



Reconstructing Ethical Leadership through Kresnayana Traditional Performance: A Culturally Responsive Project-Based Character Education Model

Jamila Wijayanti
Universitas Brawijaya,
Malang, Indonesia

Muh. Fatoni Rohman
Universitas Brawijaya,
Malang

Muhammad Hambali
Universitas Brawijaya,
Malang Indonesia

Maulfi Syaiful Rizal
Universitas Brawijaya,
Malang, Indonesia

Article Info

Article history:

Received: May, 23, 2026

Revised: June, 29, 2026

Accepted: July, 31 2026

Keywords:

Character Education;
Culturally Responsive;
Pedagogy;
Ethical Leadership;
Kresnayana Traditional
Performance.

Abstract

Ethical leadership has become an increasingly important concern as educational institutions seek effective approaches to cultivate students' moral responsibility alongside academic competence. Although character education has been widely implemented, limited attention has been given to transforming indigenous cultural heritage into authentic learning experiences that foster ethical leadership. This study explores the leadership values embodied in the Kresnayana traditional dance drama and examines their integration into the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5) through a Project-Based Learning framework. A qualitative study employing a realist ethnographic approach was conducted in Blitar Regency, Indonesia, involving 21 purposively selected participants, including cultural practitioners, educators, policymakers, and students. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, and analyzed using thematic analysis supported by triangulation and member checking. The findings reveal three interconnected leadership values: wisdom, humanism, and integrity that were progressively internalized through four learning stages: value exploration, critical reflection, collaborative artistic performance, and reflective evaluation. These experiences encouraged students to develop ethical awareness, collaborative competence, cultural identity, and leadership responsibility in authentic educational settings. This study contributes to the ethical leadership and character education literature by demonstrating how local cultural traditions can be transformed into culturally responsive pedagogical practices. The proposed model offers practical guidance for integrating indigenous knowledge into contemporary school curricula while strengthening sustainable character education.

To cite this article: Wijayanti, J., Rohman, M.F., Hambali, M., Rizal, M. S. (2026). Reconstructing Ethical Leadership through Kresnayana Traditional Performance: A Culturally Responsive Project-Based Character Education Model. *Al Qodiri: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial dan Keagamaan*, 24(2), 1.143-1.155.

INTRODUCTION

The growing complexity of contemporary society has intensified demands for leaders who possess not only technical competence but also strong ethical judgment and cultural sensitivity. Across many countries, concerns have emerged regarding the erosion of moral integrity among public officials, educational leaders, and community decision-makers, raising questions about the effectiveness of leadership development models that prioritize managerial efficiency over ethical responsibility (Ahsan & Khawaja, 2024; Bulmer et al., 2021). Although modern leadership theories have increasingly emphasized integrity, accountability, and social responsibility, empirical evidence continues to reveal a persistent gap between normative leadership ideals and actual practice (Osei et al., 2025; Pathak & Jha, 2023). Cases involving corruption, abuse of authority, and declining public trust demonstrate that technical expertise alone is insufficient to sustain responsible governance and social cohesion (Bodó & Janssen, 2022). These conditions have encouraged scholars to reconsider leadership as a value-based social practice rather than merely an organizational function. Consequently, educational institutions are expected to play a more strategic role in cultivating future leaders whose decisions are guided by ethical principles as well as intellectual competence. This

* Corresponding author:

Wijayanti et al, Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia
jamilawijayanti@ub.ac.id

challenge highlights the necessity of exploring educational approaches capable of integrating cultural values with leadership development in ways that remain relevant to contemporary society.

The urgency of strengthening ethical leadership is particularly evident in Indonesia, where rapid social transformation, globalization, and digitalization have reshaped the value systems influencing younger generations (Irwanto et al., 2025). While educational reforms have introduced various character education initiatives, concerns remain regarding their ability to translate moral principles into authentic behavioural practices within students' everyday experiences (Gunawardena & Brown, 2021; Tomlin et al., 2021). Many school-based programs continue to emphasize normative instruction through classroom discourse, whereas opportunities for experiential learning that enables students to internalize ethical values remain relatively limited (Agus et al., 2025). This situation becomes increasingly problematic when educational success is measured predominantly through academic achievement, often leaving moral development as a complementary rather than central objective (DeTienne et al., 2021; Gamage et al., 2021). At the same time, Indonesia possesses abundant cultural resources containing sophisticated philosophical teachings on leadership that have evolved through centuries of social practice. Unfortunately, these local cultural assets have not been systematically integrated into contemporary educational frameworks despite their potential to strengthen students' moral identity. Therefore, reconnecting character education with indigenous cultural traditions represents an important educational agenda that deserves greater scholarly attention.

