involve interactions between the supreme being, fellow human beings, and the natural environment, will be referenced by this division if it is associated with nature. The chain of human life will be sustained if the combination of these three relationships is kept in equilibrium, where a harmonious relationship is established and maintained in its current state. In accordance with Nelo (2024), religion is a reality believed to be the truth that regulates human behavior in one's life. It is an expression of human understanding, appreciation, and action in relation to the transcendent. In other words, religion is a human response to the transcendent that is influenced by the context of the



individual's culture. A human's self-expression of the transcendent is through religion. As Feuerbach stated in the sociology of religion, "the true content of religion or the content of the conception of God is anthropological; religion is a projection of human attitudes into things beyond its reach" (Thomas, 1994). Religion is an initial or indirect form of knowledge.

Julian Steward (1902-1972) was the first to explore the theory of human ecology or cultural ecology, which later incorporated the examination of the relationship between culture and the environment into the field of ecological studies (Bennet, 1976). This thought was conceived prior to the influence of Frans Boaz's "historical particularism" school of thought (Orlove, 1980). The perspective of human ecology theory, which is undoubtedly distinct from the theory of environmental determinism, was derived from this. The theory of environmental determinism asserts that the natural environment is a determining factor in the formation of culture. Cultural distinctions arise as a result of variations in the natural environment in which the culture resides. Meanwhile, the theory of human ecology underscores the significance of human exploitation of the natural environment through the medium of their culture and the adaptation of human life to the conditions of a natural environment. Consequently, the theory of environmental determinism tends to perceive the relationship between the natural environment and culture as a linear causal relationship, whereas the theory of cultural ecology perceives the relationship as a dialectical form (Rachmad, 2019). Determinist theory posits that the natural environment's forms determine humanity and culture, and that cultural phenomena can be predicted and elucidated by a framework that is based on the natural environment in which they exist.

Nevertheless, human ecology theory posits that the environment does not determine all aspects of human culture. Consequently, this investigation regards culture as a behavioral belief system that is adaptive and serves the primary purpose of adjusting to the physical and social environment. This method is linked to cultural materialism and cultural ecology and is documented in the research of anthropologists Steward (1972), White (1959), and Harris (2001).

This study aims to clarify and identify the local wisdom of *Sa'o* in its relationship with nature, employing the theory of cultural ecology as a framework of thought. Cultural ecology, as defined by Steward (1972), is the field of science that examines the relationship between the environment and culture from a cultural perspective—investigating human adaptation to the natural environment in order to establish a mutually beneficial relationship between humans and the environment. The transition from traditional to modern society is a result of human development, which involves the development of technology aimed at maintaining human adaptation to the environment, thereby fulfilling life by referencing cultural elements.

Julian H. Steward identifies three cultural ecology procedures: 1) Culture's efficacy is determined by the implementation of technology in conjunction with the environment. Activities of cultural communities that are necessary for survival are associated with local culture, which has been developed and has implications for the environment in which the culture is produced. The activity of cultural members in utilizing technology to meet life's needs and as an action to determine whether society has changed in daily activities compared to before is referred to as behavior through the use of technology in culture. A culture that evolves in conjunction with technological advancements in a particular region. This result encompasses natural resources and livelihood systems. 2) The action of cultural communities by carrying out activities guided by the cultural system is the relationship of behavior based on cultural elements. 3. Culture that serves as a foundation and source of strength in daily life. In a group of community members, a culture is naturally formed, and humans effectively implement it. 4. One must possess both spiritual and material fortitude in order to maintain equilibrium in life. A set of values, beliefs, and knowledge comprises the culture that is implemented (Shania & Letreng, 2022).

This reality is encapsulated in the concept of *Sa'o*, which is not merely a residence, but a representation of the cosmology and philosophy of life of a community that is in harmony with nature (Kadafi, 2019). The selection of materials (natural stone and wood), adaptive architecture, and customary rules that prohibit overexploitation are subject to values such as



harmony, simplicity, sustainability, and cooperation. This knowledge has demonstrated its efficacy in preserving the equilibrium of the ecosystem and reducing the effects of natural disasters.

