



Tembang dolanan as a medium for internalizing children's character values in the perspective of culture-based education

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Abstract

Character education has become increasingly critical in addressing the moral and social challenges faced by children in the era of globalization and digital transformation, where cultural disconnection and declining social values are evident. This study aims to analyze tembang dolanan as a medium for internalizing children's character values within the framework of culture-based education and to explain the mechanisms underlying this process. Using a qualitative approach with a systematic library research design, this study examines 42 scholarly sources related to cultural pedagogy, character education, and local wisdom. The analysis employs qualitative content analysis through coding, categorization, and thematic synthesis. The findings reveal that tembang dolanan functions as a culturally embedded pedagogical medium that facilitates the internalization of values such as religiosity, cooperation, discipline, responsibility, honesty, and creativity. This process occurs through four interconnected mechanisms: repetition, emotional engagement, social interaction, and experiential learning. Based on these findings, the study proposes the Cultural-Experiential Internalization Model (CEIM), which conceptualizes value internalization as a dynamic interaction between cultural input, learning processes, and character outcomes. The study concludes that tembang dolanan is not merely a cultural artifact but a relevant and adaptive educational resource that can support holistic character development when integrated into modern educational practices. This research contributes theoretically by offering an integrative conceptual model and practically by providing a foundation for developing culturally responsive character education strategies.

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INTRODUCTION

Character education has become a central concern in contemporary educational discourse, particularly in response to the increasing complexity of social, cultural, and moral challenges faced by younger generations. The rapid advancement of globalization and digital technology has significantly transformed children's patterns of interaction, communication, and learning, often resulting in weakened social values such as empathy, respect, and responsibility (Alnajjar, 2025; Zalli, 2024). Educational systems that primarily emphasize cognitive achievement are increasingly viewed as insufficient to address these multidimensional challenges, as they tend to neglect the affective and moral dimensions of learning. Consequently, there is a growing recognition that character formation requires holistic approaches that integrate knowledge, values, and lived experiences. In this context, education is expected not only to develop intellectual competence but also to cultivate ethical awareness and social responsibility. Therefore, the integration of value-based and culturally grounded learning approaches has become an urgent priority in modern education systems.

Empirical evidence indicates that the moral development of children is increasingly influenced by digital environments that often lack direct social interaction and cultural grounding. Children today are more frequently engaged with digital media than with traditional forms of play, leading to reduced opportunities for experiential and socially embedded learning (Bittner, 2021; Taylor & Boyer, 2020). This shift has implications for the internalization of character values, as

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learning processes become more individualistic and less contextually meaningful. Studies have shown that diminished exposure to cultural practices correlates with declining levels of social empathy, cooperation, and communal responsibility among children (Sultan & Khan, 2025; w-Czerwińska, 2024). Moreover, the dominance of globalized content often marginalizes local cultural identities, weakening the transmission of indigenous values across generations. This phenomenon highlights a critical gap between formal education and children's socio-cultural realities. As a result, there is a pressing need to re-examine educational strategies that can reconnect learners with culturally meaningful experiences.

In response to these challenges, culture-based education has emerged as a promising approach that situates learning within the socio-cultural context of students. This approach emphasizes that knowledge and values are best understood when they are embedded in meaningful cultural practices and everyday experiences (Ober et al., 2023; Rachmad, 2022; Zidny et al., 2020). Culture-based education not only facilitates cognitive understanding but also promotes the internalization of values through participation and social interaction. Local wisdom, as an integral component of cultural practices, offers rich pedagogical resources that are contextual, relevant, and deeply rooted in community life. By engaging with local cultural expressions, learners can develop a stronger sense of identity while simultaneously acquiring moral and social competencies. This approach aligns with contemporary perspectives on culturally responsive pedagogy, which advocate for the integration of learners' cultural backgrounds into educational processes. Therefore, leveraging local culture as a medium for character education represents a strategic and contextually appropriate solution.

