



Arts-Based Pedagogy for Character Education: A Qualitative Case Study of Nationalism and Social Skill Development in Primary Schools

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - This study examines the implementation of arts-based pedagogy, integrating role-play and traditional dance into primary school learning, to explore how students experience and internalize national values and social skills through participatory cultural activities.

Methodology - This study employed a qualitative case study design at SDN Belitung Selatan 2, involving 30 primary school students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and meanings related to students' learning experiences.

Findings - The findings revealed five major themes: active student engagement in participatory learning, increased self-confidence through expressive experiences, strengthened social skills through collaborative interaction, internalization of nationalism values through cultural representation, and the formation of meaningful learning through integrated experiences. Role-play and traditional dance encouraged students to participate more actively, communicate and collaborate with peers, express themselves confidently, and understand values such as cooperation, togetherness, and cultural identity through direct experience. These findings indicate that arts-based pedagogy supports cognitive, affective, and social development by creating participatory and culturally contextual learning environments. The study suggests that integrating the arts and local culture into classroom instruction can foster more meaningful, character-oriented learning in primary education.

Contribution - The study also offers practical implications for teachers seeking to design more collaborative, culturally contextual, and experience-based learning environments that integrate cognitive, affective, and social dimensions simultaneously.

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INTRODUCTION

21st-century education demands transformative learning that focuses not only on cognitive achievement but also on strengthening students' character, creativity, and skills, which are a crucial foundation for developing an adaptive and competitive generation amid increasingly complex global changes. Elementary school occupies a strategic position because this phase is the initial stage in the formation of children's values, attitudes, and self-identity, which will influence their development at subsequent levels of education. Therefore, the quality of learning experiences at this stage has long-term significance for the development of students' overall character.

The importance of learning experiences in elementary education is closely tied to the developmental characteristics of elementary school-aged children, who still require concrete experiences and active engagement to understand concepts. Children at this developmental stage tend to learn more effectively through activities involving movement, interaction, exploration, and emotional experiences compared to abstract, one-way learning (Pania et al., 2023; Susanto et al., 2024). This need is not yet fully reflected in elementary school learning practices, which remain dominated by conventional approaches based on lectures and written assignments. Several studies have shown that overly teacher-centered learning leads to low student participation and limits opportunities to develop creativity and social skills (Hafid & Hayati, 2025; Rozali et al., 2022). Initial observations at several elementary schools indicate that the majority of learning time is still spent listening to teacher explanations and completing written assignments, while collaborative and creative activities have not yet become a central part of learning, resulting in less varied and less meaningful student learning experiences.

These less-participatory learning environments result in low student engagement in the learning process. This low engagement is evident in students' minimal active participation during lessons, their lack of courage to speak in front of the class, and their limited ability to work collaboratively in groups. This situation is often associated with learning that does not provide sufficient space for interactive and expressive experiences, allowing students to engage more deeply in learning activities (Andeka et al., 2021; Hanum et al., 2025; Izzani & Komalasari, 2025). Simple survey data from elementary school students also shows that most students still feel hesitant about public speaking and prefer working individually. This situation indicates that the social and emotional aspects of learning are not optimally facilitated, resulting in students not receiving learning experiences that foster active engagement and comprehensive character development.

Low student engagement ultimately affects the character-formation process, a primary goal of elementary education, including the strengthening of national values. Character values in elementary schools are often conveyed as conceptual knowledge without the real-life experiences that enable students to internalize their meaning. Character education delivered solely through verbal approaches tends to result in rote understanding and lacks connection to students' real-life experiences (Rahmawati et al., 2025; Zahra et al., 2026). The process of internalizing values requires experience, habituation, and emotional involvement for students to understand these values as part of their lives. This gap between cognitive understanding and affective experience underscores the need for a learning approach that offers a more contextual, participatory, and meaningful experience for elementary school students.

