

Integration of Character Values in Arts and Culture Learning in Elementary Schools

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Abstract

This study analyzes the integration of character values in Arts and Culture learning in elementary schools, teachers' strategies for instilling these values, and students' responses and behavioral development. The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach involving three Arts and Culture teachers and 78 fourth–fifth grade students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through observations across 12 classroom meetings using a character values observation checklist, semi-structured interviews, and documentation of lesson plans, learning activity photographs, and students' artworks. Data analysis was conducted thematically through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, with validity strengthened through source triangulation and member checking. The findings indicate that the integration of character values—discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and cultural appreciation—consistently emerged in classroom activities. The most effective teacher strategies included group art projects, reflective discussions, the introduction of local cultural artifacts, and teachers' role modeling. Empirical evidence shows improvements in students' ability to appreciate peers' work (78%), participation in discussions of local cultural symbols (70%), and responsibility in completing tasks (66%), along with a reduction in disciplinary problems. These findings confirm that character-based Arts and Culture learning provides meaningful learning experiences and can serve as a model for the implementation of character education in elementary schools.

Keywords: character values, arts and culture learning, elementary school, moral development, cultural education.



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Introduction

Character development is a primary priority in elementary education, as this stage represents a critical period in which students' foundational values, morals, and social behaviors begin to take shape (Kamila, 2023; Tuturop & Sihotang, 2023; Armini, 2024). Schools are not only responsible for developing academic competencies but also for fostering integrity, responsibility, and cultural awareness among students (Colby & Sullivan, 2009; Mintrop, 2012; Odoh et al., 2025). In this context, Arts and Culture learning serves as a strategic medium for instilling character values through activities such as drawing, dancing, craft-making, and exploring local culture, which promote creativity, collaboration, discipline, and appreciation of cultural diversity.

Previous studies have demonstrated that arts education contributes significantly to students' cognitive, aesthetic, empathetic, social sensitivity, and communication skills (Özaltun, 2025; Li & Qi, 2025; Raza, 2023). However, most prior research has tended to position arts education as a conceptual or implicit means of character development, without examining in depth how character values are explicitly and systematically integrated into classroom practice. In many cases, the integration of character values in Arts and Culture learning is not deliberately designed within lesson planning, is not supported by clear behavioral observation instruments, and has not been empirically analyzed in terms of its impact on students' behavioral

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development. Consequently, the implementation of character education through arts and culture often relies on teachers' intuition and has yet to demonstrate consistent outcomes.

Moreover, studies that directly link arts and culture teachers' instructional strategies with changes in students' character-related behaviors at the elementary school level remain limited, particularly within the Indonesian context, which is rich in local cultural potential. This gap indicates the need for research that goes beyond emphasizing the importance of arts education for character development and instead reveals concrete forms of character value integration, teachers' pedagogical strategies, and students' engagement and behavioral responses in a contextualized and measurable manner.

Addressing this gap, the present study offers novelty by exploring the integration of character values in Arts and Culture learning through a qualitative approach that combines observations of students' behaviors, analyses of teachers' instructional strategies, and documentation of classroom practices. Specifically, this study aims to:

1. Analyze forms of character value integration in Arts and Culture learning.
2. Identify teachers' instructional strategies in fostering character values.
3. Describe students' engagement and behavioral development.
4. Explain supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of character values.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of character-based Arts and Culture learning frameworks and to provide practical benefits for teachers, students, schools, and future research.

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the integration of character values in Arts and Culture learning in elementary schools. The research was conducted in three elementary schools (SD/MI) and involved three Arts and Culture teachers and 78 students in grades IV–V, who were selected through purposive sampling based on the criterion of active participation in arts learning activities.

Instruments and Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected over a period of **four weeks** using the following instruments:

1. Character Values Observation Sheet

Observations were conducted across 12 classroom meetings using a structured observation sheet developed based on a review of character education literature and the context of Arts and Culture learning.

The observation sheet included four indicators of character values:

- a) Discipline (e.g., following teachers' instructions, completing tasks on time);
- b) Responsibility (e.g., taking care of art tools and materials, completing artwork independently);
- c) Cooperation (e.g., actively participating in group work, respecting peers' opinions);
- d) Cultural appreciation (e.g., showing interest in local artworks, appreciating diverse artistic expressions).

Each indicator was assessed using a 1–5 rating scale, with the following criteria:

- a) 1–2 = low, behaviors rarely appear and are inconsistent;
- b) 3 = moderate, behaviors appear but are not yet stable;
- c) 4–5 = high, behaviors frequently appear and are consistently demonstrated during learning activities.