Among Indonesia's diverse cultural heritage, traditional performing arts provide an especially rich medium for transmitting ethical values because they combine narrative, symbolism, emotional engagement, and collective participation within a single educational experience. Rather than functioning merely as artistic performances, many traditional epics preserve philosophical conceptions of justice, responsibility, wisdom, and public service that remain relevant to contemporary leadership challenges (Bauer, 2024; Sipondo, 2025). One such cultural heritage is the Kresnayana sendratari from Blitar Regency, whose narrative portrays Kresna as a leader who consistently balances strategic intelligence with compassion, self-restraint, and unwavering commitment to justice. These characteristics closely correspond with contemporary discussions of ethical leadership, servant leadership, and culturally responsive education, suggesting that traditional narratives may offer valuable pedagogical resources for developing students' leadership character (Armstrong & McCain, 2021; Ganz et al., 2023). Integrating these cultural narratives into project-based educational activities also aligns with Indonesia's *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5), which encourages contextual learning through authentic experiences rooted in local culture (Nurrahman et al., 2025). Accordingly, examining how the leadership philosophy embedded within the Kresnayana tradition can be transformed into meaningful educational practice represents both a timely scholarly inquiry and a practical response to the growing demand for culturally grounded ethical leadership education.

The integration of local wisdom into formal education has gained increasing scholarly attention because culturally grounded learning environments are believed to strengthen students' moral reasoning, identity formation, and civic responsibility. Recent educational reforms have shifted the focus of character education from transmitting moral knowledge toward creating authentic learning experiences that enable students to construct ethical understanding through meaningful social interaction (Bhardwaj et al., 2025; Cross & Congreve, 2021). Within this perspective, culture is no longer viewed merely as learning content but as an active pedagogical resource capable of connecting abstract values with students' lived experiences. The implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy has consistently demonstrated positive effects on student engagement, collaborative learning, intercultural awareness, and moral development across diverse educational settings (Zhou & Colomer, 2024). Simultaneously, Project-Based Learning (PjBL) has been widely recognized as an instructional approach that promotes critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and reflective practice by positioning learners as active participants in solving authentic problems (Jelodari et al., 2025; Loyens et al., 2023; Sánchez-García & Angosto, 2026). The integration of culturally responsive pedagogy with project-based learning therefore offers a promising framework for strengthening ethical leadership education because students experience moral values through direct participation rather than passive instruction. Nevertheless, empirical

evidence explaining how specific local cultural narratives can be systematically transformed into sustainable character education models remains relatively limited.

Existing studies have contributed important insights into leadership education, character formation, and the educational value of cultural heritage, yet several conceptual and methodological limitations remain apparent. Research on ethical leadership has predominantly focused on organizational behaviour, leadership effectiveness, or governance performance, emphasizing professional contexts rather than educational processes of leadership formation (Allen, 2022; Brauckmann et al., 2023; Wallo et al., 2024). At the same time, studies examining character education have generally investigated curriculum implementation, moral instruction, or school climate without adequately integrating indigenous cultural philosophies into instructional design (Ramli et al., 2025; Tohri et al., 2022). Other scholars have explored Javanese leadership concepts such as Asta Brata and local philosophical traditions, demonstrating their relevance to contemporary leadership discourse, yet these investigations have largely remained conceptual, historical, or normative in orientation (Werang et al., 2025). Likewise, research concerning traditional performing arts, temple reliefs, and epic narratives has mainly concentrated on cultural preservation, historical interpretation, or aesthetic appreciation rather than examining their pedagogical potential within contemporary schools (Toibazar et al., 2025). Although these studies collectively confirm the educational significance of local culture, they rarely explain the instructional mechanisms through which traditional narratives can facilitate the internalization of ethical leadership values among students. Consequently, current knowledge remains fragmented, with limited integration between leadership theory, local wisdom, and project-based character education.

This unresolved situation reveals a significant research gap that warrants further investigation. First, there remains insufficient empirical evidence explaining how leadership philosophies embedded in traditional performing arts can be translated into structured learning experiences capable of fostering students' ethical character through authentic participation (Babu et al., 2026; Nguyen et al., 2025). Second, previous research has rarely examined the interaction between local cultural narratives and the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5), despite the policy's strong emphasis on contextual, experiential, and culturally responsive learning (Purwanti et al., 2025). Third, existing scholarship has paid limited attention to the pedagogical processes through which students interpret, negotiate, and internalize leadership values while actively engaging in artistic performance. Addressing these gaps requires moving beyond descriptive analyses of cultural heritage toward the development of educational models that explicitly connect traditional philosophy with contemporary learning practice (Delahunty & Kimbell, 2021; Govender & Mudzamiri, 2022). Such an approach not only expands the theoretical discourse on culturally responsive character education but also provides practical guidance for educators seeking sustainable strategies to cultivate ethical leadership in schools (Gunzenhauser et al., 2021; White, 2022). Therefore, investigating the educational transformation of the *Kresnayana sendratari* within a Project-Based Learning framework represents an important contribution to both leadership studies and character education by demonstrating how local wisdom can function as a living pedagogical resource rather than merely a preserved cultural artifact.

