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Optimizing Ethnopedagogy-Based Teaching Skills of Prospective Elementary School Teachers: A Study on the Implementation of the SMILE Model

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of the SMILE model (Sustainable, Multicultural, Inclusive Learning Evaluation) in optimizing ethnopedagogy-based teaching skills among prospective elementary school teachers. The main issue addressed in this research is the limited integration of local values and cultural wisdom in the teaching practices of teacher candidates, which may hinder the development of students' cultural identity. The study was conducted at a public university in Indonesia, involving 180 students from the Elementary Teacher Education Program. A quasi-experimental method with a quantitative approach was employed. Research instruments included an observation sheet for teaching skills and an ethnopedagogical perception questionnaire, both of which had been tested for validity ($r > 0.70$) and reliability ($\alpha = 0.89$). Data were analyzed using paired t-tests and ANCOVA to measure the effectiveness of the intervention. The results showed a significant increase in ethnopedagogy-based teaching skill scores (pretest mean = 71.43; posttest mean = 85.62; $p < 0.001$). The findings conclude that the SMILE model is effective in preparing teacher candidates to integrate local cultural values into the learning process, thereby supporting sustainable education rooted in local identity.

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INTRODUCTION

Basic education holds a strategic role in shaping the intellectual, moral, and cultural foundations of younger generations. Amid the complex social and cultural dynamics of Indonesia's multicultural society, basic education is expected to serve not only as a means of knowledge transmission but also as a vehicle for preserving local cultural values. In this context, the ability of prospective elementary school teachers to understand and integrate local values into the learning process has become an urgent necessity (Wero et al., 2021; Riyanti & Novitasari, 2021; Pahmi et al., 2024). However, in reality, many teacher candidates still lack adequate pedagogical competence grounded in local wisdom. As a result, classroom instruction tends to be homogeneous, lacks contextual relevance, and does not adequately reflect the cultural diversity of the nation.

Ethnopedagogy is a pedagogical approach that emphasizes the integration of local culture into educational practices as a response to the social and cultural diversity of students (Susanti & Samad, 2024; Sakti et al., 2024). This approach supports contextual, meaningful learning that is rooted in the social realities of society. The application of ethnopedagogy in basic education is considered crucial in building students' identity and character, especially in strengthening local

cultural and ethical values that can be the basis for facing global challenges (Neustroev et al., 2018). Although ethnopedagogy has long been an academic discourse, its implementation in the teacher education process is still minimal, especially in the context of lecture design that is able to foster teaching skills based on local values systematically (Imaduddin et al., 2024; Rizaldi & Sya'roni, 2025).

Responding to these needs, the SMILE (Sustainable, Multicultural, Inclusive Learning Evaluation) learning model was developed as an innovative pedagogical framework that integrates sustainability, multiculturalism, and inclusivity in learning. The SMILE model is designed not only to improve prospective teachers' understanding of the concept of diversity but also to shape their skills in designing and implementing learning that supports the diversity of student identities. In the context of elementary school teacher education, the application of this model is expected to encourage the emergence of prospective teachers who are not only academically competent but also able to transform local values into students' learning experiences in the classroom.

Previous studies have shown that learning approaches that integrate local values contribute positively to learning motivation, conceptual understanding, and strengthening student identity (Agus et al., 2021; Fitrianto & Firisi, 2025; Wijayanti et al., 2025). However, few studies have explicitly examined the effectiveness of structured learning models in building ethnopedagogy-based teaching skills in prospective elementary school teachers. Most of the studies are still theoretical or limited to case studies without comprehensive quantitative tests. Therefore, this study is presented as a significant contribution to filling the gap in the literature through a quasi-experimental approach based on empirical data.