The need for more meaningful learning experiences has underscored the importance of implementing arts-based pedagogy, a learning approach that uses art as the primary medium. Arts-based pedagogy offers an alternative approach by positioning learning as an experiential process in which students construct understanding through artistic expression, social interaction, and embodied participation (Alter et al., 2009; Hunter & Frawley, 2023). Rather than passively receiving information, students engage in activities that integrate the cognitive, emotional, and physical dimensions of learning, creating opportunities for deeper meaning-making and value construction (Padila, 2026; Yuniarti & Maknun, 2024). This situation makes arts-based learning relevant to addressing students' need for more active, experience-oriented learning.

The relevance of arts-based learning becomes even stronger when it is linked to strengthening national values through local cultural contexts. Activities such as role-playing and traditional dance allow students to

directly experience the values of togetherness, cooperation, and cultural identity through symbolic representations and cultural expressions that are close to their lives (Ramlan & Permana, 2016). Culture-based education is seen as capable of strengthening identity awareness and a sense of nationality because students learn to understand values through familiar contexts in everyday life (Atmaja, 2023). The integration of multiple art forms in learning also creates a richer, more holistic learning experience by engaging multiple dimensions of student development simultaneously. Learning environments created through arts activities tend to be more participatory and inclusive, providing students with broader opportunities to interact, express themselves, and build social skills naturally.

Studies on arts-based learning have been conducted extensively across various educational contexts and have demonstrated positive contributions to students' creativity, learning engagement, and socio-emotional development. Several studies have identified the arts as a medium that can enhance student participation and social interaction through more collaborative and reflective learning experiences (Farrington & Shewfelt, 2020; Freedman et al., 2022; Holochwost et al., 2021). Other studies have also linked arts- and culture-based education to the strengthening of identity and character values, including nationalism and local cultural awareness (Alfiyanti et al., 2023; Dewi et al., 2025). However, these studies have largely focused on the contribution of arts learning to outcomes such as creativity, engagement, and socio-emotional development. Consequently, attention to the processes of students' learning experiences during instruction, particularly to how meaning is constructed and values are internalized through arts activities, remains relatively underexamined. Although previous studies have demonstrated the benefits of arts-based learning for creativity, engagement, and socio-emotional development, limited attention has been given to the mechanisms through which students construct meaning and internalize character values during arts-based learning experiences.

Furthermore, existing studies have generally examined individual art forms separately, leaving insufficient understanding of how multiple art forms can work together to facilitate value internalization and social skill development in primary education. The novelty of this study lies in its exploration of how role-play and traditional dance are integrated within a single arts-based pedagogical process to facilitate the development of social skills and the internalization of national values. Rather than focusing solely on learning outcomes, this study examines students' lived experiences and meaning-making processes, providing insights into how embodied cultural participation contributes to character education in primary school settings.

Based on these conditions, this study aims to examine the integration of role-play and traditional dance within arts-based pedagogy and to understand how students interpret these learning experiences as they develop nationalist values and social skills. The research focuses not only on learning outcomes but also on the processes, interactions, and experiences that emerge during the activities. This research is expected to make theoretical contributions to the study of arts-based pedagogy, particularly in the context of locally culture-based primary education, while also offering practical implications for developing more contextual, participatory, and meaningful learning in elementary schools.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore in depth the implementation of arts-based pedagogy through the integration of role-play and traditional dance in elementary school learning, and to understand how these learning experiences are interpreted by students in the context of developing nationalistic values and social skills. The case study design enables a contextual examination of phenomena in real-world settings by accounting for the complexity of interactions during the learning process, thereby providing a comprehensive picture of classroom dynamics (Hancock et al., 2021). The qualitative inquiry framework emphasizes exploring participants' meanings, experiences, and perspectives as the primary source for understanding educational phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Participants

The participants in this study comprised 30 elementary school students from both the lower and upper grades at SDN Belitung Selatan 2. The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on students' active involvement in arts-based learning activities, particularly role-play and traditional dance. Selection criteria included students' level of participation during learning, involvement in group activities, and readiness to engage in collaborative and expressive activities, ensuring that the data obtained authentically represented the learning experience.

