



Festival as a Learning Space: Local Wisdom-Based Arts and Culture Education Through the Watu Pecah Mountain Foot Festival to Strengthen Student Character

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Abstract: This study aims to describe the implementation of arts and culture education based on local wisdom through the Watu Pecah Mountain Foot Festival and to examine its contribution to the development of students' character at SMPN 1 Ambulu, Jember. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques consisting of participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, involving students, arts and culture teachers, and the caregivers of Sanggar Seni Kartika Budaya Jember. Data were analyzed using an interactive model comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, with validity ensured through source and method triangulation. The results revealed that the learning process was implemented through five ethnopedagogical stages: orientation, exploration of local wisdom, meaning construction, contextual activities, and reflection and evaluation. Through active participation in festival activities, students developed various character values, including mutual cooperation, solidarity, responsibility, discipline, social awareness, and tolerance. Compared with conventional learning approaches, the festival provided a more authentic, contextual, and meaningful learning experience because it engaged students physically, cognitively, and emotionally. This study confirms that local wisdom embedded in authentic cultural practices can serve as an effective learning resource for character education at the secondary school level.

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Introduction

Arts and Cultural Education in Junior High Schools (SMP) plays a strategic role in the holistic development of students' character. Arts and culture are not only subjects of aesthetic value but also a means of shaping noble values that reflect the nation's identity. However, the rapid development of technology and modernisation has significantly influenced students' behaviour and value orientation. (Andriyani et al. 2021). Many students now focus more on the use of gadgets, resulting in a decline in values such as cooperation, responsibility, and appreciation for local culture. Character values like discipline, tolerance, and religious attitude also show a tendency to weaken, which needs to be addressed systematically immediately (Aswidar and Saragih 2022).

One of the solutions that can be offered is to enhance students' aesthetic skills, creativity, and character through the contextual introduction of local culture. This aligns with the goals of arts and culture education, which aims to help students develop knowledge,



skills, understanding, and aesthetic awareness in their daily lives (Rosala 2016). Art education should not only focus on theory but also involve practical activities and creative processes to make learning meaningful and positively influence students' behaviour (Eisner 2002; Supeni et al. 2023).

In reality, many learning practices still focus solely on theory and are not connected to real-life situations or local cultural values (Ruyadi 2022). Learning that is not related to real-life contexts tends to be less meaningful, which can diminish students' enthusiasm and motivation. As a result, students may undervalue traditional arts and feel less proud of their local cultural identity and values (Jazuli 2016). In fact, arts and culture education based on local wisdom contains many important values and life lessons that are beneficial for students (Rosala 2016) (Hadi 2006).

These issues indicate that the learning process is still not authentic because it largely relies on text-based instruction. Experiential learning is considered more effective because it involves students directly in the learning process, thereby enhancing their understanding and engagement. Within the framework of the Cone of Experience theory, direct experience occupies the most concrete position compared to abstract learning such as reading or listening (Sobar et al. 2024). Therefore, in Arts and Cultural Education, direct experience becomes very important because it provides concrete examples and helps students internalise cultural values more deeply (Bamford 2025).

To support this, the use of an ethnopedagogical approach based on local wisdom is an effective way to shape students' character and identity (Hasanah et al. 2026). Etnopedagogy is an educational approach that places local wisdom as the main foundation in the learning process (Selasih and Sudarsana 2018). Integrating local wisdom into education also contributes to strengthening character, cultural identity, and the preservation of the nation's culture (Suanda, Subrata, and Rusmayanthi 2024). Through the utilisation of local culture, learning becomes more relevant, contextual, and meaningful for students (Misnah 2018).

The Watu Pecah Mountain Foot Festival is a cultural activity that combines elements of art, social interaction, character building, and local wisdom. From an art education perspective, such activities have great potential as a source of contextual learning because they allow students to directly experience artistic practices within an authentic social and cultural environment (Mazlan et al. 2025). Culture-based art education has proven to be capable of instilling cultural values, enhancing cultural literacy, and strengthening students' identity (Winner, Goldstein, and Vincent-Lancrin 2013). However, the utilisation of cultural festivals in formal learning is still not optimal, so it needs to be systematically integrated to make the learning more meaningful (Martadi and Sampurno 2025).