Building upon these theoretical and empirical gaps, this study seeks to examine how the leadership philosophy embedded in the *Kresnayana sendratari* can be reconstructed as a culturally grounded model of character education through the Project-Based Learning framework implemented in the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5). Specifically, the research pursues two interconnected objectives: first, to identify and interpret the ethical leadership values represented within the narrative, symbolism, and performance practices of the *Kresnayana* tradition in Blitar Regency; and second, to investigate how these values are translated into authentic educational experiences that facilitate students' character development through project-based learning activities. Unlike previous studies that have largely examined local cultural heritage from historical, artistic, or philosophical perspectives, this research positions *Kresnayana* as a dynamic pedagogical resource capable of transforming cultural values into observable educational practices. The novelty of this study therefore lies in proposing an integrative framework that bridges traditional Javanese leadership philosophy, culturally responsive pedagogy, ethical leadership theory, and the implementation of P5 within Indonesia's contemporary educational context. From a theoretical perspective, the findings are expected to extend current discussions on ethical leadership

by demonstrating that leadership competencies can emerge through culturally embedded experiential learning rather than through abstract moral instruction alone. From a practical perspective, the study offers educators and curriculum developers an evidence-based model for integrating local cultural heritage into character education while strengthening students' moral reasoning, collaborative skills, and leadership identity. Furthermore, the proposed framework contributes to ongoing educational reform by illustrating how indigenous knowledge systems can be systematically incorporated into modern learning environments without losing their philosophical authenticity. Ultimately, this research argues that reconnecting education with living cultural traditions not only enriches pedagogical practice but also provides a sustainable pathway for preparing future leaders whose ethical commitments are firmly rooted in both universal values and local cultural wisdom.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a realist ethnographic approach to investigate how ethical leadership values embedded in the Kresnayana traditional dance drama (sendratari) are interpreted and transformed into character education practices through the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5). A qualitative design was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand the meanings, cultural symbols, and educational experiences associated with the Kresnayana performance within its natural social context rather than to test predetermined hypotheses. Specifically, realist ethnography was adopted because it enables researchers to describe cultural phenomena systematically while maintaining analytical rigor through prolonged engagement, contextual observation, and empirical interpretation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2024; O'Reilly, 2020). This approach facilitates an in-depth understanding of how traditional performances function as living pedagogical resources through which ethical leadership values are represented, negotiated, and internalized by students. Rather than treating culture merely as an object of preservation, the present study conceptualizes cultural performance as an educational medium capable of bridging indigenous philosophical knowledge with contemporary character education. Consequently, the realist ethnographic design provided an appropriate methodological framework for examining the interaction between traditional leadership philosophy and project-based educational practice.

Research Setting and Duration

The research was conducted in Blitar Regency, East Java, Indonesia, where the Kresnayana traditional dance drama has been preserved as an important component of local cultural heritage. Fieldwork involved two interconnected settings. The first comprised community-based Kresnayana performances organized by local cultural practitioners and art communities responsible for preserving the tradition. The second consisted of SMAN 1 Srengat, a public senior high school implementing the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5) through arts-based project learning inspired by local cultural heritage. Data collection was carried out over a six-month period, from January to June 2026. The first month focused on literature review, institutional coordination, and instrument preparation, followed by four months of intensive observation, interviews, and document collection. The final month was devoted to data verification, thematic interpretation, triangulation, and preparation of the research findings.

Participants and Sampling Procedures

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that all individuals possessed direct knowledge and experience relevant to the research objectives. A total of twenty-one participants were involved, consisting of six Kresnayana performers and cultural practitioners, four performance organizers, three officials from the Blitar Regency Education Office responsible for curriculum development, three teachers coordinating the P5 program at SMAN 1 Srengat, and five students actively participating in the Kresnayana-based project. Participants were included based on four criteria: (1) direct involvement in either Kresnayana performances or the implementation of P5

activities; (2) a minimum of two years of professional or educational experience; (3) willingness to participate voluntarily throughout the research process; and (4) the ability to provide comprehensive information regarding leadership values and educational practices. Participant recruitment continued until thematic saturation was achieved, indicated by the absence of substantially new information emerging from subsequent interviews and observations.

Research Instruments

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher served as the primary research instrument responsible for collecting, interpreting, and validating the data. To enhance methodological rigor, several supporting instruments were employed throughout the study. Semi-structured interview protocols were developed to explore participants' perceptions regarding ethical leadership values embedded within the Kresnayana narrative, their philosophical meanings, and their implementation in P5 activities. Participant observation sheets were designed to record interactions, symbolic performances, collaborative behaviour, classroom engagement, and students' responses during project implementation. Field notes were maintained continuously to capture contextual descriptions, reflective observations, and non-verbal expressions that could not be fully represented in interview transcripts. Documentary evidence consisted of performance scripts, lesson plans, photographs, performance videos, curriculum documents, student project reports, and relevant educational policy documents. The development of interview and observation protocols was guided by ethical leadership theory (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Northouse, 2021), culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2015), and Project-Based Learning principles (Bell, 2010; Thomas, 2000).

