STRENGTHENING CHARACTER EDUCATION THROUGH REOG PONOROGO: A STUDY OF LOCAL WISDOM VALUES

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Abstract

A nation's character is rooted in the noble cultural values held by its people, with local wisdom serving as a crucial foundation for shaping virtuous character. Through this local wisdom, national culture acquires firm roots that reinforce the nation's identity. This study aims to identify and examine the character values embedded in the art of Reog Ponorogo and to assess its relevance as a medium for strengthening character education among students. Employing a qualitative approach through library research, the study analyzes data using content analysis techniques. The findings reveal that the performative elements of Reog Ponorogo that are represented by the figures of Warok, Jathil, Bujang Ganong, Klono Sewandono, and Dadak Merak embody the values of leadership, courage, cooperation, perseverance, creativity, and religiosity. These values align closely with the objectives of character education and the Profil Pelajar Pancasila, positioning Reog Ponorogo as a promising contextual learning resource for students at schools.
Keywords: *Reog Ponorogo; Character value; Local wisdom; Character education*

INTRODUCTION

Character education is a fundamental component of the national education system, aimed at cultivating a younger generation of noble character, nationalist spirit, and virtuous personality (Andini, 2024). Amid the era of globalization and digitalization, the challenges of instilling character values in students have grown increasingly complex, necessitating an educational approach that engages not only the cognitive domain but also the affective and socio-cultural dimensions of students' lives. One strategy for strengthening character education is to integrate local wisdom into the learning process (Fitriyah et al., 2025). Local wisdom is regarded as an authentic source of value, having emerged and evolved from the life experience of the local communities across generations. Consequently, such values tend to be more readily accepted and internalized by students than those that remain abstract and disconnected from their lives.

Ponorogo, as one of the districts in East Java Province, has a very rich cultural heritage, including the art of Reog Ponorogo (Buntoro et al., 2023). Reog is not only a dance and music performance. Reog is a symbolic representation of the values of the people of Ponorogo. Every element in Reog's performance, from the characters *Warok*, *Jathil*, *Bujang Ganong*, *Klono Sewandono*, and *Dadak Merak*, is full of philosophical

meanings that can be explored as a source of character education (Suprapto & Simamora, 2025; Wijayanto et al., 2018; Yurisma & Bahruddin, 2020).

Despite its popularity as a regional cultural icon, the younger generation's understanding of the philosophical values embedded in Reog Ponorogo tends to remain superficial (Pratiwi et al., 2022; Wardani, 2024), as many students recognize the art form merely as an entertaining spectacle or a visually striking attraction, without grasping the deeper character values that lie beneath its performative surface. Such a condition points to a widening gap between the continued existence of this culture as an ancestral legacy and the extent to which the succeeding generation genuinely comprehends the essence of the values it carries.

This phenomenon is a concern in itself, given that character education should ideally be taught not only through normative theory but also through the internalization of values drawn from the living culture that surrounds students in their everyday environment (Purnomo et al., 2023). Reog Ponorogo, with all the complexity of symbols and stories attached to it, has great potential to serve as a contextual medium for character learning as well as a means of preserving local culture among the younger generation (Rahmawati et al., 2021; Rosita, Sumarwati, et al., 2025).

Various previous studies have raised Reog Ponorogo from the perspective of performing arts (Argiandini et al., 2023), history (Jamiliyati & Mulae, 2025), and cultural tourism (Kirana et al., 2024). However, studies that specifically and in-depth explore the character values embedded in Reog Ponorogo art and its relevance as a medium of character education in the school environment remain relatively limited. This is an important research gap.

Character education based on local culture aligns with the spirit of the Kurikulum Merdeka, which emphasizes strengthening the Profil Pelajar Pancasila, specifically in the dimensions of global diversity, cooperation, and independence (Ramadhanti, 2023). These dimensions align with values in Reog, such as the spirit of collectivity in *Warok* performances and cooperation between members in displaying the *Dadak Merak* attraction, which requires extraordinary physical and mental strength. Through this study of the value of local wisdom, Reog Ponorogo is expected to function not only as a spectacle object, but also as a learning resource that can instill character values naturally

and meaningfully (Salma et al., 2025). This approach aligns with the principle of contextual learning, which states that values are easier to internalize when they come from a cultural environment that is close to students' lives.