The diversity of participant characteristics was also taken into account to obtain a more comprehensive picture, encompassing variations in levels of activeness, self-confidence, and ability to collaborate among students. This consideration enabled the study to capture the dynamics of diverse learning experiences in the application of arts-based pedagogy. In addition to students, classroom teachers and activity facilitators served as supporting informants, providing a broader perspective on the learning process, classroom interactions, and student development during the activities, thereby enriching the data.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation to obtain rich and complementary data. Participatory observation was conducted throughout the learning process, focusing on student engagement, social interactions, and expressions that emerged during art activities. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with students and teachers to explore their subjective experiences, perceptions, and the meanings they constructed during art-based learning. Documentation in the form of photos, videos, and activity notes was used as supporting data to strengthen the results of the observations and interviews.

Instruments

The research instrument was a set of data-collection tools systematically aligned with the research objectives, consisting of a structured observation sheet, a semi-structured interview guide, and a documentation format. The observation sheet was designed as a set of behavioral indicators that cover aspects of student engagement, social interaction, self-confidence, and responses to arts activities, thereby enabling consistent data collection throughout the learning process. The semi-structured interview guide was prepared based on the research focus, which included learning experiences, perceptions of arts activities, and the meanings of nationalism and cooperative values, with flexibility to develop follow-up questions in response to participants' responses. The documentation format was used to record both visual and written data related to learning activities, thereby supporting triangulation and strengthening the validity of the research findings.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach, which focuses on identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns of meaning emerging from the research data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis process began with a thorough reading of interview results, observation notes, and documentation to understand the full context of the data, followed by highlighting key elements related to the students' learning experiences. Data fragments with similar meanings were then grouped into broader categories to form central themes representing the phenomena under study.

Theme development was conducted reflectively, considering the interrelationships between the data and the observed learning context, resulting in in-depth interpretations of students' experiences in arts-based learning. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources and methods and by confirming results with participants to ensure congruence between the researcher's interpretations and the intended experiences.

FINDINGS

The research results are presented through a thematic analysis of students' learning experiences during arts-pedagogy-based learning that integrates role-play and traditional dance. Findings were obtained from complementary observations, interviews, and documentation, and then organized into main themes representing patterns of meaning that emerged consistently from the field data. Each theme describes the dynamics of the learning process and the changes students experience in the context of engagement, self-development, and the meaning of values.

Active Student Involvement in Participatory Learning

Students' active engagement during arts-based pedagogy appears to have changed significantly compared to previous teacher-centered learning patterns. Observations indicate that in the initial stages of the activity, some students displayed passive behavior, such as waiting for instructions and being reluctant to participate in group discussions. However, this situation changed when the activity entered the movement exploration and role-play phase. Observation notes revealed that approximately two-thirds of students began to actively engage in the exercises, marked by increased participation in trying out movements, proposing ideas, and interacting with other group members, resulting in a more dynamic and communicative classroom atmosphere.

This change in engagement became even more evident when students were allowed to develop role-play scenarios independently in groups. The interactions were not merely instructional; they evolved into dialogues that demonstrated student initiative in managing their own learning. One observational finding was that students began providing feedback to each other on the movements and roles they played, and some previously passive students even began to express their opinions. This condition shows that arts-based learning creates a broader space for participation, so that students not only participate in activities but also play an active role in shaping the course of learning. The strengthening of active student engagement was also confirmed by interview data describing students' subjective experiences during the learning process. One student stated:

"I prefer learning like this because I can directly participate, not just sit and listen. So it feels more exciting, and I do not get bored quickly" (S1, interview).

This statement reflects a shift in the perception of learning, from being previously perceived as monotonous to being more engaging. Another student shared a similar experience:

"If I use movement and role-playing, I want to continue participating because I can be with my friends and I am not afraid of making mistakes" (S4, interview).

This statement demonstrates that engagement is influenced not only by physical activity but also by a social atmosphere that supports student participation.



Figure 1. Student Performance in Dance Arts

Other findings from teacher interviews indicate that increased student engagement does not occur instantly, but develops gradually over the course of the learning process. Teachers reported that students who were initially less active began to show changes after several meetings, especially as they became more comfortable with the more open and collaborative learning model. This is evident in the increasing number of students taking the initiative to try out roles, ask questions, and provide feedback on group activities, a trend previously rare in conventional learning.