Instrument Trustworthiness

The credibility and trustworthiness of the research instruments were ensured through multiple validation procedures conducted before and during data collection. Content validity of the interview and observation protocols was established through expert review involving three specialists representing educational leadership, cultural studies, and qualitative research methodology. Their recommendations were incorporated to improve conceptual clarity, contextual relevance, and interview sequencing. A pilot interview involving two participants with characteristics similar to those of the research participants was subsequently conducted to evaluate question clarity and interview flow. Throughout the fieldwork, methodological triangulation was implemented by combining participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentary analysis. Source triangulation was achieved by collecting information from cultural practitioners, educators, policymakers, and students, while theoretical triangulation involved comparing empirical findings with ethical leadership theory, the Hasta Brata philosophy, and culturally responsive pedagogy. To further strengthen analytical credibility, member checking was conducted by returning interview summaries to participants for confirmation, and peer debriefing sessions with qualitative research colleagues were carried out to minimize interpretative bias.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection followed a systematic and iterative procedure designed to ensure methodological rigor, transparency, and analytical credibility throughout the ethnographic investigation. The research process integrated cultural exploration, educational observation, and qualitative interpretation through several interconnected stages. Each stage was carefully designed to identify ethical leadership values embedded in the Kresnayana traditional performance while simultaneously examining their transformation into character education practices through the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5). Rather than treating data collection as isolated activities, the study adopted an iterative process in which emerging findings continuously informed subsequent observations and interviews. This procedure enabled the researcher to capture both the philosophical dimensions of the Kresnayana narrative and the pedagogical processes through which these values were internalized by students. The complete research procedure is illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Research Procedure for Exploring Ethical Leadership Values Embedded in the Kresnayana Traditional Performance through a Realist Ethnographic Approach

As illustrated in Figure 1, the investigation commenced with identifying the research problem through an extensive review of literature concerning ethical leadership, culturally responsive pedagogy, local wisdom, and Project-Based Learning. The study subsequently proceeded with designing the research framework, developing qualitative instruments, validating interview protocols through expert review, and obtaining institutional permission together with ethical clearance. Participants were then selected through purposive sampling before participant observation of Kresnayana performances and P5 learning activities, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and documentary evidence collection were conducted. Following data collection, all qualitative materials were transcribed verbatim, systematically organized, and analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding before being synthesized using thematic analysis. The credibility of the findings was strengthened through methodological triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing prior to interpreting the findings within the frameworks of ethical leadership, culturally responsive pedagogy, and Javanese leadership philosophy. This systematic sequence ensured that every stage of the research remained logically interconnected, thereby enhancing the transparency, dependability, and replicability of the study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2024). All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and integrated with observation notes, field notes, and documentary evidence into a unified qualitative database. The analytical process began with open coding, during which meaningful units related to ethical leadership, cultural symbolism, educational practice, and student character development were identified. Similar codes were subsequently organized through axial coding to establish conceptual relationships among leadership values, pedagogical activities, and learning outcomes. Finally, selective coding was undertaken to integrate these categories into broader themes explaining how the Kresnayana traditional performance functions as a culturally responsive model of ethical leadership education. Throughout the analysis, constant comparative techniques were employed across participant groups and data sources to ensure interpretative consistency. Analytical memos were written continuously to document emerging concepts, theoretical reflections, and analytical decisions. The resulting themes were interpreted by integrating empirical evidence with ethical leadership theory, culturally responsive pedagogy, Project-Based Learning, and the Hasta Brata philosophical framework, thereby producing a comprehensive explanation of how local cultural wisdom can be systematically transformed into sustainable character education practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

1. Noble Leadership Values in the Kresnayana Sendratari



Figure 2. A scene from the Kresnayana sendratari performance featuring Kresna demonstrating patience and leadership (Researcher's Documentation, 2026).

Based on direct observations of the Kresnayana sendratari performance and interviews with artists and audience members, it was found that the characterization of Kresna represents strong and contextual noble leadership values. These values are displayed not only through dialogue but also through body movements, expressions, storylines, and visual symbols contained within each scene. Thematically, this study identifies three dominant leadership values:

- a) **Wisdom Leadership:** The character of Kresna is portrayed as a leader capable of making wise decisions during conflicts. In several scenes, rather than relying immediately on physical strength, Kresna prioritizes strategy, ingenuity, and moral consideration. Interview results indicate that the audience interprets this behavior as the emotional and intellectual intelligence of a leader.
- b) **Patient and Humanistic Leadership:** The second prominent value is patience and a humanistic attitude. Kresna is depicted as a figure capable of controlling emotions, remaining calm, and respecting others, including adversaries. Refined body movements, a composed facial expression, and thoughtful dialogue demonstrate that leadership is not merely about power, but also about self-control.
- c) **Decisive and Principled Leadership:** In addition to being wise and patient, Kresna is portrayed as a leader who is decisive. This firmness is evident when Kresna must uphold truth and justice, even when facing pressure or risks. Integrity is reflected in Kresna's consistency in upholding the principles he believes to be correct.