These score categories were used to facilitate the interpretation of the level of character value integration in Arts and Culture learning.

2. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with **three Arts and Culture teachers** and **12 students** using interview guidelines. Teacher interview questions focused on lesson planning, strategies for integrating character values, and challenges encountered during implementation. Student interview questions explored their learning experiences in arts education, engagement in classroom activities, and perceptions of the character values learned.

3. Documentation

Documentation included **lesson plans**, **photographs of learning activities**, and **students' artworks**, such as drawings, simple dances, and craft products. These documents were used to support observation and interview data and to provide concrete evidence of classroom practices.

4. Data Analysis Techniques

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Data were analyzed thematically following three stages:

1. Data reduction, involving the selection and categorization of data according to character value indicators;
 2. Data display, presented through tables, descriptive narratives, and visual illustrations;
 3. Conclusion drawing, by linking empirical findings to the research objectives and questions.
- Trustworthiness of Data (Validity and Reliability)

Data trustworthiness was ensured through source and technique triangulation, by comparing data from observations, interviews, and documentation. In addition, member checking was conducted with teachers and students to confirm the accuracy of data interpretation in relation to participants' experiences. Research reliability was maintained through the consistent use of the same observation instruments across all meetings and systematic, continuous data recording, allowing for traceability of the data collection and analysis processes (Udar, n.d.; Kurniyadi, 2025; Zubaid, 2024).

Results and Discussion

1. Level of Character Value Integration in Learning

The high percentage of character value integration particularly in cooperation and cultural appreciation—indicates that Arts and Culture learning possesses pedagogical characteristics that support the natural internalization of values through direct learning experiences. Collaborative art activities encourage intensive social interaction among students, allowing cooperation to be not merely taught normatively but experienced authentically during the creative process. This finding aligns with Raza (2023) and Li and Qi (2025), who emphasize that arts education effectively fosters social skills and empathy through students' emotional and social engagement in creative activities.

The relatively lower percentages of discipline and responsibility compared to cooperation suggest that regulatory character values require more consistent and sustained reinforcement. This indicates that although Arts and Culture learning is effective in building social relationships and appreciation, strengthening discipline and responsibility still necessitates explicit strategies, such as structured time management, clear role distribution, and process-oriented evaluation. This finding reinforces Özalton's (2025) conclusion that certain character values require more structured instructional design to be optimally internalized.

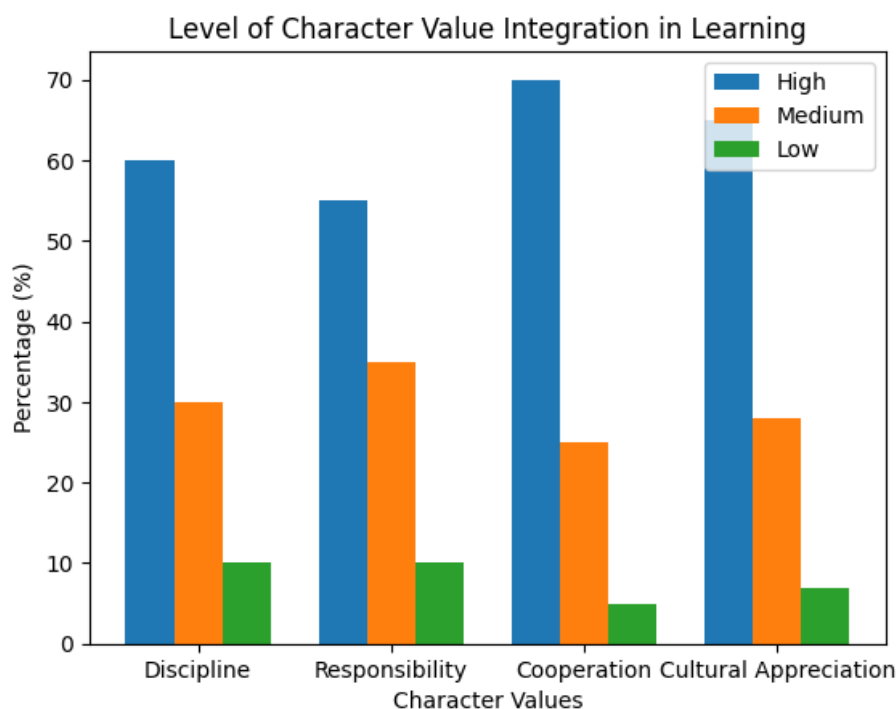


Figure 1. Level of Student Character Value Integration

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2. Most Effective Teacher Strategies

The findings demonstrate that the effectiveness of character value integration is strongly influenced by teachers' pedagogical strategies. Group art projects proved to be a primary means of fostering students' cooperation and responsibility, as such activities demand task distribution, communication, and commitment to collective outcomes. This result supports the concept of *experiential learning*, which emphasizes that values and attitudes are formed through direct experience rather than verbal instruction alone (Colby & Sullivan, 2009).