One form of local cultural expression that holds significant pedagogical potential is *tembang dolanan*, traditional Javanese children's songs that are closely associated with play activities. These songs are not merely forms of entertainment but serve as vehicles for transmitting moral, social, and spiritual values through lyrics, rhythms, and collective participation (Liu et al., 2024; Thompson, 2025; Yüceland & Savaş, 2026). Through repetitive singing, symbolic meanings, and social interaction, children are exposed to values such as cooperation, honesty, discipline, and empathy in a natural and engaging manner. Unlike formal instruction, the learning process embedded in *tembang dolanan* is experiential and implicit, allowing values to be internalized gradually through meaningful participation. Furthermore, the integration of emotional engagement in these activities enhances the effectiveness of value transmission. However, despite its potential, the role of *tembang dolanan* in contemporary education has been increasingly marginalized due to changing lifestyles and technological influences. This situation underscores the importance of revitalizing traditional cultural media within modern educational frameworks.

A growing body of research has explored the role of local cultural practices, including *tembang dolanan*, in supporting character education. Several studies have demonstrated that traditional songs can function as effective pedagogical tools for fostering moral and social values in children (Kelmendi & Pajaziti-Drançolli, 2025; Mihai, 2025; Yuliarini & Cholimah, 2025). Other research highlights the importance of integrating cultural media into formal education to enhance students' character development and cultural identity (Nurasiah et al., 2022; Samiya, 2025). Additionally, recent studies emphasize the role of culturally responsive pedagogy in improving learning engagement and promoting value internalization through meaningful experiences (Caingcoy, 2023; Fahadah & Thomps, 2025a). Empirical findings also suggest that repetitive and participatory activities, such as singing and group play, contribute to the development of discipline, cooperation, and empathy among children (Garaigordobil et al., 2022; Wu & Lu, 2021). Furthermore, research on digital sociology indicates that cultural displacement caused by technology can be mitigated through the integration of local wisdom into educational practices (Sulianta, 2024). Collectively, these studies confirm the relevance of cultural media in character education, particularly in early childhood contexts.

Despite these contributions, existing studies tend to focus predominantly on descriptive and implementative aspects, such as the use of traditional songs in classroom settings or their impact on specific character traits. There is still limited research that systematically examines the underlying mechanisms through which values are internalized via cultural practices. In particular, the interaction between repetition, emotional engagement, social interaction, and experiential learning as integrated processes of value internalization remains underexplored. Moreover, theoretical

frameworks that connect cultural pedagogy, local wisdom, and character education are often discussed separately rather than as an integrated conceptual model. This fragmentation limits the depth of understanding regarding how cultural media function as pedagogical instruments. In addition, few studies address the relevance of traditional cultural practices within the context of modern, technology-driven education systems. Therefore, a critical gap exists in developing a comprehensive and theoretically grounded explanation of how *tembang dolanan* facilitates the internalization of character values within a culture-based education framework.

Based on this gap, the present study aims to analyze *tembang dolanan* as a medium for internalizing children's character values from the perspective of culture-based education. Specifically, this study seeks to (1) examine the pedagogical role of *tembang dolanan* as a cultural learning medium, (2) identify the character values embedded within it, and (3) explain the mechanisms through which these values are internalized by children. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of an integrative framework that connects cultural pedagogy, experiential learning, and character education. Practically, the findings are expected to provide insights for educators and policymakers in designing contextually relevant learning models that incorporate local cultural resources. Furthermore, this study offers a strategic perspective on revitalizing traditional cultural practices in response to the challenges of digital transformation. By bridging tradition and modernity, this research aims to support the development of holistic and culturally grounded character education.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a systematic library research approach to examine *tembang dolanan* as a medium for internalizing children's character values within the framework of culture-based education. The qualitative approach was selected because the study aims to explore meanings, conceptual *relationships*, and theoretical integration rather than to test hypotheses quantitatively. Library research was considered appropriate as it enables a comprehensive synthesis of existing scholarly works, allowing the researcher to construct an in-depth understanding of cultural pedagogy and value internalization processes. To ensure methodological rigor, this study adopted structured procedures inspired by systematic literature review principles, including transparent source selection, categorization, and analytical synthesis. This design allows the study to produce theoretically grounded findings that are both integrative and analytically robust.