2. Implementation Model of Leadership Values in P5 Projects



Figure 3. Group discussion and routine rehearsal process by SMAN 1 Srengat students in drafting the Kresnayana drama script (Researcher's Documentation, 2026).

Observations at SMAN 1 Srengat show that the leadership values embedded in the Kresnayana sendratari are implemented through project-based learning, specifically within the framework of the Project for Strengthening the Profile of Pancasila Students (P5). The implementation model identified includes several stages:

- a) Value Exploration Stage: Students are introduced to the Kresnayana story through reading, viewing, and group discussions. Teachers act as facilitators who assist students in identifying leadership values within the story. Students are able to connect the character of Kresna with daily values such as responsibility, cooperation, and honesty.
- b) Internalization through Discussion and Reflection: After understanding these values, students engage in group discussions to deepen their meaning and relevance. Reflection is carried out through question-and-answer sessions, presentations, and individual assignments that train students' critical thinking skills.
- c) Implementation through Artistic Practice (Drama/Sendratari): Leadership values are implemented through drama performance practices. Students take on roles as actors, scriptwriters, or production team members. This activity fosters leadership values such as teamwork, responsibility, discipline, and effective communication.
- d) Evaluation and Reflection Stage: The final stage is conducted through collective evaluation. Interview results show that students find it easier to understand leadership values through a practical approach compared to theoretical learning.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the Kresnayana traditional performance embodies three interconnected ethical leadership values—wisdom, humanism, and integrity which together constitute a coherent framework for leadership development within contemporary education. Rather than functioning solely as cultural symbolism, these values operate as practical ethical principles that guide decision-making, interpersonal relationships, and social responsibility. This finding suggests that leadership competencies are not merely individual attributes but are culturally constructed through narratives that embody collective moral ideals. Such an interpretation reinforces contemporary perspectives that conceptualize ethical leadership as a socially embedded practice requiring moral judgment, accountability, and responsibility rather than technical competence alone (Ahsan & Khawaja, 2024; Pathak & Jha, 2023). Furthermore, the persistence of these values within a traditional performance indicates that indigenous cultural heritage remains relevant for addressing current concerns regarding declining public trust, ethical misconduct, and weakening moral responsibility among future leaders (Bodó & Janssen, 2022; Osei et al., 2025). While previous studies have largely discussed ethical leadership within organizational or governance contexts (Brauckmann et al., 2023; Wallo et al., 2024), the present findings extend this discourse by demonstrating that ethical leadership can be cultivated through culturally embedded educational experiences. Consequently, the study broadens existing leadership theory by positioning indigenous cultural narratives as dynamic pedagogical resources capable of developing ethical leadership from the earliest stages of formal education.

Another important finding concerns the educational significance of local cultural wisdom as an authentic foundation for character education. The integration of the Kresnayana narrative into learning activities demonstrates that students internalize ethical values more effectively when those values are situated within cultural experiences that are meaningful and familiar to their social environment. This finding supports the argument that character education becomes more effective when culture is treated not merely as instructional content but as a living context through which learners actively construct moral understanding (Ramli et al., 2025; White, 2022). The process also aligns with recent educational reforms emphasizing culturally responsive learning as a means of strengthening identity formation, civic responsibility, and ethical awareness (Bhardwaj et al., 2025; Zhou & Colomer, 2024). Similar conclusions have been reported by Tohri et al. (2022) and Nurrahman et al. (2025), who found that integrating local wisdom enhances students' character formation by connecting educational experiences with community values. However, unlike these earlier studies, which primarily emphasized curriculum integration and cultural preservation, the

present research demonstrates that indigenous cultural narratives can also function as systematic mechanisms for ethical leadership development. This distinction represents an important conceptual contribution because it shifts the role of local wisdom from passive cultural inheritance toward an active pedagogical strategy capable of producing ethically responsible future leaders.

The implementation model identified in this study further reveals that ethical leadership develops through a gradual experiential process involving value exploration, collaborative reflection, artistic practice, and continuous evaluation. These stages indicate that leadership values are internalized through repeated participation and social interaction rather than through direct moral instruction alone. This finding is consistent with contemporary educational perspectives emphasizing authentic and student-centred learning environments, where knowledge is constructed through active engagement with meaningful problems and collaborative experiences (Cross & Congreve, 2021; Jelodari et al., 2025). Recent systematic reviews similarly conclude that project-based learning promotes critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and reflective capacity because learners become active participants in authentic educational situations (Loyens et al., 2023; Sánchez-García & Angosto, 2026). Nevertheless, the present study extends these findings by demonstrating that project-based learning not only improves cognitive competencies but also serves as a powerful mechanism for internalizing ethical leadership values when authentic cultural experiences become the basis of learning. This finding therefore addresses the research gap identified in the Introduction regarding the limited empirical evidence explaining how indigenous cultural narratives can be systematically transformed into sustainable character education models. It also strengthens the argument that experiential learning rooted in local culture provides a more comprehensive approach to leadership education than approaches relying predominantly on theoretical moral instruction.