The application of the SMILE model not only provides a pedagogical framework that is responsive to cultural diversity but also strengthens the professional competence of prospective teachers, especially in terms of instructional design, contextual learning strategies, and reflective approaches in teaching practice. This study also emphasizes the importance of developing a teacher education curriculum that explicitly adopts the principles of sustainability, multiculturalism, and ethnopedagogy in an integrative manner (Andriyanto et al., 2025). This study also contributes to the development of a pedagogical model that is relevant to the multicultural context of Indonesia. Meanwhile, in practice, the findings of this study can be a reference for teacher education providers in designing lecture models based on local values. In the long term, the implementation of this approach is expected to strengthen the competitiveness of the national education system while remaining rooted in the nation's cultural identity.

The novelty of this study lies in the integration of the SMILE model with an ethnopedagogical approach in the context of elementary school teacher education, as well as the presentation of empirical data that supports the effectiveness of the model. There are not many previous studies that focus on developing the teaching skills of prospective teachers through a model that systematically combines the principles of sustainability, cultural diversity, and inclusivity in learning.

This study aims to fill that gap by not only enriching the academic literature in the field of multicultural education but also providing alternative pedagogical solutions that can be adapted by educational institutions for teacher training in various regions. The objective was to examine the effectiveness of the SMILE model (Sustainable, Multicultural, Inclusive Learning Evaluation) in optimizing ethnopedagogy-based teaching skills among prospective elementary school teachers. That can be useful for teachers and students to level up the quality of learning in class with a multicultural setup.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design of the one-group pretest-posttest design (Bridges et al., 1998). This design was chosen to measure the effectiveness of the SMILE model intervention in improving ethnopedagogy-based teaching skills in

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prospective elementary school teachers. The population in this study were all sixth-semester students in the Elementary School Teacher Education Study Program (PGSD) at one of the state universities in Indonesia. The sampling technique was carried out by purposive sampling with a total of 180 respondents who had taken the learning strategy course. Inclusion criteria included active students who attended lectures fully for one semester.

