



## Teachers' Social Competence and the Internalization of Batak Culture in Students' Character Formation at UPTD SDN 125538 Pematangsiantar

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### ABSTRACT

*Education functions not only as a means of knowledge transmission but also as a process of character formation aimed at shaping students with integrity and strong moral foundations. Teachers play a dual role as both instructors and moral exemplars, with social competence serving as the foundation for building trust, empathy, and constructive interaction in the classroom and wider community. In the Indonesian context, this competence is critical because education is expected to produce not only academically capable individuals but also citizens who uphold cultural identity. Within North Sumatra, Batak cultural values—particularly the philosophy of Dalihan Na Tolu and practices such as marsiadapari (mutual cooperation)—offer a moral framework that can be integrated into character education. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach at UPTD SDN 125538 Pematangsiantar, involving classroom teachers, students, parents, and the school principal selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected via in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation of school activities, and were analyzed through interactive techniques of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing, with triangulation applied to ensure validity. The findings demonstrate that teachers exhibit strong social competence by fostering positive communication, mediating conflicts fairly, and collaborating with parents. These competencies enable the meaningful internalization of Batak cultural values into daily educational practices, thereby strengthening students' respect, discipline, solidarity, and cultural rootedness. In conclusion, the synergy between teachers' social competence and Batak cultural values creates a culturally responsive model of character education that prepares students to become intellectually capable, morally upright, and culturally grounded individuals.*

**Keywords:** Social Competence, Batak Culture, Character Formation

### INTRODUCTION

Education does not merely function as an instrument for the transfer of knowledge; rather, it serves as a comprehensive process of character formation aimed at shaping students into individuals with integrity and strong moral foundations. The role of

education is therefore dual in nature: cognitive development on the one hand, and ethical-social development on the other. Within this framework, teachers are not solely instructors who deliver curriculum content, but also models of behavior, values, and social attitudes that students tend to emulate (Lickona, 2013). The ability of teachers to act as role models is closely tied to their social competence, which can be understood as the professional ability to build constructive communication, maintain healthy interaction, and establish harmonious social relationships with students, colleagues, parents, and the wider community (OECD, 2019). Social competence is essential because teaching is inherently relational. The classroom environment is not a neutral space but rather a social system where interaction, respect, and shared understanding play a central role in shaping students' personalities (Hargreaves, 2000). A teacher with strong social competence can cultivate trust, empathy, and cooperation in students, which in turn encourages the internalization of positive values. In the Indonesian context, this competence is especially significant since education is expected not only to produce skilled individuals but also citizens who uphold cultural values and national identity (Tilaar, 2002). Thus, teachers' social competence becomes the foundation for embedding character education that aligns with both universal ethical principles and local cultural wisdom.

One of the challenges of education in Indonesia today is the tension between modernization and cultural preservation. Globalization and digitalization often encourage uniform educational approaches that risk detaching students from their cultural roots. For this reason, local culture should not be marginalized in schools but instead integrated into character education as a source of moral guidance and identity formation (Geertz, 1973). In North Sumatra, the Batak culture offers a rich repertoire of values that can serve as a foundation for character education. Its philosophical principle of *Dalihan Na Tolu*—which encompasses *somba marhulahula* (respect for the wife-giver clan), *manat mardongan tubu* (caution and respect toward one's own clan), and *elek marboru* (affection and care for the wife-taker clan)—embodies values of respect, wisdom in social interaction, and mutual appreciation (Simanjuntak, 2018). Beyond *Dalihan Na Tolu*, other Batak cultural values also strongly resonate with the aims of character education. The tradition of *marsiadapari* (mutual cooperation in farming and communal work) reflects the importance of solidarity and collective responsibility, which can nurture a sense of cooperation and social care among students. Respect for elders, obedience to parents, and honoring ancestors are equally emphasized in Batak traditions, reinforcing values of gratitude, humility, and intergenerational continuity (Sibarani, 2012). These cultural orientations provide a holistic framework for shaping student character that goes beyond abstract moral teaching, embedding values into daily interactions and lived experiences.