Research Setting and Timeframe

This study was conducted within an academic research context without a specific physical field location, as it relied entirely on secondary data derived from scholarly publications. The research process was carried out over a four-month period, from November 2025 to February 2026. The literature analyzed in this study was drawn from both national and international sources, with a focus on publications related to character education, cultural pedagogy, local wisdom, and traditional children's songs. The selected timeframe ensured that the study incorporated recent scholarly developments, particularly those *published* between 2021 and 2026, while also including foundational references relevant to the conceptual framework. This approach allowed for a balanced integration of contemporary and established perspectives.

Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of all scholarly works related to *tembang dolanan*, character education, and culture-based education available in academic databases. The sample included 42 selected documents, comprising peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and conference proceedings published between 2015 and 2026. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure the inclusion of relevant and high-*quality* sources. The inclusion criteria required that the selected literature (1) explicitly discuss cultural media or local wisdom in education, (2) address character value development or internalization processes, and (3) demonstrate theoretical or empirical relevance to the research focus. Sources were excluded if they lacked academic credibility, were not peer-reviewed, or did not provide sufficient analytical depth. This sampling strategy ensured that the data used in the study were both credible and contextually relevant.

Research Instruments

The primary instrument used in this study was a structured document analysis protocol designed to guide the systematic extraction and organization of data from the selected literature. The protocol included several key analytical indicators, namely: (1) types of character values identified, (2) forms of cultural media used, (3) mechanisms of *value* internalization, and (4) theoretical frameworks applied in each study. These indicators were developed based on established theories in character education, cultural pedagogy, and experiential learning. In addition, a data extraction matrix was utilized to categorize and compare findings across different sources, facilitating the identification of patterns and thematic relationships. This instrument ensured consistency and depth in the analytical process.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument, several procedures were implemented. Content validity was established through expert judgment involving two scholars in the fields of education and cultural studies, who reviewed the relevance and clarity of the analytical indicators. Construct validity was ensured by aligning the instrument with established theoretical frameworks in character education and cultural pedagogy. Reliability was maintained through iterative coding and re-analysis, where the researcher revisited the data multiple times to ensure consistency in interpretation. Additionally, source triangulation was conducted by comparing findings across multiple studies to *identify* convergent and divergent patterns. These strategies enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted through a systematic and sequential process. First, relevant literature was identified through database searches using keywords such as “tembang dolanan,” “character education,” “cultural pedagogy,” and “local wisdom in education” across platforms including Google Scholar, Scopus, and SINTA-indexed journals. The initial search yielded 96 documents, which were subsequently screened based on titles and abstracts to assess their relevance. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 42 documents were selected for full-text analysis. Each selected document was then organized and coded using the predefined analysis protocol. All sources were documented and archived to *ensure* transparency and replicability of the research process.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using *qualitative* content analysis, following a systematic multi-stage process. First, data reduction was carried out by selecting information relevant to the research objectives. Second, open coding was applied to identify key concepts related to character values, cultural practices, and internalization mechanisms. Third, the identified codes were grouped into categories and synthesized into broader themes, such as repetition, emotional engagement, social interaction, and experiential learning. Fourth, thematic interpretation was conducted to examine the relationships among these themes within the framework of culture-based education. The analysis was conducted iteratively to refine conceptual understanding and ensure analytical depth. This approach enabled the development of an integrative explanation of how *tembang dolanan* functions as a medium for value internalization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Tembang Dolanan as a Culture-Based Pedagogical Medium

This study identifies *tembang dolanan* as a culturally embedded pedagogical medium that functions beyond entertainment and operates as an implicit learning system for character formation. The analysis reveals that *tembang dolanan* integrates cognitive, affective, and social learning processes through its structure, delivery, and social context. Unlike formal instructional approaches that rely on explicit teaching, *tembang dolanan* facilitates value transmission through participatory and experience-based engagement. This finding confirms that cultural practices can serve as pedagogical instruments when they are embedded in meaningful social interactions and repetitive activities.