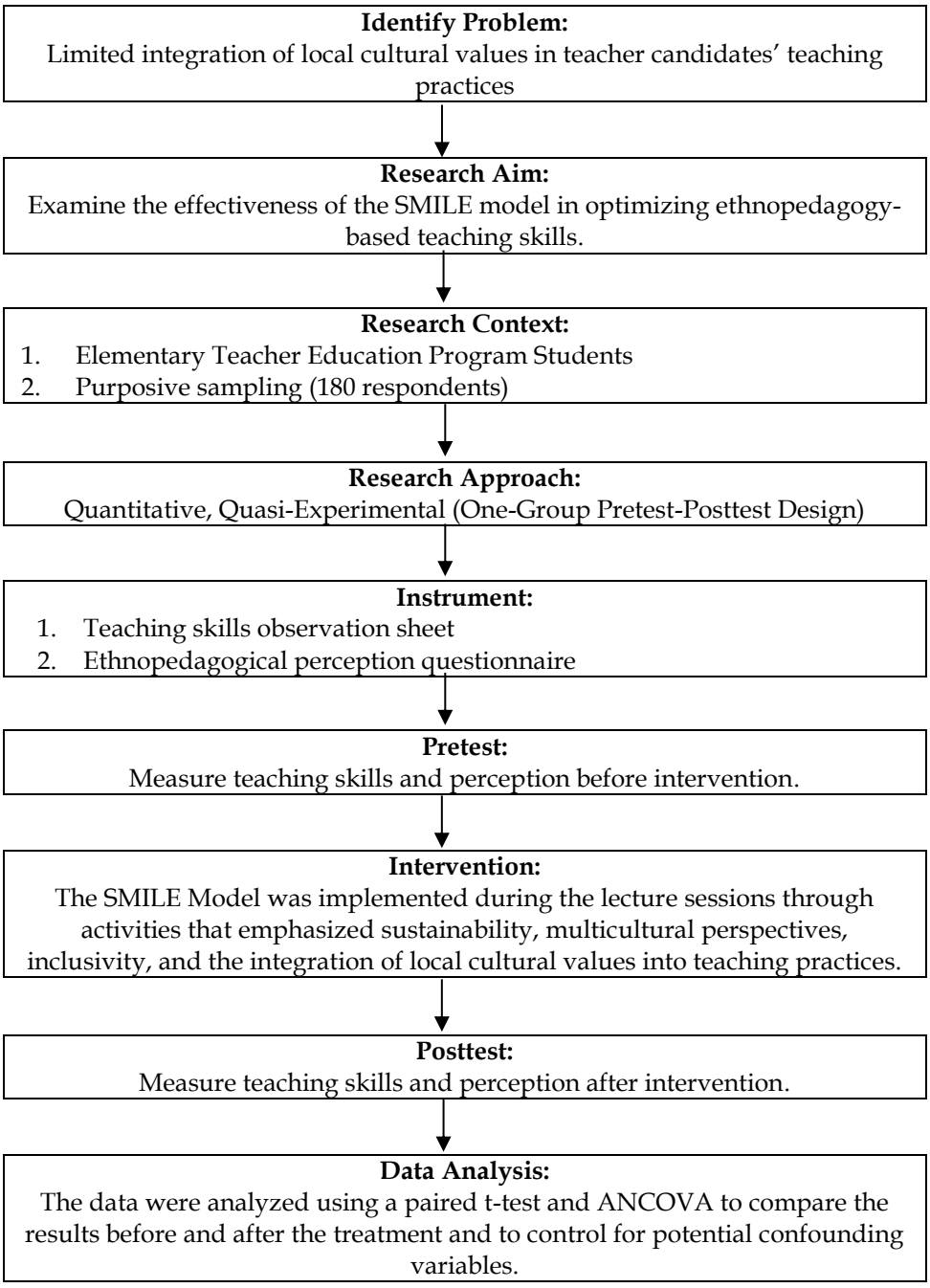


Figure 1. Research flowchart

The research instruments consist of two main types. First, a teaching skills observation was sheet developed based on pedagogical competency indicators and ethnopedagogical value integration. This instrument consists of 20 items using a Likert scale of 1–5, covering aspects of planning, implementing, and evaluating local culture-based learning. Second, an ethnopedagogical perception questionnaire that measures students' understanding and attitudes towards the importance of local cultural values in learning. This instrument consists of 25 items

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and has undergone content validity testing by three education experts and shows high reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.89.

Before the treatment was given, students took a pretest in the form of microteaching practices observed using teaching skills instruments. After that, they took lectures based on the SMILE model for eight sessions. Each session included activities exploring local culture, designing contex-based lesson plans, and inclusive learning simulations. After the series of lectures was completed, students took a posttest using the same instrument.

The data obtained were analyzed statistically using SPSS software. The normality test was carried out using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov method, while the homogeneity test used Levene's Test. To determine the effectiveness of the intervention, a paired sample t-test was conducted to compare the pretest and posttest scores. Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was also used to control for the possible influence of confounding variables and to ensure the effectiveness of the intervention more accurately.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

To determine the effectiveness of the application of the SMILE model in improving ethnopedagogy-based teaching skills, an analysis was conducted on two types of instruments, namely teaching skills observation and the ethnopedagogy perception questionnaire. The following are the results of the analysis of each instrument:

Observation of Teaching Skills Based on Ethnopedagogy

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of pretest and posttest scores of teaching skills

Score	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	180	71.43	6.12
Posttest	180	85.62	5.78

Table 1 shows an increase in the average score of teaching skills from 71.43 before treatment (pretest) to 85.62 after treatment (posttest). This shows a positive increase after the application of the SMILE model in the learning process.

Table 2. Paired sample t-test results for teaching skills

Pair	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest-Posttest	-21.574	179	0.000

Based on Table 2, the significance value (p-value) of 0.000 < 0.05 indicates that there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of teaching skills. This means that the application of the SMILE model has been proven statistically effective in improving students' teaching skills.