Consequently, the environment and culture are inextricably linked, as they are the outcome of a fusion that is facilitated by reciprocal communication. In other words, ecological processes are governed by the laws of reciprocity and cause and effect. Cultural and environmental characteristics are distinct and distinct, rendering them non-static (Soeroso & Susuilo, 2008). The primary function of both is evident in the interdependence between human behavior and culture. Cultural ecology is the study of the adaptation of humans to the natural environment and the comprehension of culture from an environmental perspective. This field is distinguished by the collaboration between the two, with a focus on the norms of a culture and mutual adjustment.

Comte, in Soeroso & Susuilo (2008), posits that the perspective of environmental dominance explains that human life is dependent on nature, but at the same time, humans also influence environmental changes. This theory also considers the possibility that the environment has a relative nature, in accordance with the aforementioned study. This result implies that the environment is a significant factor in determining the suitability of a specific culture at specific times; however, the same environmental conditions do not guarantee the emergence of the same culture.

An overview of natural resource management and environmental problem-solving methods based on local wisdom, providing insights for comprehensive community development activities. This fact is due to the direct correlation between cultural values in Indonesia, which are eco-centric and biocentric. Consequently, it can be referred to as deep ecology (deep/dense ecology). This fact also demonstrates that cultural values can regulate natural resource management wisely and sustainably. Community development activities are significantly influenced by local wisdom, which serves as cultural ecology. This insight not only fosters independence but also generates prosperity. Furthermore, cultural ecology embodies the principles of sustainable development that are urgently required in the present day (Nur, 2021).

Numerous researchers have researched the local wisdom of *Sa'o* in relation to the natural environment. For instance, Sada & Jumari (2018) and Utami & Supriatna (2024) characterize nature as a reflection of the chain of humanity, in which human existence is inextricably linked to its environment. A house (*Sa'o*) is capable of possessing a soul and a great deal of spirit. This fact is the primary reason why the investigation of *Sa'o Ngaza* (traditional houses) is imperative. It was also disclosed that traditional Palembang houses are endowed with the value and significance of local wisdom, which is pertinent to this matter. This fact is evident in the physical form of the building, including its function, ornamentation, and construction, as well as in intangible aspects, including philosophical significance, religious values, traditions, arts, moral values, and science. All of these advantages are still discernible (Tondi & Iryani, 2018). In accordance with the findings of this investigation Sianipar et al. (2015), which investigated the significance of *Gorga* carving art in traditional Batak homes. Their research determined that the *Gorga* carvings in traditional houses possess significance in each of their forms. Each component of the *Gorga* carvings in the Batak *Gorga* carvings possesses symbolic significance. This result suggests that Batak culture continues to preserve cultural values (Sianipar et al., 2015). The authors analyze the significance of figurative carvings on the *Sa'o Ngaza* (traditional houses) of the Ngada people in light of these two studies, which undoubtedly differ from those of previous research.

Ga'e is a term that can refer to the beginning, foundation, origin, cause, nobility, or noble. *Ga'e* can be interpreted as a noble group or class that holds a respected position in society and is influential from a sociological perspective. In the customary community, they possess property and special rights. Additionally, they are actively involved in the community, participating in the ritual of cleansing the traditional house (*Ka Sa'o*), the purification of Ngadhu and Bhaga (ka *Ngadhu*), and the thanksgiving ceremony for the opening of a new village (*Ka Nua*). The *Ga'e Ratu Ka'e* or *Ga'e Meze* group is believed by the Ngada community in general



and Mangulewa in particular to have black blood as a symbol of the sun, while the *Ga'e Kisa* group is believed to have yellow blood as a symbol of the moon. Ultimately, [Panjaitan \(2017\)](#) has investigated the continuity of life in *Sa'o* and found that each group or social strata consistently endeavors to preserve the purity of their group. As per the regulations, membership in this social stratum is acquired through birth and is determined by the maternal line or position. Special marriages are exclusively permitted within the same stratum/*Netu Tuka Ghi* ([Sile et al., 2020](#)).