Students' active engagement in arts-based learning is evident not only in their physical presence during activities but also in their cognitive and emotional engagement throughout the learning process. Students appear more focused, display enthusiastic expressions, and engage in meaningful interactions with their peers, making learning more lively and participatory. As illustrated in Figure 1, students actively participated in dance performance activities, demonstrating coordinated movements, collaborating with peers, and confidently expressing cultural meanings through artistic expression. The figure highlights how students were directly involved in experiential learning situations that required both individual participation and collective interaction. These findings demonstrate that arts-based pedagogy can create learning conditions that encourage comprehensive student engagement, including physical, social, and emotional, which is essential for creating meaningful learning experiences.

Development of Self-Confidence through Expressive Experiences

Changes in students' self-confidence were evident through the shifts in roles they took during the learning process, particularly in activities that required performance and expression. In the initial stages, students' positions within the group tended to follow a pattern: only a few students consistently took the lead, while others preferred to stay behind or follow along with little initiative. Observation notes revealed that responses to performance instructions were still limited to following directions, with body gestures tending to be reserved and voices muted. This situation illustrates that self-confidence had not yet become part of the learning habits formed in the classroom.

Development began to emerge as learning activities gradually provided students with opportunities to explore their roles more freely. In several practice sessions, students began to shift from passive to more active positions, such as attempting to speak dialogue, even if it was still brief, or following movements with more open expressions. Field notes indicated an increase in the number of students willing to perform in front of small groups without direct direction. This change was gradual and not uniform, but it demonstrates a tendency that involvement in expressive activities provides students with a space to build confidence through direct experience.

This dynamic was also evident in the way students interacted during rehearsals, as they began to respond to their roles through both dialogue and movement. Students who had previously tended to be quiet began to contribute to the flow of the performance, albeit in simple ways. This situation demonstrated a shift in how students responded to learning demands, from simply following along to becoming more involved in building the process together. The collaborative group environment also contributed to the emergence of courage because students felt supported by their peers.

The teacher's perspective provided a broader picture of students' confidence development during the activity. The teacher reported that the most visible changes were in students who had previously rarely participated in learning but began to show courage after several practice sessions. The following statement illustrates this:

"Children who were usually quiet are now starting to be willing to try performing, although they were initially hesitant, but over time they seem more prepared and do not wait to be told" (Teacher, interview).

"When they are given a role, there is a responsibility that makes them strive to perform better, which gradually makes them confident" (Teacher, interview).

This statement indicates that direct experience in performing roles encourages students to develop self-confidence gradually.

The changes that occurred were not only related to the courage to perform, but also included students' attitudes toward the learning process, which involves the possibility of error. Students appeared more open to feedback and no longer showed excessive anxiety when making mistakes during practice. This condition shows that expressive experiences through arts-based learning contribute to the formation of more stable self-confidence, which is evident not only in performance situations but also in how students interpret the learning process as a whole.

Strengthening Social Skills through Collaborative Interaction

The development of students' social skills in arts-based pedagogy can be understood through the teacher's observations of changes in interaction patterns during the activity. The teacher stated:

"At first, they were still working individually, even in groups, but after a few meetings, they began to communicate and collaborate" (Teacher, interview).

This statement indicates that group work, which was initially administrative, gradually evolved into more meaningful interactions, with students becoming more actively involved in the collaborative process. The teacher also emphasized that this change did not occur instantly, but rather through a process of adapting to a learning pattern that requires collective involvement.

Observations in the initial phase showed that group interactions were still not optimal. Some students appeared to dominate activities, while others tended to be passive, following directions without making significant contributions. Communication remained limited to simple assignments, without in-depth discussions of the performance's content or format. This situation indicates that students' social skills, particularly in communication and collaboration, still require strengthening through more interactive learning experiences.

Changes began to emerge when students were faced with tasks requiring more complex coordination, such as plotting a role-play and synchronizing dance movements within a group. Previously limited interactions became more open, with students engaging in discussions, exchanging ideas, and adapting their roles to align with other group members'. This experience fostered more intense two-way communication, so that group work processes were no longer reliant on a single individual but involved more equitable participation.