Prior studies have attempted to move in this direction, but each has had notable limitations. Yabu M., Tjandra, and Ahmad (2006) Focused on integrating cultural values into learning materials to support character development, valuable, but limited to curriculum content, not live cultural practice. Krismo and Sofyan (2025) developed learning modules using the ADDIE model, prioritising design and validation processes, with no engagement with community-based cultural events.. Fadlul Rokhman et al. (2018) examined project-based learning and its effect on outcomes, yet the "projects" remained largely school-contained. Trisakti et al. (2009) proposed a life skills-based model connecting arts education with practical competencies, but again within a classroom frame.

The pattern is clear. Most existing studies operate within classroom boundaries, focus on product or module development, and treat local wisdom as a theme rather than a living learning source. More critically, none have examined a specific regional cultural festival—let



alone the Watu Pecah Mountain Foot Festival through an ethnopedagogical lens. There is no model for how this festival can be systematically integrated into formal arts and culture education. That gap is precisely what this research addresses. Contextual, participatory learning grounded in real community cultural practices has demonstrably improved student engagement, deepened understanding, and produced more meaningful learning experiences (Morris 2020) (Liana et al. 2026). This study fills that gap by implementing ethnopedagogy-based arts and culture learning using the Watu Pecah Mountain Foot Festival as its primary learning source contributing both a replicable integration model and the first ethnopedagogical analysis of this festival in an educational context.

Research Method

This research employs a qualitative descriptive method to provide a detailed explanation of how arts and culture education based on local wisdom is implemented through the Watu Pecah Mountain Foot Festival in order to strengthen students' character at SMPN 1 Ambulu, Jember. This method was chosen because it allows learning activities to be described naturally within their real social and cultural context, with a focus on a deep understanding of students' learning experiences (Creswell, J. W., & Poth 2018) (Merriam and Tisdell 2016).

This research was conducted at two main locations, namely SMPN 1 Ambulu Jember as a formal school environment, and Sanggar Seni Kartika Budaya Jember as a non-formal cultural environment related to festival activities. The participants consisted of students from SMPN 1 Ambulu as the main subjects, as well as art and culture teachers and the caretakers of the studio who served as key informants by providing information about the learning process and the cultural values contained within the festival context. The selection of informants was carried out using purposive sampling techniques based on the informants' direct involvement in the learning activities (Sugiyono 2018).

Data collection relied on three complementary techniques. Participatory observation was used to document the learning process and student behaviour during festival-based activities in real time. In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers, students, and studio caregivers to capture their experiences, interpretations, and understanding of the learning process. The interview guide covered four main topics: (1) the integration of local wisdom values in festival activities, (2) the role of teachers and caregivers in facilitating learning, (3) students' direct experiences and perceived learning outcomes, and (4) the relationship between festival participation and character development. This structured coverage ensures the instrument addresses the core research questions and supports the validity of the data collected. Documentation including activity photographs, field notes, and relevant learning materials served as the third data source to corroborate observational and interview findings. (Yin 2016). Prior to data collection, written informed consent was obtained from the school principal, participating teachers, and studio caregivers. For student participants, parental consent was secured through a formal consent form distributed via the school, and photographic documentation was conducted only after approval was granted by all relevant parties.

Data analysis using an interactive model that includes three steps: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2014). interactive model, consisting of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. At the reduction stage, only data directly relevant to the research objectives was retained. Relevant data was then presented descriptively, and conclusions were drawn progressively as



recurring patterns emerged across sources. To strengthen the validity of findings, both source triangulation and method triangulation were applied. Source triangulation cross-checked information from students, teachers, and studio caregivers, while method triangulation compared findings across observation, interview, and documentation data (Denzin 2017). Together, these procedures ensure analytical rigour and a comprehensive account of how festival-based learning operates in practice.