The child born to a man who marries a woman from a lower caste will adhere to the mother's caste, which is the middle caste. In contrast, a man who marries a woman from a higher caste will not immediately elevate his social or customary status in the Mangulewa community; rather, it will be perceived as a violation that warrants severe punishment/*La'a Sala* ([Arndt, 2009](#)). In accordance with customary regulations, such instances will result in customary sanctions, including expulsion from the village. *Reba* culture is a multifaceted system of values, beliefs, and vital ideas that can regulate community behavior in both the natural environment and social life. These values include social, religious, moral, artistic, economic, and environmental conservation. The Ngada community (*Gurusina* community) adheres to *Reba* culture as a means of navigating the social environment, the relationship between humans and God, and the natural environment ([Bhoga, 2005](#)).

3. Internalization of Local Wisdom Values in *Sa'o* for Students

Contextual social studies learning underscores the relationship between students' real-life experiences and their surroundings and the learning materials ([Rofik et al., 2020](#); [Jalal et al., 2024](#)). This method disapproves of history education that is exclusively focused on the memorization of facts and chronology. Instead, education must cultivate historical empathy and the ability to make sense of the past in order to enable students to understand it in a modern context. In the Ngada traditional house, the term "*Sa'o*" signifies not only a physical structure but also a symbol of cultural identity, social values, and ancestral knowledge systems. It maintains a philosophy of life that includes respect for ancestors, deliberation, and togetherness. Contextual history learning is a method of instruction that establishes a connection between the learning materials and the real-world contexts of students, such as their personal, cultural, and social environments ([Erawati et al., 2023](#)). This method emphasizes the process of meaning-making, in which students not only memorize years and events but also comprehend the significance and relevance of history to their present circumstances.

Communities are instructed to preserve equilibrium between humans, nature, and the Creator through *Sa'o*-related rituals and traditions. This local wisdom is a crucial moral guideline that students must comprehend in order to maintain their distance from their ancestral cultural roots. Local wisdom, including moral values, spirituality, and community solidarity, is embodied by symbolic media. For instance, the figurative carvings on *Sa'o Ngaza* represent values such as discipline, hard work, responsible leadership, integrity, loyalty, and sacrifice, which collectively constitute local wisdom and can be used as a basis for character education for students.

The *Sa'o* plays a crucial role in transmitting cultural values to students through its involvement in traditional ceremonies, such as the *Reba* celebration and the construction of the *Sa'o*. Students are encouraged to acquire knowledge regarding cooperation, solidarity, and respect for their parents and ancestors. The process of transmitting these values is typically conducted orally and through hands-on practice, which allows students to comprehend the philosophical significance of each symbol, architecture, and ritual within the *Sa'o*.

Consequently, *Sa'o* serves as a non-formal educational environment that influences the cultural identity and character of the Ngada youth. In practice, teachers can: (1) map local values that are consistent with learning outcomes; (2) create authentic assignments, such as documenting traditional practices or culture-based entrepreneurship; (3) evaluate using a Pancasila character rubric; and (4) incorporate local content into extracurricular, co-curricular, and P5 activities. Curriculum alignment, teaching materials that incorporate local cultural

content, and community partnerships are all critical components of program sustainability, as underscored by numerous recent studies (Arinda & Fauzan, 2025).

In this era of globalization, students encounter a variety of obstacles that appear to create imbalances in their ability to preserve local wisdom. Students encounter substantial obstacles when they attempt to preserve local wisdom values. The influx of modern technology and popular culture frequently leads to a preference for a practical and immediate lifestyle, whereas the tradition of *Sa'o* necessitates perseverance, togetherness, and patience. Some students are less engaged in traditional rituals due to their lack of comprehension regarding the meaning of *Sa'o*. Consequently, schools, families, and traditional communities must implement a cultural education strategy to enable students to comprehend the significance of local *Sa'o* wisdom in the context of contemporary life.