Ethnopedagogy Perception Questionnaire

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of students' perceptions of ethnopedagogy

Score	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	180	73.25	7.03
Posttest	180	88.40	6.21

Table 3 indicates an increase in students' perception scores regarding the importance of ethnopedagogy, rising from an average of 73.25 to 88.40 following the SMILE model intervention.

This improvement reflects enhanced awareness and more positive attitudes toward incorporating local cultural values into the learning process.

Table 4. Results of the paired sample t-test for ethnopedagogy perception

Pair	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest-Posttest	-19.812	179	0.000

The t-test results in Table 4 show a significance value of 0.000 < 0.05, indicating a statistically significant difference in students' perceptions before and after the implementation of the SMILE model. This finding confirms that the SMILE model not only enhances practical teaching skills but also influences students' perspectives on the importance of integrating local cultural values into education.

Overall, both instruments consistently demonstrated that the implementation of the SMILE model significantly improved the teaching skills and ethnopedagogical perceptions of prospective elementary school teachers. These results indicate that the SMILE model is an effective and relevant instructional strategy within the context of teacher education grounded in local culture and diversity.

Discussion

The research findings indicate that the implementation of the SMILE model has a significant impact on enhancing teaching skills based on ethnopedagogy and students' perceptions of the importance of local cultural values in education. This section focuses on two main aspects: ethnopedagogy-based teaching skills and students' ethnopedagogical perceptions. The significant improvement in teaching skills scores after the SMILE model implementation shows that this model effectively equips students with pedagogical competencies rooted in local wisdom. These findings are consistent with previous studies, which assert that an ethnopedagogical approach allows students to relate learning materials to their cultural identity, thereby enhancing their understanding and appreciation of local history (Faridah et al., 2024; Putra et al., 2024; Syafiulia et al., 2025).

In the lesson planning aspect, students demonstrated improved abilities in designing contextual lesson plans that integrate local cultural values. They were able to incorporate elements of local culture, such as traditions, language, folklore, and local symbols, into learning objectives, materials, and activities. This aligns with the principles of ethnopedagogy, which emphasizes contextual and participatory learning that reflects the social and cultural environment of the students (Rexhepi & Bajrami, 2025).

In the implementation aspect, students showed improvement in applying multicultural and inclusive learning approaches. They adopted teaching strategies that accommodate student diversity, including the use of media and methods that reflect local cultural identities. Additionally, they developed communication skills that respect students' social and cultural backgrounds, an important aspect in creating a safe and supportive learning environment. In the evaluation aspect, students began demonstrating competency in designing assessment instruments that measure not only the cognitive domain but also the affective and psychomotor domains relevant to the cultural context. They created authentic assessments, such as projects based on local wisdom, community-based tasks, and reflective assignments on local values integrated into the learning process. This shows that the SMILE model not only enhances technical teaching skills but also fosters reflective awareness in future teachers regarding cultural diversity and sustainability.

The increase in students' perceptions of ethnopedagogy reflects the growing awareness and positive attitudes toward the role of local cultural values in education. Students began to realize that ethnopedagogy is not just an alternative approach but a necessity for building contextual and meaningful education. Their developing perceptions include the understanding that local

wisdom can serve as an authentic learning resource, strengthening students' cultural identities and bridging global and local values harmoniously. This positive attitude was also reflected in students' active participation in local cultural exploration activities during the intervention. They showed enthusiasm for exploring regional cultural potentials, engaging in dialogue with community leaders, and observing cultural practices that could be integrated into teaching. Furthermore, students began demonstrating a critical understanding of the importance of inclusivity in teaching—by providing space for diverse student identities and cultural backgrounds in classroom practices.

Overall, these findings indicate that the SMILE model not only enhances students' cognitive and pedagogical skills but also fosters affective development and cultural awareness, which are fundamental to ethnopedagogical practices. This success supports the theory that integrating local values into teacher education is essential, not only for cultural preservation but also as a strategy to enhance the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of education in multicultural societies like Indonesia.