From a cultural pedagogy perspective, *tembang dolanan* reflects the principle that learning is inseparable from the socio-cultural environment in which it occurs. The findings show that children do not merely memorize song lyrics, but actively engage with culturally meaningful content that reflects shared norms and values. This aligns with recent studies emphasizing the importance of culturally responsive learning environments in fostering deeper understanding and identity formation (Fahadah & Thomps, 2025b; Zeng et al., 2025). However, this study extends previous research by demonstrating that the pedagogical role of cultural media lies not only in content delivery but also in the structure of interaction and participation that accompanies it.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals three defining pedagogical characteristics of *tembang dolanan*: simplicity, repetition, and communicative interaction. These characteristics collectively create a learning environment that is accessible, engaging, and sustainable over time. Simplicity allows children to easily comprehend and retain content, repetition reinforces memory and habit formation, and social interaction enables collaborative learning and value negotiation. While previous studies have acknowledged the educational value of traditional songs (Gong et al., 2024; Shi, 2025; Wang & Thotham, 2024), they often treat these elements separately. This study provides a more integrated understanding by positioning these characteristics as interdependent components of a culture-based pedagogical system.

However, the findings also indicate that the effectiveness of *tembang dolanan* as a pedagogical medium is contingent upon its contextual implementation. In modern educational settings, where digital media dominates children's experiences, the absence of guided facilitation may reduce its impact to mere entertainment. This limitation highlights the need for structured integration of cultural media into formal education. Therefore, this study argues that the pedagogical potential of *tembang dolanan* can only be fully realized when supported by intentional educational design and contextual adaptation.

Character Values Embedded in Tembang Dolanan

The analysis identifies that *tembang dolanan* contains a multidimensional set of character values that are transmitted implicitly through symbolic, linguistic, and social elements. These values include religiosity, cooperation, discipline, responsibility, honesty, and creativity, forming a holistic framework of character development. Unlike formal curricula that present values in abstract terms, *tembang dolanan* embeds these values in narratives, symbols, and collective practices, making them more accessible and meaningful to children.

This study finds that religious values are conveyed through symbolic representations that emphasize harmony between humans, nature, and the divine. Social values, such as cooperation and empathy, emerge through group-based singing and play activities, where children learn to interact, negotiate roles, and respect others. Discipline and responsibility are reinforced through structured patterns of rhythm and rules within the songs, requiring children to follow sequences and maintain coordination. Additionally, honesty and simplicity are embedded in moral narratives conveyed through song lyrics, while creativity is fostered through opportunities for improvisation and variation during play.

These findings support previous research highlighting the role of traditional cultural practices in character formation (Agus et al., 2021; Purwaningsih & Ridha, 2024). However, this study extends the literature by demonstrating that these values do not operate independently but are interconnected within a unified value system. The integration of multiple values within a single activity allows children to develop character holistically rather than in fragmented dimensions. This integrative nature distinguishes *tembang dolanan* from conventional instructional approaches that often isolate specific character traits.

Nevertheless, the analysis also reveals that the effectiveness of value transmission depends on the interpretative support provided by educators and parents. Without reflective engagement, children may internalize the activity at a superficial level, focusing on memorization rather than meaning. This finding highlights a critical limitation in existing practices, where cultural activities are often implemented without pedagogical mediation. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of guided interpretation to maximize the educational potential of *tembang dolanan*.