Results and Discussion

Implementation of Learning

The implementation of arts and cultural education based on local wisdom through the Watu Pecah Mountain Foot Festival is carried out in several stages in accordance with the planned ethnopedagogical learning model. Overall, the learning process demonstrates a dynamic relationship between teachers and students, where teachers act as facilitators, mentors, and evaluators, while students actively explore, discuss, and engage in cultural activities. The implementation process of the learning takes place in five stages as presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Implementation Stages of Learning Based on Local Wisdom

Stage	Learning Activities	The Role of the Teacher	The Role of Students
Orientation	The teacher introduces the concept of local wisdom and relates it to students' daily lives.	Facilitator to help students understand the importance of local culture	Recognise and reflect on their prior knowledge about culture in their environment
Deepening of Local Wisdom	Observation and direct participation in festival activities: cultural seminars, traditional parades, art performances, and community activities	Guiding and assisting students in interpreting what they observe	Actively observing and identifying character values (cooperation, tolerance, responsibility, social concern)
Elaboration and Interpretation of Meaning	Group discussion to connect cultural practices with character values in daily life	Clarifying concepts and guiding students to interpret experiences	Discussing observations and relating them to character values
Contextual Activities	Simulation or direct participation in the festival as a learning object as well as an internalisation space for values	Facilitating student involvement in performances and social activities	Participate in shows and social activities; learn directly from the community and cultural practitioners.
Reflection and Evaluation	Discussion and written assignment to reflect on the values obtained	Providing feedback and reinforcing the internalisation of character values	Reflecting on learning and applying it in attitude and behaviour

These five stages reflect a deliberate pedagogical progression from awareness, to observation, to interpretation, to participation, to internalisation. The transition is not automatic. At the orientation stage, students often arrive with stronger attachments to digital habits than to local cultural practices. Shifting that orientation requires teachers to go beyond explanation; they must make cultural relevance felt, not just stated. This is where the facilitator role becomes genuinely demanding. In the field, teachers reported difficulty



stepping back from an instructional mode and resisting the urge to overexplain, particularly when students initially showed low engagement or were unfamiliar with traditional art forms.

By the contextual activities stage, something shifts. When students participate directly in festival performances and community interactions not as audience members but as contributors, social awareness begins to emerge through experience rather than instruction. The change in behaviour is gradual but observable: students who were initially disengaged became more attentive to communal roles, more willing to cooperate, and more capable of interpreting cultural symbols on their own terms.

The analysis confirms that this approach aligns with core ethnopedagogical principles; local culture functions not as decorative content, but as the primary medium of learning. Knowledge and values are not separated here; they are acquired together, through the same experience. This is consistent with Alwasilah's (2009) argument that local wisdom is effective precisely because it shapes character from within a student's own cultural frame, not from outside it. The festival as a learning medium reinforces this; ethnopedagogy, applied in this way, is not a theoretical framework imposed on practice, but a natural fit for community-based character education (Supriatna 2017).

Students' direct involvement in festival activities also confirms what experiential learning theory has long argued: direct, concrete experience is the most effective pathway to deep understanding Dale (1969) which states that direct experience is the most effective way to learn. The more concrete the experience, the better the students' understanding and memory of the material (Dewey 2007)(Morris 2020). The more students engage with authentic cultural practices rather than simulations, the more durable their learning becomes. In this study, participating in the festival did not simply reinforce content already taught in class. It generated new understanding that classroom instruction alone could not have produced.

Emerging Character Values

The research results indicate that the implementation of arts and culture education based on local wisdom through the Watu Pecah Mountain Foot Festival helps to develop students' character values in a tangible way. These values are not only understood theoretically but are also reflected in students' behaviour during the learning process and their involvement in festival activities (Lickona 2009) (Berkowitz and Bier 2004). The character values identified during the research along with their manifestations and empirical evidence are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Character Values That Appear in Festival-Based Learning

Character Values	Manifestation in Learning	Empirical Evidence (Source Quotation)
Teamwork Mutual Cooperation	Students work together in groups during discussions, cultural activities, and festival preparations.	The values I get are definitely mutual cooperation. Basically, my class is solid... I have more freedom to be creative, express myself, and explore through art.
Togetherness and Communication	Students who previously had limited communication become closer and more active in socialising through drama art.	"Through this drama art, it also fosters togetherness and camaraderie among students within the class. From initially being unable to speak, they become more connected in communication and socialising.
Responsibility	Students are more responsible for completing group assignments than individual tasks.	By participating in this art activity, we become more responsible, and that's not easy because we work in groups.