The present study focuses on UPTD SDN 125538 Pematangsiantar, located within a predominantly Batak community. This school serves as an important locus of research because it represents the intersection of teacher roles, student character formation, and the reinforcement of local culture. In such a context, teachers' social competence is not only tested in the classroom but also in their ability to integrate local wisdom into pedagogical practices. A socially competent teacher can translate the philosophy of *Dalihan Na Tolu* into practical lessons on respect, fairness, and empathy, while also modeling these behaviors in their interactions with students and parents. This integration

ensures that cultural values are not taught in abstraction but internalized through lived social experiences. The internalization of Batak culture in education can prevent students from becoming alienated from their identity. Cultural disconnection often leads to moral disorientation, where students may excel academically but lack a grounded sense of self and social responsibility (Nussbaum, 2010). Teachers with social competence are thus agents of cultural transmission, mediating between the formal curriculum and the moral traditions of the community. In this way, education becomes not only a tool of knowledge acquisition but also a medium of cultural continuity and transformation. The aim of this study, therefore, is to analyze how teachers' social competence contributes to the internalization of Batak cultural values in order to shape students' character at UPTD SDN 125538 Pematangsiantar. The research emphasizes the dual responsibility of teachers: to embody social skills that foster trust and respect, and to function as cultural mediators who ensure that local traditions are meaningfully integrated into the educational process. By doing so, this study highlights the strategic role of education in forming a generation that is both academically competent and culturally rooted. The ultimate expectation is that students will grow into individuals who are not only intellectually capable but also morally upright, socially responsible, and deeply connected to their cultural heritage.

## METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with the locus of research at UPTD SDN 125538 Pematangsiantar. The informants comprised classroom teachers, the school principal, students, and parents, who were selected using purposive sampling in order to ensure the representation of individuals most directly engaged in character formation practices. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies focusing on school activities related to character education. These techniques allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how social competence among teachers and the internalization of Batak cultural values function as integrative elements within the school's educational practices. The data analysis was carried out using three key stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, all implemented interactively throughout the research process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This method allowed the researcher to identify recurring patterns, highlight significant themes, and link them with the broader theoretical framework of teacher competence and cultural integration in education. To ensure the validity of the findings, triangulation was applied across sources, techniques, and time, which enhanced the credibility and reliability of the results (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The focus of the research was directed toward two interconnected dimensions. First, it explored how teachers exercised social competence in their daily interactions with students. This competence was evident in practices such as fostering positive communication, resolving conflicts constructively, and encouraging collaboration within the classroom setting (Zulfikar, 2019). Teachers demonstrated empathy, adaptability, and respect for students' diverse backgrounds, which created an inclusive learning environment. Second, the study examined the internalization of Batak cultural values in the process of character formation. Cultural principles such as *dalihan na tolu* (a

traditional Batak philosophy of kinship and mutual respect), discipline, and communal responsibility were embedded in classroom activities and school-wide programs. These values provided a moral framework that complemented the formal curriculum and contributed to shaping students' integrity, respect, and sense of community (Sianipar, 2020). The findings highlight that the synergy between teacher social competence and the internalization of Batak cultural heritage strengthens the holistic formation of student character at UPTD SDN 125538 Pematangsiantar. This integration not only supports the development of moral responsibility among students but also ensures that local wisdom continues to be preserved and transmitted through formal education. Thus, education in this context serves not merely as knowledge transfer but as a cultural and moral cultivation process, preparing students to become individuals who embody both universal ethical principles and local cultural identity.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that teachers at UPTD SDN 125538 Pematangsiantar demonstrate a high degree of social competence in their daily interactions with students, parents, and colleagues. Observations indicated that teachers engage in effective interpersonal communication with their students, not merely transmitting knowledge but fostering emotional bonds that create a supportive and nurturing classroom atmosphere. Such relational practices are consistent with the argument that teacher–student relationships are fundamental for students' cognitive and socio-emotional development (Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012). Teachers in this school adopt personal approaches when engaging with learners, often addressing them individually to understand their personal circumstances, challenges, and strengths. This practice strengthens trust, enhances motivation, and facilitates character development among students. One notable aspect of teachers' social competence is their role as mediators in minor conflicts that naturally occur among students. Instead of exercising authoritarian control, teachers employ restorative approaches, encouraging dialogue and fairness when resolving disputes. In this way, they model tolerance and empathy, qualities essential for democratic and pluralistic education (Noddings, 2013). For instance, when students engage in disagreements during group activities, teachers guide them to listen actively to one another's perspectives and to reach a consensus rather than imposing a unilateral solution. This practice cultivates tolerance, respect, and responsibility, reinforcing the moral dimension of character education.