Mechanisms of Character Value Internalization

One of the key contributions of this study is the identification of four interconnected mechanisms through which *tembang dolanan* facilitates the internalization of character values: repetition, emotional engagement, social interaction, and experiential learning. These mechanisms form a dynamic system that transforms cultural activities into meaningful learning experiences.

First, repetition functions as a cognitive and behavioral reinforcement mechanism. The repeated singing of songs enables children to internalize values gradually, transforming abstract concepts into habitual behaviors. This finding aligns with theories of habit formation and reinforces previous studies emphasizing the role of repetition in value internalization (Miller et al., 2019). Second, emotional engagement enhances the learning process by creating positive associations with the values being transmitted. Children are more likely to internalize values when they are experienced in enjoyable and emotionally meaningful contexts.

Third, social interaction serves as a mechanism for observational learning and behavioral modeling. Through group activities, children observe and imitate the actions of peers, reinforcing social norms and cooperative behavior. This finding is consistent with social learning theory, which highlights the role of interaction in shaping behavior. Fourth, experiential learning enables children to actively engage in meaningful activities, allowing them to “learn by doing” rather than passively receiving information. This process strengthens the connection between knowledge and real-life application.

Based on these findings, this study proposes a conceptual model of value internalization through *tembang dolanan*, in which cultural media functions as an input, the four mechanisms operate as transformative processes, and character values emerge as outcomes. This model provides a more comprehensive explanation compared to previous studies, which tend to focus on isolated factors. By integrating multiple mechanisms, this study offers a holistic understanding of how cultural practices contribute to character education. Based on these findings, this study proposes a conceptual model of character value internalization through *tembang dolanan*, as illustrated in Figure 1.