This experience was also reflected in students' statements describing changes in how they interacted during the activity. One student stated:

"When we work in groups like this, we have to talk to our friends; we cannot just stay silent like we usually do" (S8, interview).

Another student added:

"If someone is not able to do something, we usually help them so they move together, so they are more unified" (S10, interview).

These statements demonstrate that engaging in collaborative activities not only fosters communication but also fosters awareness of the importance of helping each other achieve shared goals. The interactions that developed during the learning process also demonstrated development in how students addressed differences of opinion. Discussions no longer resulted in one party dominating the group; instead, they evolved into a negotiation involving multiple perspectives. Students began to demonstrate the ability to listen, consider, and adapt to group decisions, creating a more harmonious collaborative atmosphere. This demonstrates that arts-based learning experiences significantly contribute to students' social skill development, not only in group work but also in fostering more positive interpersonal relationships in the classroom.

Internalization of Nationalist Values through Cultural Representations

The understanding of nationalist values in arts-based pedagogy appears to develop through students' involvement in activities that directly present cultural elements. The teacher described this change as a process

related not only to conceptual understanding but also to the experiences students experience during the activities. This is reflected in the following statement:

"Children more easily understand the meaning of togetherness and struggle when they directly act out the events, rather than just hearing stories" (Teacher, interview).

The teacher also added that the use of traditional dance and role-playing made students more interested in learning about cultures that had previously received less attention in everyday learning, making the values conveyed more relevant to their experiences.

Observations showed that student involvement in activities with cultural elements elicited different responses than text-based learning. Students appeared more focused and displayed more lively expressions when acting out roles or following dance movements that conveyed specific meanings. Some students even began asking about the background stories or the meanings of their movements, indicating an interest in more deeply understanding the cultural context presented. This situation demonstrates that cultural representation through concrete activities provides a stronger stimulus for developing students' understanding of nationalist values.



Figure 2. Student Role Play Performance

The process of internalizing these values does not occur directly but develops through students' experiences during the activities. Group interactions, as well as role-playing related to themes of struggle or togetherness, provide opportunities for students to experience situations that reflect these values. Figure 2 illustrates students' participation in role-play performances, in which they collaboratively enacted scenarios requiring communication, shared responsibility, and mutual support. These embodied experiences enabled students to engage with nationalist values in authentic social contexts, thereby transforming abstract concepts into meaningful personal and collective experiences. Observation notes indicate that students are beginning to connect their activities with broader meanings, such as the importance of cooperation and mutual respect within a group, which are integral to nationalist values.

Students' experiences in understanding these values were reflected in interviews conducted after the learning activity. One student stated:

"When we act out the story of the struggle, we understand how difficult it was and why we have to help each other" (S6, interview).

Another student expressed:

"When we dance together, it feels like we are a group, so we have to be united to perform well, like working together" (S13, interview).

These statements demonstrate that the values of nationalism are not merely understood as abstract concepts but are increasingly understood through experiences involving feelings and social interactions.

The strengthening of nationalist values through cultural representations was also evident in the way students reflected on their learning experiences after the activity. Students demonstrated the ability to relate the activities they undertook to their daily lives, such as the importance of togetherness, cooperation, and mutual respect. This process demonstrates that arts-based learning provides a space for students to develop a deeper understanding of nationalist values, as these values are not only conveyed verbally but also presented through experiences that can be directly engaged with within the learning context.

Creating Meaningful Learning through Experiential Integration

Learning that integrates arts activities offers students a different way to understand the material, especially when the learning process involves movement, interaction, and reflection simultaneously. Activities such as role-playing and traditional dance serve not only as supplementary activities but also as a central component in helping students build understanding through direct experience. Observations show that students are fully engaged during the learning process, both physically and mentally, as indicated by longer periods of focused attention and more active responses to each stage of the activity.