The findings further indicate that collaborative artistic performance serves as the principal mechanism through which ethical leadership values are translated into observable behaviours. Students did not merely learn about leadership conceptually but experienced leadership directly while assuming different responsibilities as performers, scriptwriters, production coordinators, and evaluators throughout the project. These authentic roles required learners to negotiate decisions, resolve interpersonal conflicts, communicate effectively, and maintain collective responsibility, thereby transforming ethical principles into practical leadership competencies. This finding supports previous research suggesting that narrative-based and experiential learning environments provide richer opportunities for leadership development than conventional teacher-centred instruction because learners actively construct ethical understanding through meaningful participation (Armstrong & McCain, 2021; Ganz et al., 2023). Likewise, studies by Gunawardena and Brown (2021) demonstrated that authentic storytelling strengthens moral reflection by connecting ethical values with learners' lived experiences. However, the present study advances this body of knowledge by showing that traditional performing arts provide a multidimensional pedagogical environment in which cognitive understanding, emotional engagement, cultural identity, and collaborative responsibility develop simultaneously. Consequently, Kresnayana functions not only as a cultural performance but also as an experiential leadership laboratory that enables students to practice ethical decision-making within authentic social interactions.

The present findings also provide a critical perspective on the implementation of contemporary character education in Indonesian schools. Although character education has become a central component of national educational reform, many existing programs continue to emphasize normative instruction and cognitive understanding without providing sufficient opportunities for students to practice ethical behaviour in authentic situations. The evidence generated by this study suggests that such approaches may limit the internalization of moral values because ethical leadership is more effectively developed through repeated participation in meaningful social experiences. This interpretation is consistent with previous studies reporting that authentic learning environments promote stronger moral reasoning, civic engagement, and responsible behaviour than approaches relying primarily on theoretical instruction (DeTienne et al., 2021; Tomlin et al., 2021; Agus et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the proposed model is also influenced by contextual conditions, including teacher competence in facilitating reflective dialogue, institutional support for project-based learning, and the availability of local cultural resources that remain actively practiced within the community. These contextual factors may explain why previous studies

have reported varying levels of success in implementing culturally responsive character education across different educational settings (Govender & Mudzamiri, 2022; White, 2022). Therefore, rather than proposing a universally applicable instructional model, this study argues that successful ethical leadership education requires adaptive implementation that respects the unique cultural and institutional characteristics of each educational context.

From a broader theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the international literature by bridging ethical leadership, culturally responsive pedagogy, and project-based learning within a single culturally grounded educational framework. Previous scholarship has generally examined these perspectives independently, resulting in fragmented explanations regarding how ethical leadership values emerge through educational processes (Brauckmann et al., 2023; Wallo et al., 2024). By contrast, the present findings demonstrate that ethical leadership develops through the interaction of indigenous cultural narratives, collaborative learning experiences, and critical reflection, thereby offering a more integrated explanation of leadership formation. This contribution directly addresses the research gaps identified in the Introduction, particularly the limited empirical evidence explaining how traditional performing arts can be systematically transformed into sustainable character education models and the insufficient integration between indigenous philosophy and the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5) (Babu et al., 2026; Purwanti et al., 2025). Conceptually, the study expands current discussions by positioning local wisdom as an active pedagogical mechanism rather than a symbolic cultural asset, while practically it provides educators with an evidence-based framework for integrating indigenous cultural heritage into contemporary curricula. Within the broader global literature, the findings reinforce growing recognition that culturally responsive educational innovation should not merely preserve local traditions but should transform them into dynamic learning resources capable of preparing ethically responsible leaders for increasingly complex and multicultural societies (Nguyen et al., 2025; Ramli et al., 2025; Werang et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

Ethical leadership cannot be developed solely through abstract moral instruction; it requires meaningful learning experiences that connect ethical principles with learners' cultural realities. The present study highlights that the Kresnayana traditional dance drama offers such a learning context by transforming indigenous leadership philosophy into authentic educational practice within the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5). Through students' active engagement in cultural exploration, collaborative performance, critical reflection, and project-based activities, leadership values such as wisdom, integrity, responsibility, and respect for others become lived experiences rather than conceptual knowledge. This process illustrates that local cultural heritage can function not only as an object of preservation but also as a practical educational resource capable of strengthening character formation in contemporary schools. By integrating ethical leadership theory, culturally responsive pedagogy, and Project-Based Learning within a single instructional framework, this research broadens current understanding of how indigenous knowledge systems may enrich modern character education. The proposed model also provides practical guidance for educators seeking culturally relevant approaches that foster students' moral reasoning, collaborative competence, and leadership identity while maintaining alignment with national educational priorities. Although the findings originate from a specific cultural setting in Blitar Regency, they offer a conceptual foundation that may inform similar initiatives in other educational contexts where local traditions continue to shape community values. Future research should investigate the adaptability of this model across different cultural environments and educational levels, as well as examine its long-term influence on students' leadership behaviour and civic engagement through longitudinal and comparative studies.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Jamila Wijayanti Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, writing original draft, project administration, and corresponding author. Muh. Fatoni Rohman: Methodology, formal analysis, validation, writing review and editing, and supervision. Muhammad Hambali Investigation, data curation, resources, visualization, and writing review and editing. Maulfi Syaiful Rizal Validation, supervision, interpretation of findings, writing review and editing, and final approval of the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