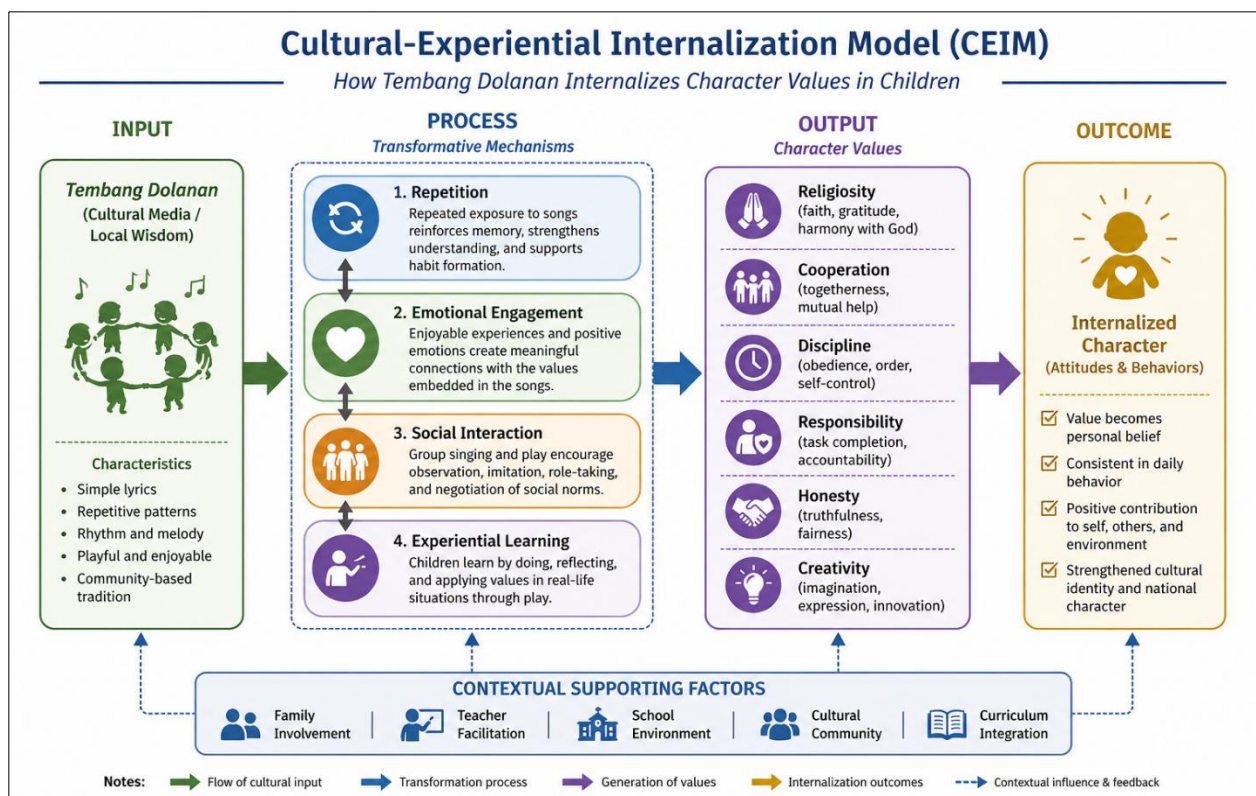


Figure 1. Cultural-Experiential Internalization Model (CEIM) of Character Value Internalization through Tembang Dolanan.

Figure 1 illustrates the Cultural-Experiential Internalization Model (CEIM), which conceptualizes *tembang dolanan* as a cultural input that undergoes transformation through four key mechanisms,

namely repetition, emotional engagement, social interaction, and experiential learning. These processes collectively lead to the development of character values, which are ultimately internalized into children's attitudes and behaviors. The model also highlights the role of contextual supporting factors, such as family, teachers, and the learning environment, in strengthening the internalization process.

Relevance of Tembang Dolanan in Contemporary Education

The findings indicate that *tembang dolanan* remains highly relevant in contemporary education, particularly in addressing the challenges posed by digitalization and cultural disconnection. In an era where children are increasingly exposed to individualistic and screen-based learning environments, *tembang dolanan* offers a socially interactive and culturally grounded alternative. Its emphasis on collaboration, communication, and shared experiences aligns with the competencies required in 21st-century education.

This study finds that the relevance of *tembang dolanan* lies in its ability to bridge traditional values and modern educational needs. It not only preserves cultural heritage but also contributes to the development of critical competencies such as creativity, social skills, and emotional intelligence. These findings are consistent with recent studies that highlight the importance of integrating local wisdom into modern educational frameworks (Ammar, 2024). However, this study extends these insights by emphasizing that cultural media can function as adaptive learning tools when appropriately contextualized.

Despite its potential, the analysis reveals several challenges in implementing *tembang dolanan* in modern education, including limited teacher awareness, lack of instructional innovation, and the dominance of digital media. These challenges suggest that revitalization efforts must go beyond preservation and focus on pedagogical transformation. Integrating *tembang dolanan* into formal curricula, supported by digital adaptation and teacher training, represents a strategic approach to enhancing its relevance.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that *tembang dolanan* is not merely a cultural artifact but a dynamic pedagogical resource with significant potential for character education. Its effectiveness lies in its ability to integrate cultural meaning, social interaction, and experiential learning into a cohesive educational process. Therefore, optimizing its role requires a systematic, reflective, and innovative approach that aligns cultural heritage with contemporary educational demands.

Proposed Model: Cultural-Experiential Internalization Model (CEIM)

This study proposes a conceptual framework termed the Cultural-Experiential Internalization Model (CEIM) to explain how *tembang dolanan* functions as a medium for internalizing children's character values within a culture-based education framework. The model conceptualizes value internalization as a dynamic and multi-layered process that integrates cultural content, learning mechanisms, and character outcomes into a coherent system.

At the core of the model, *tembang dolanan* serves as a cultural input, representing local wisdom embedded in symbolic, linguistic, and social forms. Unlike conventional instructional materials, this cultural input is inherently contextual and meaningful, allowing children to engage with values that are closely connected to their lived experiences. This finding aligns with cultural pedagogy perspectives, which emphasize that learning becomes more effective when it is grounded in learners' socio-cultural environments.