These findings are consistent with previous research showing that culturally based contextual learning can increase student engagement and strengthen cultural identity in the learning process (Samo et al., 2017; Rosa et al., 2021; Erez et al., 2018). Moreover, the integration of ethnopedagogy in teacher training has been shown to foster reflective skills and high cultural sensitivity in prospective teachers (Neustroev et al., 2018; Sugiarto et al., 2025). Therefore, the SMILE model can be seen as both a reinforcement of prior research and a contribution offering a more systematic and measurable structural approach to its implementation.

Theoretically, this research enriches the development of ethnopedagogical models by introducing a systemic framework that integrates multicultural education and inclusivity. Multicultural education is crucial to be introduced at the primary school level. It instills attitudes of mutual respect, tolerance, and recognition of cultural diversity in society (Aderibigbe et al., 2023; Suri & Chandra, 2021). At the primary school level, a multicultural approach helps students understand and appreciate differences in ethnicity, religion, race, and culture from an early age (Bennett, 2022; Sadiah & Tarmini, 2024). This is essential for preventing social conflicts and strengthening national unity. As explained in a study, multicultural education at the primary school level can foster a sense of peace and mutual respect among students. The implementation of multicultural education in the classroom can also enhance students' academic performance, especially those from different cultural backgrounds (Abacioglu et al., 2023; Doucette et al., 2021; Pishghadam et al., 2023). This approach allows students to see the world from various perspectives, enriching their learning experience.

The SMILE learning design also creates an inclusive learning environment, ensuring that all students, including those with special needs, have equal access to quality education. At the primary school level, an inclusive approach helps students with diverse abilities learn together in a supportive environment (Lakkala et al., 2021). This benefits not only students with special needs but also other students, as they learn to appreciate differences and work together in diversity. In the context of a multicultural society, inclusive education also plays a key role in shaping a tolerant generation capable of adapting to social change (Sorkos & Hajisoteriou, 2021; Deroncele & Ellis, 2024). Through inclusive education, students are taught to respect human rights and avoid discrimination, which forms the foundation for creating a harmonious and just society.

This research makes a significant contribution to the literature on teacher education in the era of globalization, where the integration of local values is increasingly important to balance the pressures of cultural homogenization. Practically, the findings of this research can serve as the basis for formulating teacher education curricula rooted in local potential and as a reference for designing teacher training programs in regions with diverse cultural characteristics. The SMILE model can also be replicated and adapted in various educational contexts as a transformative approach to building contextual, adaptive, and culturally rooted education.

These findings demonstrate that the SMILE model not only enhances students' cognitive and pedagogical competencies but also fosters affective development and cultural awareness, which are essential for ethnopedagogical practices. This success supports the theoretical view that integrating local values into teacher education is crucial not only for cultural preservation but also as an important strategy to improve the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of education in multicultural societies like Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

The research findings provide empirical evidence that the SMILE model is effective in improving the ability of prospective elementary school teachers to integrate local cultural values into the learning process. It is effective in enhancing ethnopedagogy-based teaching skills and strengthening students' perceptions of the importance of local cultural values. Students showed improvement in the areas of lesson planning, implementation, and assessment that integrated local wisdom, along with a more positive understanding and attitude toward the role of ethnopedagogy in elementary education. The SMILE model offers significant contributions both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it expands the ethnopedagogical framework by emphasizing the principles of sustainability, multiculturalism, and inclusivity. Practically, the model can be adapted in teacher training and curriculum development based on local culture as a strategic approach to building contextual and sustainable education in multicultural societies. The recommendation that can be put forward based on these findings is the need for a broader integration of the SMILE model into the teacher education curriculum, including lecturer training and the development of contextual teaching materials. In addition, further research can be directed to explore the implementation of the SMILE model at the elementary education level directly in order to observe the long-term impact on the development of character and student identity. Thus, local value-based education is not only a theoretical discourse but also becomes a real practice that forms civilized, relevant, and sustainable education.

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