Based on this background, this article was compiled to examine in depth the character values contained in the art of Reog Ponorogo and how these values can function as a medium to strengthen character education for students. This study is important to carry out to bridge the preservation of local culture with the needs of character education in the modern era. The objectives of this study in detail are: (1) to identify the character values contained in the elements of Reog Ponorogo's performance, and (2) to analyze the relevance and potential use of these values as a medium for strengthening character education in the school environment. The results of this study are expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of character education based on local wisdom, as well as a practical contribution for teachers in designing contextual and culture-based learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reog Ponorogo as Local Wisdom

Reog Ponorogo is one of the traditional arts typical of East Java, originating and developed in Ponorogo Regency. This art combines elements of dance, music, and drama in a dynamic performance (Rochmaningtyas & Trisakti, 2025). The most prominent feature of reog is a giant mask in the shape of a tiger's head decorated with peacock feathers, known as *Dadak Merak*, which weighs 30-40 kilograms but can be supported only by the strength of its dancer's teeth. In addition to *Dadak Merak*, reog's performance features several distinctive characters, such as *Warok*, *Jathil*, *Bujang Ganong*, and *Klono Sewandono*, each of whom has their own role and character in the storyline (Argiandini et al., 2023). This art is generally rooted in folk legends about the journey of Prabu Klono Sewandono, who wanted to propose to Dewi Songgolangit from the Kediri Kingdom (Idha et al., 2022).

As a traditional art, Reog Ponorogo keeps a variety of life values reflected in the characters and symbols (Rochmaningtyas & Trisakti, 2025). Reog Ponorogo is part of Ponorogo's local wisdom have the potential to be a source of strengthening character

education. Local wisdom refers to a community's cultural inheritance, embedded in every dimension of its way of life and shaped as an expression of human intelligence in responding to the challenges of the natural environment (A'yunin & Siregar, 2024).

Through this process, culture develops distinctive forms that, over time, come to define the identity of the community that produces them. In Indonesia, where ethnic diversity has given rise to thousands of distinct forms of local knowledge, Reog Ponorogo, as a form of local wisdom, plays a vital role in strengthening national character and identity. It contributes significantly to preserving harmony in social life while safeguarding communities against the adverse effects of foreign cultural influence (Angmo et al., 2024). At the same time, its characteristics and expressions remain closely aligned with the surrounding community's worldview, allowing outside elements to be selectively absorbed without displacing core local values. In this way, Reog Ponorogo can function not only as a heritage of performing arts, but also as a medium for learning meaningful character rooted in local wisdom (Suarningsih, 2019).

Character Education

Character education is a deliberate and systematic effort to instill positive values in students, aimed at shaping a well-rounded personality that encompasses moral, social, and spiritual dimensions. Lickona defines good character as the integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, all three of which must operate simultaneously for taught values to become genuinely internalized in students' everyday behavior (Rosita, 2013). Character education, therefore, cannot be understood merely as the transmission of knowledge about ethical values; it must also involve emotional engagement and the consistent practice of positive action, so that such values become an integral part of students' personalities rather than remaining abstract, cognitively memorized norms.

In Indonesia, the strengthening of character education has become a key priority within national education policy, as reflected in the Profil Pelajar Pancasila framework developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbud, 2022). This profile comprises six core dimensions: (a) faith and piety toward God Almighty coupled with noble character, (b) global diversity, (c) cooperation, (d) independence, (e) critical reasoning, and (f) creativity. It aimed at cultivating students as lifelong learners who possess both strong character and global competence. This policy

affirms that character education is no longer treated as a supplementary component of the curriculum but rather as a central orientation to be integrated into every stage of the learning process (Gilang et al., 2017), including through contextual learning resources rooted in students' local culture.