Discipline	Students consistently follow the learning steps and adhere to activity rules; understanding each other's roles.	Now friends understand and respect each other. They understand each other's roles even though they are different.
Social concern	The community actively supports the festival activities even though they do not have an official role.	It can be seen from the enthusiasm and involvement of the community during the festival.
Tolerance	The festival provides a space for interaction among residents from various cultures and religions; interfaith prayers and various art performances.	Interfaith prayer activities are a tangible manifestation of tolerance in daily life.

This finding is in line with the view Abeles (1994) that arts education not only develops artistic skills but also cognitive, emotional, and social aspects (Hallam 2010). Students demonstrate good cooperation when working in groups during discussions and cultural activities, showing that they learn teamwork not only from teachers but also through direct involvement in real social activities (Karmina, Dyson, and Setyowati 2024).

In addition, integrating local culture into the learning process can enhance students' awareness of its importance. This aligns with Alwasilah's (2009) idea of ethnopedagogy, which emphasises the use of local culture as a source of learning to shape students' character and identity (Suyitno 2012). Tolerance as a value learned through local wisdom helps students realise that differences are not obstacles, but rather strengths to create social harmony.

Student Learning Experience

This research shows that students gained positive and meaningful learning experiences in cultural arts education based on local wisdom through the Watu Pecah Mountain Foot Festival. The students were very enthusiastic and considered learning through local culture more interesting than regular classroom lessons because it felt more relevant to real life. One student stated:

"Participating in this art activity provides a very, very different learning experience, very exciting. It is more enjoyable than studying in a classroom. We don't just learn one thing, but many things. How to express ourselves, makeup, costumes, stage management. We learn a lot from this drama dance art. And we become more familiar with the culture and potential of the region."

This indicates that the utilisation of local cultural context can significantly enhance students' motivation to learn. Observation results show that student engagement was very high during the learning process. Students actively participated in discussions, observations, and festival-based activities. Their involvement encompassed physical, cognitive, and emotional participation. Students became more confident in sharing ideas, working in groups, and demonstrating curiosity towards cultural activities (Hallam 2010). From the students' perspective, this learning experience not only provides academic benefits but also personal and social meaning. Students gain a better understanding of the importance of preserving local culture and its values, such as cooperation, tolerance, and responsibility. Direct involvement in cultural activities helps them more easily internalise these values (Wibowo et al. 2024) (Khalek and Wong 2026).

This finding aligns with Ausubel's (1968) meaningful learning theory: when new knowledge connects to what students already know and experience, learning becomes genuinely meaningful rather than memorization-dependent (Chi 2009). The festival



functioned precisely as this bridge. It also confirms Eisner (2002) argument that art education is not about producing outcomes alone the process itself develops students' interpretive and reflective capacities. Festival participation pushed students toward deeper, more reflective engagement than classroom tasks typically allow (Mokski et al. 2023).

Conceptually, these findings suggest that ethnopedagogy-based learning through cultural festivals is not merely an enrichment activity it is a viable and effective model for character education. The festival serves simultaneously as a learning source, a social laboratory, and a space for value internalisation. Practically, this implies that arts and culture teachers do not need elaborate infrastructure to implement meaningful learning. What they need is a framework for systematically connecting existing community cultural events to curriculum objectives.