REFERENCES

- Agus, A. A., Rizal, A., Muhajir, M., & Jamalang, A. (2025). From awareness to action: Rethinking high school civic education for the digital generation in Indonesia. *Cogent Education*, 12(1), Article 2534156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2025.2534156>
- Ahsan, M. J., & Khawaja, S. (2024). Sustainable leadership impact on environmental performance: Exploring employee well-being, innovation, and organizational resilience. *Discover Sustainability*, 5(1), 317. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43621-024-00422-z>
- Allen, A. (2022). Navigating stigma through everyday city-making: Gendered trajectories, politics and outcomes in the periphery of Lima. *Urban Studies*, 59(3), 490–508. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980211044409>
- Armstrong, J. P., & McCain, K. D. (2021). Narrative pedagogy for leadership education: Stories of leadership efficacy, self-identity, and leadership development. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 14(4), 60–70. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.21724>
- Babu, V., Kumar, A., & Kumar, V. (2026). Exploring mindfulness and leadership development: Lessons learnt using grounded theory through the study of the performing arts. *FIIB Business Review*, 15(2), 232–251. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23197145221088643>
- Bauer, M. W. (2024). Public administration under populist rule: Standing up against democratic backsliding. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 47(15), 1019–1031. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2023.2243400>
- Bell, S. (2010). Project-based learning for the 21st century: Skills for the future. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 83(2), 39–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098650903505415>
- Bhardwaj, V., Zhang, S., Tan, Y. Q., & Pandey, V. (2025). Redefining learning: Student-centered strategies for academic and personal growth. *Frontiers in Education*, 10, Article 1518602. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2025.1518602>
- Bodó, B., & Janssen, H. (2022). Maintaining trust in a technologized public sector. *Policy and Society*, 41(3), 414–429. <https://doi.org/10.1093/polsoc/puac019>
- Brauckmann, S., Pashiardis, P., & Ärlestig, H. (2023). Bringing context and educational leadership together: Fostering the professional development of school principals. *Professional Development in Education*, 49(1), 4–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2020.1747105>
- Brown, M. E., & Treviño, L. K. (2006). Ethical leadership: A review and future directions. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 17(6), 595–616. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2006.10.004>
- Bulmer, E., Riera, M., & Rodríguez, R. (2021). The importance of sustainable leadership amongst female managers in the Spanish logistics industry: A cultural, ethical and legal perspective. *Sustainability*, 13(12), Article 6841. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13126841>
- Cross, I. D., & Congreve, A. (2021). Teaching (super) wicked problems: Authentic learning about climate change. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 45(4), 491–516. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2020.1849066>
- Delahunty, T., & Kimbell, R. (2021). (Re)framing a philosophical and epistemological framework for teaching and learning in STEM: Emerging pedagogies for complexity. *British Educational Research Journal*, 47(3), 742–769. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3706>