A growing body of research indicates that character education is more effective when the values it conveys are drawn from a cultural environment familiar to and meaningfully experienced by students, rather than derived solely from abstract normative theory disconnected from their lived reality (Rosita, Suryanto, et al., 2025). This approach aligns with the principle of contextual learning, which holds that the internalization of values is more meaningful when students can connect what they learn with the socio-cultural realities surrounding them. Within this context, local wisdom assumes a strategic role as a source of character values, given that the symbols, figures, and narratives it embodies naturally carry moral messages closely tied to students' cultural identity, thereby allowing the process of character education to unfold in a more authentic and sustained manner (Baderiah & Munawir, 2024).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with the library research method. This method was chosen because the research aims to explore and analyze Reog Ponorogo as a medium for strengthening character education. The data sources in this study consist of two types. The primary sources are the documentation of the performance, story scripts, and character descriptions in the art of Reog Ponorogo (*Warok*, *Jathil*, *Bujang Ganong*, *Klono Sewandono*, and *Dadak Merak*). Secondary data are in the form of books, articles, and previous studies on history, philosophy, and values in Reog Ponorogo.

Data collection is carried out through documentation techniques and literature studies, namely collecting, reading, and recording relevant information from various library sources about Reog Ponorogo. The data is then analyzed by content analysis techniques, through the following stages: (1) data reduction, which is sorting out information relevant to the character value; (2) data categorization, which is grouping character values based on Reog elements (characters, symbols, storyline, and philosophy); (3) data interpretation, namely interpreting these values in the context of

character education; and (4) drawing conclusions based on the results of interpretation. The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources, which involves comparing information from various references to ensure the consistency and validity of findings regarding character values in Reog Ponorogo.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data analysis, many character values were found in the art elements of Reog Ponorogo, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Character Values in the Ponorogo Reog Element

Reog Ponorogo Element	Description	Character Values
Warok	A leader who is dashing, magical, and upholds honesty and self-control	Leadership, courage, responsibility, honesty
Jathil	Dancers depicting horsemen with agile and decisive movements	Discipline, agility of thinking and acting
Bujang Ganong	A humorous but dexterous, agile, and clever character in the royal court	Creativity, ingenuity, hard work
Klono Sewandono	An authoritative king, firm in making decisions	Leadership, assertiveness, social responsibility
Dadak Merak	A large mask carried with the power of teeth (capengan), symbolizing sacrifice and inner strength	Hard work, never giving up, self-control, patience
Performance	Involving the cooperation of many players in one whole show	Cooperation, cohesiveness, the spirit of togetherness

Leadership Character

Leadership character values are moral and behavioral qualities that allow a person to direct, protect, and set an example for others, such as courage, responsibility, wisdom, assertiveness, and charisma. In leadership studies, the trait theory asserts that effective leaders generally have innate characteristics such as confidence, integrity, and a drive to take responsibility for their group (Argiandini et al., 2023; Sliwka et al., 2024). These values are clearly seen in the character of *Warok* in the art of Reog Ponorogo, who is described as a highly knowledgeable figure, has inner strength, and is a protector and advisor to the community.

Warok's leadership relies not only on physical strength but also on spiritual depth and self-control, aligning with the concept of character-based leadership, which emphasizes that authority is born from inner qualities, not power alone. *Warok*'s attitude of prioritizing community welfare over personal interests also reflects the principle of servant leadership—leaders serve before leading (Irawansyah, 2016). Thus, *Warok* represents Javanese local wisdom in modern leadership theory.

The character of *Klana Sewandono* shows another dimension of leadership: firmness, courage to make decisions, and the ability to influence and move his followers to achieve common goals. This character aligns with Bass's transformational leadership theory, that leaders have to motivate, provide a clear vision, and inspire their subordinates to act beyond self-interest (Sliwka et al., 2024). In the context of Javanese philosophy, the leadership of *Klana Sewandono* can also be attributed to the concept of *Asta Brata*, the eight main qualities of an ideal leader that come from the elements of nature, such as the nature of the sun that gives spirit and the nature of the earth that is firm and responsible.

Even though the legend also portrays this figure's human side through excessive desire and ambition, this trait reinforces the story's function as a vehicle for moral learning, particularly regarding the importance of balancing ambition with wisdom in leadership. By combining the authority of the *Klana Sewandono* and the spiritual wisdom of *Warok*, the art of Reog Ponorogo fully depicts the ideal of Javanese leadership that unites power, morality, and community service.