Reflective discussions following art-making activities played a crucial role in developing cultural appreciation and mutual respect. Through reflection, students not only presented their artworks but also internalized the meanings of cultural symbols and the creative processes involved. This strategy is consistent with Mintrop's (2012) assertion that reflection is a critical element in practice-based character education.

The introduction of local cultural artifacts, such as Malay Riau batik motifs and traditional musical instruments, strengthened the contextual dimension of learning. Integrating local culture made learning more relevant to students' lives while reinforcing cultural identity and pride in local heritage. This finding confirms Odoh et al.'s (2025) emphasis on the importance of culturally based approaches in building character and social awareness among learners.

Based on interviews and observations, the most successful instructional strategies included:

- a) group art projects (supporting cooperation and responsibility);
- b) reflective discussions after art-making (encouraging cultural appreciation and respect for peers' work);
- c) the introduction of local artifacts, such as Malay Riau batik motifs and traditional musical instruments;
- d) teachers' role modeling of discipline in classroom management.

These strategies group art projects, reflective discussions, the introduction of local artifacts, and teachers' role modeling were empirically shown to be effective. After three art projects, most students demonstrated improved ability to appreciate peers' work, increased participation in discussions of local cultural symbols, and greater responsibility in completing tasks. Teachers also reported a reduction in disciplinary issues during learning activities. This combination of strategies created meaningful learning experiences and supported the tangible development of students' character.

3. Empirical Evidence Observed in the Classroom

Table 2. Improvement in Students' Character Development

Indicator	Percentage (%)
Improved ability to appreciate peers	78
Active participation in discussions of local cultural symbols	70
Responsibility in completing tasks	66
Reduction in disciplinary problems	(reported by teachers)

The improvement in students' ability to appreciate peers and actively participate in cultural discussions indicates that the integration of character values in Arts and Culture learning impacts not only individual attitudes but also overall classroom social dynamics. A collaborative and appreciative learning environment fosters a more conducive classroom climate, which in turn contributes to the reduction of disciplinary problems, as reported by teachers. Although this reduction was not quantitatively measured, the qualitative findings suggest that a character-based Arts and Culture approach can serve as a strategic alternative for classroom management in elementary schools.

Overall, this study confirms that Arts and Culture learning, when consciously designed with appropriate pedagogical strategies, can function as an effective medium for strengthening character values among elementary school students. Consequently, these findings extend previous studies by demonstrating how and under what conditions character value integration can be optimally implemented in real classroom practices.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Arts and Culture learning, when designed in an integrated and contextual manner, can function as an effective medium for strengthening character values among elementary school students. The integration of cooperation, discipline, responsibility, and cultural appreciation does not emerge merely as a byproduct of learning; rather, it is formed through deliberately designed learning experiences, particularly through group art projects, reflective discussions, and the use of local cultural artifacts. Empirical

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findings indicate that these strategies have a tangible impact on students' behavioral development, as reflected in improved ability to appreciate peers' work (78%), increased active participation in discussions of local cultural symbols (70%), and greater responsibility in task completion (66%), accompanied by a reduction in disciplinary problems during the learning process.

Practically, the findings of this study offer several implications for the implementation of learning in elementary schools. First, Arts and Culture teachers are encouraged to design learning activities based on group projects with clear role distribution and responsibilities to strengthen students' cooperation and discipline. Second, reflective activities following art-making should be integrated as an essential component of instruction, as they have been shown to help students internalize values of appreciation, empathy, and respect for diverse artistic expressions. Third, the use of local cultural artifacts in Arts and Culture learning should be expanded as a contextual strategy to foster cultural awareness and strengthen students' local identity. Fourth, teachers' role modeling in time management, attitudes, and classroom interactions remains a crucial factor that should be consistently maintained as a model of character behavior for students.

This study has several limitations, including its limited scope, which involved only three elementary schools (SD/MI), the relatively short research duration of four weeks, and the relatively homogeneous characteristics of the students. Consequently, the findings cannot be broadly generalized. Future research is recommended to involve a larger number of schools with more diverse social and cultural backgrounds, extend the duration of the study to allow for longitudinal observation of character development, and combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to obtain more comprehensive and measurable assessments of students' character development.

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