- DeTienne, K. B., Ellertson, C. F., Ingerson, M.-C., & Dudley, W. R. (2021). Moral development in business ethics: An examination and critique. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 170(3), 429–448. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04351-0>
- Gamage, K. A. A., Dehideniya, D. M. S. C. P. K., & Ekanayake, S. Y. (2021). The role of personal values in learning approaches and student achievements. *Behavioral Sciences*, 11(7), Article 102. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs11070102>
- Ganz, M., Cunningham, J. L., Ben Ezer, I., & Segura, A. (2023). Crafting public narrative to enable collective action: A pedagogy for leadership development. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 22(2), 169–190. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2020.0224>
- Gay, G. (2018). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (3rd ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Govender, N., & Mudzamiri, E. (2022). Incorporating indigenous artefacts in developing an integrated indigenous-pedagogical model in high school physics curriculum: Views of elders, teachers and learners. *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, 17(3), 827–850. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11422-021-10076-2>
- Gunawardena, M., & Brown, B. (2021). Fostering values through authentic storytelling. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 46(6), 36–53. <https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.045067489909904>
- Gunzenhauser, M. G., Flores, O. J., & Quigley, M. W. (2021). Race-conscious ethics in school leadership: From impersonal caring to critical responsibility. *Teachers College Record*, 123(2), 1–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146812112300206>
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2024). *Ethnography: Principles in practice* (5th ed.). Routledge.
- Hammond, Z. (2015). *Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students*. Corwin Press.
- Irwanto, I., Bahfiarti, T., & Unde, A. A. (2025). Digital transformation of youth violence in Indonesia: New responsibilities and social negotiations in the digital age. *Frontiers in Communication*, 10, Article 1576389. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2025.1576389>
- Jelodari, Z., Zenouzagh, Z. M., & Hashamdar, M. (2025). Exploring PBL and e-PBL: Implications for 21st-century skills in EFL education. *Discover Education*, 4(1), Article 311. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44217-025-00773-3>
- Loyens, S. M. M., van Meerten, J. E., Schaap, L., & Wijnia, L. (2023). Situating higher-order, critical, and critical-analytic thinking in problem- and project-based learning environments: A systematic review. *Educational Psychology Review*, 35(2), Article 39. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-023-09757-x>
- Nguyen, P. T., Nguyen, K. N. V., Do, H. T. T., & Nguyen, Q. T. (2025). Confucian educational thought and its relevance to contemporary Vietnamese education. *Philosophies*, 10(3), Article 70. <https://doi.org/10.3390/philosophies10030070>
- Northouse, P. G. (2021). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (9th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Nurrahman, A., Sukirno, Muhson, A., & Marzuki. (2025). Enhancing character education and students' positive attitudes through local wisdom in the era of Society 5.0: A case study in vocational schools. *Indonesian Values and Character Education Journal*, 8(2), 305–314. <https://doi.org/10.23887/ivcej.v8i2.99297>
- O'Reilly, K. (2020). *Key concepts in ethnography* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Osei, A., Zhu, N., & Agyemang, A. O. (2025). Advancing business ethical standards: Unpacking the synergistic influence of governance structures and CSR engagement on corporate integrity in BRICS countries. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 32(3), 3471–3494. <https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.3140>
- Pathak, P., & Jha, S. (2023). Theories, constructs and contexts in responsible leadership: A future research agenda. *Benchmarking: An International Journal*, 31(8), 2718–2742. <https://doi.org/10.1108/BIJ-11-2022-0699>
- Purwanti, K. L., Adriyani, Z., Afifa, E. L. N., & Nurhalisa, S. (2025). Character education through project-based learning: The implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile and Rahmatan lil Alamin Project in an Islamic elementary school. *Journal of Integrated Elementary Education*, 5(2), 353–368. <https://doi.org/10.21580/jieed.v5i2.26578>

- Ramli, R., Razali, R., Gadeng, A. N., Diana, N., & Hariadi, J. (2025). Integrating local knowledge into higher education: A qualitative study of curriculum innovation in Aceh, Indonesia. *Education Sciences*, 15(9), Article 1214. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15091214>
- Sánchez-García, R., & Angosto, S. (2026). Mapping the path to effective project-based learning: A systematic review and analysis of models and practices. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-026-07870-0>
- Sipondo, A. (2025). Ubuntu ethical leadership in the African public sector: Conceptual proposals. *International Journal of Public Leadership*, 21(2), 140–154. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPL-10-2024-0119>
- Thomas, J. W. (2000). *A review of research on project-based learning*. Autodesk Foundation.
- Tohri, A., Rasyad, A., Sururuddin, M., & Istiqlal, L. M. (2022). The urgency of Sasak local wisdom-based character education for elementary school in East Lombok, Indonesia. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education*, 11(1), 333–344. <https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v11i1.21869>
- Toibazar, A., Dautova, G., Aliyev, Y., Turdali, T., & Zhalgasbayeva, K. (2025). Ethnic narratives in education: The role of Kazakh epics in preserving cultural heritage and identity. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 12(1), 154–177. <https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/2395>
- Tomlin, K. A., Metzger, M. L., & Bradley-Geist, J. (2021). Removing the blinders: Increasing students' awareness of self-perception biases and real-world ethical challenges through an educational intervention. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 169(4), 731–746. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04294-6>
- Wallo, A., Lundqvist, D., & Coetzer, A. (2024). Learning-oriented leadership in organizations: An integrative review of qualitative studies. *Human Resource Development Review*, 23(2), 230–275. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15344843241239723>
- Werang, B. R., Agung, A. A. G., & Wulandari, I. G. A. A. (2025). Asta Brata leadership practices and its impact on school culture and student character in Indonesia's elementary schools. *Discover Sustainability*, 7(1), Article 78. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43621-025-02421-0>
- White, A. L. (2022). Reaching back to reach forward: Using culturally responsive frameworks to enhance critical action amongst educators. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 44(2), 166–184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714413.2021.2009748>
- Zhou, T., & Colomer, J. (2024). Cooperative learning promoting cultural diversity and individual accountability: A systematic review. *Education Sciences*, 14(6), Article 567. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14060567>