Students are essential as the inheritors and preservers of the local wisdom of *Sa'o*. Empowering them through cultural education, traditional ritual training, and an introduction to *Sa'o* philosophical values can cultivate a sense of ownership and responsibility for their ancestral heritage. The sustainability of the social, spiritual, and ecological values contained within will be guaranteed by their active participation in traditional ceremonies, restoration, and construction in *Sa'o*. Therefore, students are not merely observers; they are also key players in the preservation of Ngada cultural identity in the face of modernization. The moral message that is transmitted to preserve cultural identity and collective consciousness is essential, particularly for students who are tasked with the responsibility of preserving and transmitting traditions through an understanding of their symbols and techniques (Wimansyah et al., 2025).

By *Sa'o*, Ngada students can cultivate a profound appreciation for local culture, particularly in rituals like *Reba*, through an examination of the values of local wisdom. The integration of local culture into education, such as thematic materials in elementary schools, has enhanced their critical thinking skills and cultural comprehension by leveraging their cultural heritage. This fact cultivates a sense of significance and emotional connection to cultural heritage. It is undeniable that both challenges and opportunities for cultural regeneration accompany the process of inheritance. In the face of the current of modernity, students are inclined to favor practical and immediate lifestyles. Nevertheless, the existence of a *Sa'o* educational space that embodies local values through structures, carvings, and rituals offers them the chance to more deeply explore their cultural identity. *Sa'o* is transformed into an active environment in which students are not merely passive recipients, but also actualizers of values, preservers, and inheritors of local wisdom, when an ethno-pedagogical approach is employed (Zahro et al., 2022). This approach brings learning closer to the natural situations of the community. The Table 1 corroborates this assertion.

Table 1. Local Wisdom Values and Their Implementation for Students

Local Wisdom Values	Concept	Implementation for Students
Mutual cooperation	The principle of cooperation and togetherness in completing tasks for the common good (collective), not the individual. Emphasis on volunteerism and mutual assistance.	1. Able to participate actively in group work and community projects (such as environmental cleanups, community service). 2. Able to prioritize discussion and deliberation to resolve problems at school or in the community. 3. Able to appreciate each other's contributions to an achievement.
Ecological Wisdom	Traditional knowledge about the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. This includes concepts of conservation, sustainability, and the belief that nature is a source of life and must be protected.	1. Able to adopt an environmentally friendly lifestyle (reduce, reuse, recycle). 2. Able to reduce the use of single-use plastics and dispose of waste properly. 3. Able to get involved in reforestation or nature conservation activities. 4. Able to choose environmentally responsible products and services.



Local Wisdom Values	Concept	Implementation for Students
Politeness and Respect	Respecting elders, appreciating others, and being polite in speech and behavior. These values maintain social harmony and good manners in social interactions.	1. Able to speak and behave politely to parents, teachers, and peers. 2. Able to listen to others' opinions without interrupting. 3. Able to respect differences in views and beliefs. 4. Able to use appropriate language in the real world and on social media.
Resilience and Simplicity	The ability to survive and recover from difficulties (resilience) by not focusing on material luxuries, but on mental and spiritual fortitude.	1. Able to not give up easily when facing learning challenges or personal problems. 2. Able to manage your personal finances wisely and avoid consumerism. 3. Able to learn to be grateful for what you have and focus on self-development. 4. Able to utilize existing resources creatively and optimally.
Deliberation for Consensus	A decision-making method that prioritizes shared interests by discussing until an agreement is reached, without any coercion of will.	1. Able to practice expressing opinions logically and politely in discussions. 2. Able to learn to accept when your opinion is not accepted and support the final decision that has been mutually agreed upon. 3. Able to be a fair facilitator in resolving conflicts between peers.
Preserving Local Traditions and History	Efforts to preserve ancestral cultural heritage (such as regional languages, dances, traditional ceremonies, folk tales) as a form of identity and respect for history.	1. Able to learn and use the local language in family communication. 2. Able to participate actively in or simply watch traditional arts performances. 3. Able to document and share local stories or culinary specialties through social media. 4. Able to visit museums and historical sites to understand their cultural roots.

The derivatives of the local wisdom values of *Sa'o* and the development of the concepts above, if implemented in learning, include aspects, learning strategies, examples of application, and expected results, as [Table 2](#).