This engagement affects how students process the information they receive during learning. Students not only follow instructions but also begin to relate the activities they undertake to the material they are studying. In some situations, students are seen explaining the meaning of the movements or roles they play, indicating a process of understanding that develops from concrete experiences to more abstract meanings. This process demonstrates that learning does not stop with activities but continues into the reflection stage, which strengthens students' understanding.

The dynamics of learning also demonstrate students' active involvement in constructing learning experiences, where they are not only the implementers of activities but also participate in their development. Some students have begun to suggest variations in movement or dialogue delivery that better align with their understanding, allowing for more flexible, less rigid learning. This situation reflects the space students have to construct knowledge based on their direct experiences.

These experiences are reflected in student interviews, which demonstrate how they interpret the learning process. One student stated:

"If you learn while practicing like this, it is easier to remember because you have actually done it, not just read about it" (S2, interview, March 22, 2026).

Another student expressed:

"I understand better if I try it myself, because I can see and feel it for myself, so I do not forget it as quickly" (S14, interview, March 22, 2026).

These statements demonstrate that direct experience contributes to students' memory and understanding of the material being learned. The integration of physical experience, social interaction, and thought processes that occur during learning creates a more meaningful learning environment for students. Learning is not simply understood as a process of receiving information, but as an experience that simultaneously engages various aspects of the student. This demonstrates that integrating arts-based experiences has a powerful impact on the quality of students' understanding, as the knowledge gained is directly connected to the activities they engage in during the learning process.

DISCUSSION

Active Student Engagement in Arts-Based Learning

Student engagement during arts-based learning leads to a more lively, participatory classroom atmosphere. Activities such as role-playing and traditional dances engage students directly in the learning process, enabling them not only to listen but also to perform and respond actively. This engagement is evident not only in physical activity but also in the attention, enthusiasm, and interactions that occur during the learning process. This demonstrates that learning experiences that provide space for exploration can

encourage deeper student engagement, which aligns with the concept of learning engagement, which encompasses behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects (Wati & Sugesti, 2025).

A more open and relaxed learning environment also strengthens this engagement. Students appear more willing to participate because they do not feel pressured always to provide correct answers; instead, they are allowed to experiment and explore. Arts-based activities create a fun learning experience, so that the engagement that emerges is natural and sustainable. This reinforces the view that arts-based learning can increase student participation through engaging and meaningful experiences (Marni et al., 2023). From an arts-based pedagogy perspective, engagement emerged as learning was experienced simultaneously through bodily action, emotional expression, and social interaction. This finding supports the view that learning becomes more meaningful when students are positioned as active participants in knowledge construction rather than passive recipients of information.

Developing Self-Confidence through Expressive Experiences

Although increased confidence was evident among many students, the findings also indicate that this development occurred gradually and unevenly. Some students remained hesitant during the early stages of participation, suggesting that arts-based pedagogy does not automatically generate confidence but requires supportive environments and repeated opportunities for expression.

Performing and expressing themselves during learning activities provides students with the opportunity to develop self-confidence gradually. Role-play activities allow students to assume specific roles, allowing them to try speaking and moving in ways that differ from their daily routines. This experience helps students become more confident in performing because they are not fully themselves, but rather embracing the role they are playing. This process provides students with the opportunity to overcome self-doubt through repeated, direct experiences that relate to the formation of behavior through social experiences (Mustika & Amelasasih, 2024).

These changes are also influenced by a supportive learning environment that does not emphasize formal assessment. Students become more comfortable trying because mistakes are not seen as failures but as part of the learning process. This environment allows students to develop self-confidence more consistently, as it grows from direct experiences. Art activities, in this case, are an effective means of practicing courage and self-expression, allowing students to build self-confidence naturally and gradually (Arifa et al., 2025).

Strengthening Social Skills through Collaborative Interaction

The interactions that occur during group activities demonstrate that arts-based learning provides ample space for students to develop social skills. Activities that require cooperation, such as role-playing and adjusting movements, encourage students to communicate and coordinate with group members (Ferdiansyah et al., 2026). This process familiarizes students with sharing ideas, listening to opinions, and working together to achieve common goals. This demonstrates that collaborative experiences are an important part of learning, aligning with the view that art can be a medium for developing social skills through direct interaction (Siti Nurhanifah, 2025).