Teachers' social competence is also evident in their collaboration with parents. The school frequently organizes parent–teacher meetings and committee forums, where teachers emphasize the importance of open communication in supporting children's holistic development. Such collaborative strategies echo Epstein's (2018) theory of overlapping spheres of influence, which posits that family, school, and community must work together to ensure effective student development. Teachers in this context are not perceived merely as authority figures but as respected role models who remain approachable and open in their interactions. This dual role—as authority and companion—enables them to maintain respect while also fostering intimacy and trust with both parents and students.

In addition, teachers extend their social competence to interactions with the broader school community. Collaboration among teachers, administrative staff, and community leaders ensures that educational practices are aligned with the socio-cultural realities of the students. Teachers exhibit an awareness that their responsibilities extend beyond instructional duties; they are facilitators of social harmony and cultural transmission. As argued by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), social competence is not an isolated skill but a core aspect of professional capital that sustains teachers' roles as moral and cultural leaders within schools.

### ***Internalization of Batak Culture in Character Education***

The internalization of Batak cultural values within the character formation process is a distinctive feature of education at UPTD SDN 125538 Pematangsiantar. Teachers employ multiple strategies to embed cultural heritage into daily learning, thus ensuring that students remain rooted in their local identity while acquiring global competencies. The first strategy observed is the use of Batak proverbs as moral guidance during classroom instruction. Teachers regularly introduce traditional sayings to provide life lessons that resonate with students' cultural backgrounds. For instance, the proverb *Anakhon hi do hamoraon di au* (children are one's true wealth) is frequently cited to instill a sense of responsibility in students regarding their role in securing their family's and community's future. Proverbs, as part of oral tradition, function as vehicles for transmitting values, ethics, and wisdom (Danandjaja, 2017). By weaving these expressions into teaching, educators connect abstract moral concepts with familiar cultural idioms, making them more meaningful and memorable for students. The second strategy is the reinforcement of communal values through the practice of *marsiadapari* (mutual cooperation or gotong royong). Teachers encourage students to participate in collective activities such as school cleaning, group learning, and extracurricular competitions. In these activities, emphasis is placed on the importance of collaboration, solidarity, and collective responsibility. This reflects the traditional Batak ethos that individual success is inseparable from communal well-being (Simanjuntak, 2020). Such experiences provide practical training in teamwork and empathy, aligning with twenty-first century competencies that highlight collaboration as a critical skill (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). The third and most comprehensive strategy is the application of the Batak philosophical system, *Dalihan Na Tolu*. This philosophy embodies the triadic relationship among social groups and prescribes principles of respect, prudence, and compassion: *somba marhulahula* (respect for in-laws or elders), *manat mardongan tubu* (care for peers or relatives), and *elek marboru* (compassion toward the younger or weaker). Teachers integrate these principles into classroom and extracurricular activities, teaching students how to interact respectfully with authority, maintain solidarity with peers, and extend kindness toward those who are less privileged. Such moral instruction aligns with Indonesia's national Character Education Strengthening Program (*Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter—PPK*), which emphasizes respect, integrity, and social care (Kemendikbud, 2017). By contextualizing PPK within Batak culture, teachers create a culturally responsive pedagogy that resonates deeply with students' lived experiences.

### ***Synergy between Teachers' Social Competence and Batak Cultural Values***

The most significant strength identified in this research is the synergy between teachers' social competence and the internalization of Batak cultural values. Teachers' sensitivity to students' social and emotional needs enables them to translate cultural values into concrete learning practices. For instance, when teaching the importance of *Dalihan Na Tolu*, teachers do not merely explain its meaning but also model its application by showing respect to colleagues, exercising fairness in decision-making, and demonstrating empathy in interactions. This form of lived pedagogy ensures that students learn both cognitively and affectively. Such synergy has profound implications for character formation. Students develop discipline, mutual respect, and solidarity—qualities that are not only essential for academic success but also for social life in a multicultural society. As Banks (2016) argues, multicultural education must equip students with the ability to navigate diversity while affirming their own cultural identities. At UPTD SDN 125538 Pematangsiantar, the reinforcement of Batak values ensures that students appreciate their cultural roots, thereby developing a secure sense of identity even amidst the forces of globalization. The integration of teachers' social competence and Batak culture produces long-term impacts on students' moral development. Respect for parents, honesty, responsibility, and communal solidarity are not imposed externally but internalized through continuous modeling and practice. Teachers' roles as both social mediators and cultural transmitters guarantee that the values taught are experienced directly in the students' daily lives. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes that learning and development are mediated by social interaction and cultural tools. Teachers, in this sense, function as mediators who bridge universal educational objectives with local cultural wisdom. Another important implication is the enhancement of students' resilience in facing global challenges. In the era of digitalization and cultural homogenization, local cultural identity often risks being eroded. By integrating Batak values into education, students are equipped with a moral compass that anchors them in their heritage while enabling them to engage critically with external influences (Tilaar, 2012). The emphasis on communal responsibility, respect for elders, and empathy provides them with ethical guidelines that counteract the individualism and materialism prevalent in modern society.