Table 2. Implemented in Learning

Aspect	Learning strategies	Application Examples	Expected results
Mutual Cooperation Value	1. Project-Based Learning (PjBL) 2. Interactive group discussions	Students create a project on preserving the <i>Sa'o</i> traditional house in Ngada through group work.	Students are able to improve collaboration skills, empathy, and social responsibility.
Tolerance Value	1. Multicultural-based learning 2. Case studies of local traditions	Students discuss about the meaning of the Sagi traditional ritual and its role in uniting society.	Students are able to appreciate cultural diversity and respect each other.
Independence Value	1. Problem-Based Learning 2. Individual assignments	Students make a report on the function of Pata Dela (traditional meeting place) in <i>Sa'o</i> independently.	Students are able to have critical thinking skills and individual responsibility.
Ecological Value	1. Contextual learning 2. Field observation	Students know a direct observation of the use of customary forests and wisdom in protecting the natural environment around <i>Sa'o</i> .	Students are able to grow awareness of protecting the environment and understanding the value of ecological wisdom.



Aspect	Learning strategies	Application Examples	Expected results
Togetherness Value	1. Discovery Learning 2. Utilization of digital media	Students make a documentary video about community cooperation in building the <i>Sa'o</i> traditional house.	Students are able to develop a sense of brotherhood and care for each other.
Cultural Identity Value	1. Integration of social studies material with local history 2. Project-based learning	Students do a portfolio project about the history of the <i>Sa'o</i> traditional house and its philosophical values.	Students are proud of local culture and have a strong cultural identity.
Social Solidarity Value	1. Service Learning 2. Cross-subject collaboration	Students carry out social service activities around the <i>Sa'o</i> area.	Students are able to develop social awareness and a sense of belonging to the community.

Local wisdom is the values, knowledge, and norms that have been passed down through generations within a community and serve to regulate life and maintain harmony between humans, nature, and the creator (Tohari, 2025; Efendi et al., 2020). In the context of education, where students play a role, local wisdom serves as a foundation. Baka et al. (2019) and Hetarion et al. (2020), by integrating learning as content and competition with culture in learning, found significant activity from their research. Likewise, presenting local teaching materials will build cultural identity and community resilience against negative external influences. The integration of local wisdom, such as the values in *Sa'o*, allows students to "construct" their own knowledge of history and cultural values through exploration, discussion, and direct observation. This process is very effective for internalizing character values such as cooperation, responsibility, and respect.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The local wisdom that is embodied in the structure and values of *Sa'o* in Bena Village is not merely a traditional architectural heritage, but rather a holistic and sustainable environmental management system, as concluded in the aforementioned study. This knowledge is the result of a mutualistic symbiotic relationship between society and nature, which is motivated by ancestral spiritual values. The philosophical concept of "Dewa zeta" (God the Owner of Nature) is the primary foundation that establishes humans as a part of nature who are obligated to protect it, rather than as rulers. Customary sanctions, including customary rules, serve as effective environmental laws by regulating the prudent utilization of natural resources, including wood, water, and land, to prevent overexploitation. Third, the construction of *Sa'o*, which employs local materials, earthquake-resistant structures, and a layout that respects the natural topography, demonstrates a proven capacity to adapt and mitigate disasters over centuries from an architectural perspective. Consequently, *Sa'o* and all of its associated values are a tangible expression of reverence for nature that has facilitated the survival and sustainability of Bena Village to this day. This model not only preserves environmental integrity but also enhances the resilience, social cohesion, and cultural identity of indigenous communities. The noble values of Bena Village are enduring and have the potential to motivate students. This result can be accomplished by enhancing student engagement and literacy. However, it is equally crucial to actively engage in traditional rituals, engage in discussions with elders (*Ata Ga'e* and *Mosalaki*), and comprehend the philosophical significance of each rule.

As students, we need to be encouraged not only to preserve the physical form of *Sa'o* but also to internalize its values. Students can also utilize technology and social media to document and disseminate their stories, values, beauty, and local wisdom to a broader audience with a relevant, youthful perspective. Ultimately, students, as successors, will be able to innovate culturally, translating local wisdom values such as sustainability, simplicity, and respect for nature into contemporary forms, such as eco-fashion, creative content, or social entrepreneurship based on the principles of sustainable ancestral heritage.



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