Collaborative interaction was not always harmonious. Students initially experienced difficulties related to unequal participation and role dominance, indicating that social skill development emerged through negotiation and adaptation rather than through collaboration alone. The interactions also involve adapting to differences of opinion within the group. Students learn to understand others' perspectives and seek mutually acceptable agreements. This experience fosters mutual respect and cooperation, leading to more positive relationships among students. The social skills developed are not only related to learning tasks but also reflect students' ability to interact in everyday life.

Internalizing Nationalist Values through Cultural Representations

The findings suggest that nationalism values were not acquired through direct instruction but through participation in culturally situated experiences. This supports the argument that identity-related values are

more effectively internalized when students encounter them through meaningful cultural practices rather than abstract explanations.

Activities that present cultural elements through art provide experiences that help students understand nationalist values more deeply. Role-plays centered on struggle and traditional dance create situations that allow students to directly experience the meanings of togetherness, cooperation, and cultural identity. These experiences prevent the values learned from being abstract; instead, they present them as activities that can be understood through experience. This approach aligns with culture-based education, which emphasizes the importance of context in learning values (Ferdiyansyah & Iskandar, 2025).

The understanding gained from these experiences makes it easier for students to relate nationalist values to everyday life. Values such as mutual respect and cooperation are understood not only as concepts but also as part of their learning experiences. This demonstrates that arts-based learning can be an effective means of instilling values through a contextual and meaningful approach.

Meaningful Learning through Experience Integration

Learning that involves multiple activities simultaneously provides students with a more holistic understanding of the material. Activities that combine movement, interaction, and reflection enable students not only to receive information but also to experience the learning process directly. This experience helps students connect the concepts they learn with the activities they engage in, thus deepening their understanding. This aligns with the view that meaningful learning occurs when new information connects with students' existing experiences (Qoyyim & Salsabil, 2026; Sari et al., 2026).

Engaging in diverse experiences also encourages students to interpret learning more broadly. Students not only participate in activities but also understand the rationale behind them. This process makes learning more contextual and memorable because it is directly connected to their experiences. Arts-based learning, in this case, helps create more meaningful and relevant learning experiences for students.

Toward an Integrated Understanding of Arts-Based Character Education

While each theme represents a distinct dimension of students' experiences, the findings collectively suggest an interconnected process rather than isolated outcomes. Increased engagement provided opportunities for students to participate more actively in expressive activities, thereby supporting the development of self-confidence. As students became more confident, they engaged more fully in collaborative interactions, strengthening social skills and a sense of collective responsibility. These social experiences, in turn, created conditions for students to interpret and internalize national values through shared cultural practices. Meaningful learning emerged as the cumulative result of these interconnected experiences.

Therefore, arts-based pedagogy should not be understood merely as an instructional strategy for increasing engagement. Rather, it represents a holistic pedagogical process through which participation, expression, collaboration, and cultural experience interact to support character formation in primary education.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that arts-based pedagogy, through the integration of role-play and traditional dance, creates meaningful learning experiences that support students' engagement, self-confidence, social skills, and the internalization of national values in primary education. The findings indicate that character development emerges not primarily through direct instruction but through active participation in artistic and cultural experiences. Students construct understanding and values through social interaction, performance, reflection, and cultural expression, thereby making abstract concepts such as cooperation, togetherness, and nationalism meaningful lived experiences.

Theoretically, this study contributes to experiential learning by showing how direct artistic experiences facilitate value internalization, extends embodied learning by highlighting the role of movement and

performance in shaping students' understanding of character values, and enriches culture-based pedagogy by positioning local cultural practices as pedagogical mechanisms for character formation rather than merely contextual learning resources. The findings also contribute to socio-emotional learning by demonstrating how collaborative arts activities foster self-confidence, communication, empathy, and social responsibility. Practically, the study suggests that arts and local culture should be integrated as central components of learning to create more meaningful and character-oriented educational experiences. Future research may explore broader educational contexts and examine the long-term impact of arts-based pedagogy on students' character and identity development.

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