The findings from this study underscore the importance of culturally grounded character education. While national curricula provide a general framework for moral education, the incorporation of local wisdom enriches these efforts by making them contextually relevant and emotionally resonant for students. Teachers' social competence serves as the critical mechanism for this integration, as only through effective interpersonal skills can cultural values be translated into meaningful educational practices. The case of UPTD SDN 125538 Pematangsiantar demonstrates that the collaboration between teachers and cultural traditions can serve as a model for other schools in Indonesia. It highlights the necessity of training teachers not only in pedagogical and cognitive skills but also in social competence and cultural sensitivity. Professional development programs should thus include modules on cultural pedagogy, conflict mediation, and community engagement. These skills are crucial for preparing teachers to fulfill their roles as facilitators of character education in diverse cultural contexts. The results and discussion reveal that the

combination of teachers' social competence and the internalization of Batak cultural values creates a robust foundation for character education at UPTD SDN 125538 Pematangsiantar. Teachers' ability to communicate effectively, mediate conflicts, and collaborate with parents establishes the social conditions necessary for moral education. Simultaneously, the integration of Batak proverbs, communal practices, and the \*Dalihan Na Tolu\* philosophy ensures that character formation is deeply rooted in local cultural identity. This synergy produces students who are disciplined, respectful, and socially responsible, while also preserving their Batak heritage amidst the dynamics of globalization. This study affirms that education must be understood not only as a cognitive enterprise but also as a socio-cultural and moral endeavor. By anchoring education in both teacher competence and cultural wisdom, schools can nurture students who are intellectually capable, morally upright, and culturally grounded.

## Conclusion

Teachers' social competence plays a central role in shaping the character of students in primary education. At UPTD SDN 125538 Pematangsiantar, the integration of social skills in teaching practices has proven to be an essential bridge for embedding local cultural values into the school's character education programs. Social competence, which encompasses the ability to communicate effectively, empathize with others, manage interpersonal relationships, and create a supportive learning environment, provides the foundation upon which teachers can guide students not only academically but also morally and socially. In this context, the unique cultural identity of the Batak community serves as a valuable source of moral guidance and collective values, offering students a sense of rootedness while preparing them to face global challenges. One of the central elements of Batak culture, *Dalihan Na Tolu*, emphasizes harmony in relationships through mutual respect, balance, and responsibility. Teachers at SDN 125538 Pematangsiantar draw on this value to cultivate respect among students, encouraging them to recognize their roles and responsibilities both inside and outside the classroom. For example, students are taught to honor and respect their parents, elders, and teachers while also practicing fairness and responsibility toward their peers. The ability of teachers to convey these values effectively is closely tied to their social competence. Through daily interactions, teachers model respectful behavior, demonstrate empathy, and promote inclusivity, thereby allowing students to internalize these values as part of their character development. Teachers who possess strong social competence are able to translate this cultural value into collaborative classroom activities. By engaging students in group tasks, communal projects, and collective problem-solving exercises, teachers reinforce the spirit of cooperation and solidarity. This process not only strengthens the social fabric of the classroom but also instills in students the importance of working together for the common good, a principle that extends beyond school into broader community life. Respect for parents and elders, another cornerstone of Batak culture, also forms a critical aspect of the school's character education. Teachers with high social competence are adept at linking this cultural expectation to moral lessons and school activities. They encourage

students to practice courtesy, obedience, and gratitude in their daily interactions, thereby reinforcing familial and community ties. By fostering such respect, teachers help students internalize cultural values that build strong moral character while simultaneously supporting the goals of holistic education. The synergy between teachers' social competence and the internalization of Batak cultural values provides a powerful framework for character education at UPTD SDN 125538 Pematangsiantar. Teachers' ability to engage meaningfully with students enables the effective transmission of cultural values such as *Dalihan Na Tolu* and respect for elders. This integration ensures that students not only develop moral integrity and social responsibility rooted in their own culture but also acquire the resilience and adaptability needed to face the complexities of the globalized world. Ultimately, the collaboration between teacher competence and local culture emerges as an effective strategy in producing well-rounded individuals who embody both cultural pride and global readiness.

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