The model identifies four key transformative mechanisms that mediate the internalization process. First, repetition functions as a reinforcement mechanism that strengthens memory and supports habit formation. Through continuous exposure to song lyrics and patterns, values are gradually embedded in children's cognitive and behavioral structures. Second, emotional engagement enhances learning by creating positive affective connections, making values more meaningful and memorable. This supports the view that emotional experiences play a critical role in shaping long-term learning outcomes.

Third, social interaction operates as a mechanism of observational learning, where children acquire values through participation, imitation, and negotiation within group contexts. This aligns with Social Learning Theory, which posits that behavior is shaped through interaction with others.

Fourth, experiential learning enables children to internalize values through direct involvement in meaningful activities. This mechanism reflects Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through experience and reflection.

These four mechanisms do not operate independently but interact dynamically to form an integrated learning process. Repetition strengthens cognitive retention, emotional engagement deepens affective attachment, social interaction reinforces normative behavior, and experiential learning connects values to real-life practice. This integrative process transforms cultural exposure into internalized character values, including religiosity, cooperation, discipline, responsibility, honesty, and creativity.

The final component of the model is the character outcome, which represents the internalized values manifested in children's attitudes and behaviors. Unlike surface-level learning, the values produced through this process are deeply rooted, as they are formed through continuous interaction between cognitive, affective, and social dimensions. This finding extends previous studies that tend to examine value transmission in isolation, by offering a holistic and process-oriented explanation.

The CEIM model integrates three major theoretical perspectives.

First, from the perspective of cultural pedagogy, learning is understood as a culturally situated process. Cultural practices such as *tembang dolanan* provide authentic contexts that facilitate meaningful learning. This supports the argument that local wisdom is not merely content but a pedagogical medium that shapes how learning occurs.

Second, the model draws on Social Learning Theory, which explains how children learn through observation, imitation, and interaction. The group-based nature of *tembang dolanan* creates a social environment where values are modeled and reinforced collectively. This perspective highlights the importance of social context in shaping character development.

Third, the model is grounded in Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes the role of experience in constructing knowledge. Through active participation in singing and play, children engage in concrete experiences that allow them to internalize abstract values. This process bridges the gap between knowledge and action, making learning more meaningful and sustainable.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the CEIM model provides a comprehensive explanation of how cultural practices function as effective pedagogical tools. It also addresses the limitations of previous studies, which often examine cultural media, social interaction, or experiential learning separately without considering their interdependence.

CONCLUSION

This study establishes that *tembang dolanan* functions as an effective culture-based pedagogical medium for internalizing children's character values through implicit and experience-driven learning processes. The findings indicate that value internalization occurs through four interconnected mechanisms, namely repetition, emotional engagement, social interaction, and experiential learning, which collectively transform cultural practices into meaningful character formation. A central contribution of this study is the development of the Cultural-Experiential Internalization Model (CEIM), which provides a systematic and integrative explanation of how local cultural media operate as both learning content and pedagogical processes. This model advances existing literature by moving beyond descriptive accounts toward a process-oriented and theoretically grounded framework of character education. Practically, the study underscores the need to reposition *tembang dolanan* within contemporary education through structured integration, pedagogical facilitation, and adaptive innovation, including its alignment with digital learning environments. Without such efforts, its educational potential risks being reduced to mere cultural preservation rather than active value formation. However, as a conceptually driven study, its findings require empirical validation in real educational settings. Future research should therefore focus on testing and refining the proposed model through classroom-based and experimental studies. Overall, this study affirms that revitalizing culturally grounded learning is essential for developing character education that is both contextually relevant and pedagogically effective.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

SA conceived and designed the study, conducted the literature review, performed data analysis, and drafted the manuscript. **SU** supervised the research process, contributed to conceptual refinement, validated the analytical framework, and critically revised the manuscript for important intellectual content. Both authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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