The Role of Festivals as a Learning Tool

The Watu Pecah Mountain Foot Festival played a concrete role in strengthening students' character through direct cultural participation. Unlike classroom instruction, which relies on mediated examples videos, textbooks, indirect demonstrations the festival placed students inside living cultural practices. They observed, engaged, and contributed to activities that the community itself values: traditional parades, communal prayers, art performances, and collective event preparation. Character values were not explained here; they were practiced and modelled by the community in real time (Kolb 2015); (Berkowitz and Bier 2004) (Lickona 2009). The art and culture guiding teacher stated:

"Before the Watu Pecah Mountain Foot Festival, I usually set an example for the children through online media or indirectly. But after this festival, I no longer feel confused. I can use direct learning media. The children can get involved. So far, the children are very happy, especially because they can participate directly. The children can also appreciate, because the learning is related to appreciation."

Compared to conventional learning, festivals as a medium of education have several advantages. Festivals offer authentic learning based on real cultural practices, encourage active participation, and support holistic learning by developing not only knowledge but also social and emotional skills. Direct interaction with the community further enriches students' understanding of social life and culture (Yatim et al. 2025).

Table 3. Comparison of Festivals with Conventional Learning

Comparison Aspect	Conventional Learning	Festival as a Learning Media
Learning resource	Online media or indirect examples	Real and direct cultural experience
Student involvement	Passive (receiving information)	Active physically, cognitively, and emotionally
Type of learning	Theoretical	Authentic and contextual
Developed dimensions	Especially academic knowledge	Comprehensive knowledge, social skills, and emotional skills
Interaction space	Limited to class	Direct interaction with the community and cultural practitioners
Relevance	Less related to real life	Connected directly with the living local cultural practices

The differences here are not about preference or style. They reflect fundamentally different assumptions about where meaningful learning happens and what counts as valid educational experience. Festival-based learning treats the community as curriculum. That is a conceptual shift with practical consequences. Conceptually, these findings affirm that ethnopedagogy-



based learning through cultural festivals is a legitimate and replicable model for character education not an enrichment add-on. The festival operates simultaneously as a learning source, a social laboratory, and a space for value internalisation. Practically, this means arts and culture teachers do not need elaborate infrastructure to make this work. What they need is a systematic framework for connecting existing community events to curriculum objectives something this study provides in the form of the five-stage implementation model. Students engage more deeply when learning is anchored in experiences and cultural contexts they already inhabit (Chi 2009). The festival did not bridge students to an unfamiliar world. It made visible the educational dimension of a world they already belong to.

Conclusion

This research shows that arts and culture education based on local wisdom through the Watu Pecah Mountain Foot Festival, which is carried out by following the stages of ethnopedagogical learning from orientation to reflection, creates a contextual, active, and meaningful learning experience. Festival-based learning increases student engagement, characterised by greater enthusiasm and more active participation than traditional methods. This greatly helps students develop character values such as cooperation, responsibility, discipline, social awareness, and tolerance, as observed in their behaviour during the activities. The study confirms that local wisdom is an effective learning resource because real cultural practices like festivals provide authentic experiences that help students understand and internalise values more deeply than purely theoretical learning.

Recommendation

This study confirms that festival-based arts and culture learning is both feasible and educationally meaningful. But feasibility is not scalability. Broader adoption requires honest attention to what worked and what remains unresolved.

For teachers, facilitating learning in a community cultural setting demands more than enthusiasm; it requires structured preparation. Schools and teacher training institutions should develop targeted professional development to help teachers navigate this role shift, rather than assuming they can manage it independently.

For studio supervisors, this research affirms that cultural practitioners function as a living curriculum. Sanggar institutions should consider building more formal, sustained collaboration with local schools, not occasional involvement, but structured educational partnerships with clear objectives.

For future researchers, three directions are worth pursuing: testing this model at different educational levels, expanding the geographical scope for broader generalisation, and developing concrete learning tools, such as modules or local wisdom-based curricula, that teachers can use without requiring deep ethnographic knowledge of the festival itself.

Several constraints deserve honest acknowledgement. Scheduling festival participation within formal school time is difficult. Not every region has culturally rich festivals with accessible educational potential. Teacher readiness varies. These are structural conditions, not minor obstacles, and they determine whether this model remains a research finding or becomes actual practice. Addressing them requires institutional support: school policies that legitimise community-based learning and sustained collaboration between schools, cultural communities, and local government.



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