Responsibility Character

The value of responsibility for *Warok* figures is reflected in their role as protectors of the community, maintaining safety, order, and traditional values in their environment with full seriousness. This responsibility aligns with one of the dimensions of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila, which requires concern and real contribution to the common good above personal interests (Afrianto & Yusuf, 2024). Within the framework of character education, *Warok*'s attitude embodies the value of social responsibility that should be instilled in students—willingness to maintain trust and actively contribute to their community. Thus, *Warok* can be used as a concrete model for students to understand that

responsibility is not just an individual obligation but a form of service to the wider social environment.

Meanwhile, *Klana Sewandono*'s responsibility is seen in his role as a leader who must bear the consequences of every decision for the kingdom and its people, including when facing failure due to his personal desires. This character is relevant to the dimensions of "critical reasoning" and "independent" in the Profil Pelajar Pancasila, which emphasizes the importance of the ability to evaluate one's own actions and dare to bear the consequences of choices (Leandra & Rahmawaty, 2024; Suarningsih, 2019). *Klana Sewandono*'s story represents that leadership responsibilities include readiness to accept risks and learn from mistakes. Through this example, students are invited to realize that true responsibility is not only measured by success but also by the courage to account for every decision.

Cooperation and Spirit Character

The value of cooperation is evident in the Reog Ponorogo performance, when the character of *Dadak Merak* has to maintain the balance of the heavy mask load completely with the strength of his teeth and neck. Meanwhile, *Bujang Ganong* and the *Jathil* dancers move dynamically around him to create a complete harmony of the performance. The success of a performance can only be realized if these elements support each other in harmony of rhythm, position, and energy, so that cooperation is an absolute requirement. This aligns with the "cooperation" dimension of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila, which emphasizes collaboration, care, and sharing roles to achieve common goals (Argiandini et al., 2023; Priyanti Ph., 2019). In character education, the synergy among *Dadak Merak*, *Bujang Ganong*, and *Jathil* illustrates the importance of team building, work groups, and contribution.

The value of spirit is also strongly emanated from each character, starting from the physical and mental endurance of the *Dadak Merak* dancers who practice for years to be able to lift a mask weighing tens of kilograms, the agile and expressive movements of *Bujang Ganong* which depicts the joy and persistence of never giving up, to the discipline of the *Jathil* dancers' training in maintaining flexibility and precision of movement. This spirit is relevant to the "independent" dimension, which requires initiative, perseverance, and self-management to face challenges. In the framework of character education, the

three figures teach students that great achievements are always born from a consistent training process and a high work ethic, not just talent. By imitating the spirit of *Dadak Merak*, *Bujang Ganong*, and *Jathil*, students are expected to be able to cultivate perseverance and fighting power in facing every learning process and life challenges.

Creative Character

Creative value is depicted in the character of *Bujang Ganong*, who appears in a scary red face mask, but is instead presented through witty, agile, and improvisational gestures. It's a combination of contrasts that shows expertise in processing unexpected ideas into new forms of expression. Creativity can be understood as the ability to produce original and useful ideas or works (Astuti et al., 2019), which is the ability to come up with various possible solutions or forms of expression from the same problem (Ramadhanti, 2023). This is reflected in the way the *Bujang Ganong* dancer continues to explore spontaneous variations in movement without rigid movement patterns.

In the framework of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila, this character is in line with the "creative" dimension, which requires students to be able to produce original ideas, works, and actions while being adaptive to the situation (Suarningsih, 2019), so that *Bujang Ganong* can be an inspiration for students to dare to improvise and find new ways to solve problems and express themselves.

Discipline Character

The value of discipline is evident in the *Jathil* dancers through their duty and consistency according to the rules of the performance. Discipline can be observed in the training of the Jathil dancers' horse-riding movements (*eblek*), which demands uniform precision of formation, rhythm, and posture—an achievement attainable only through consistent repetition and adherence to established training standards. Discipline can be explained through the concept of self-regulation, which is the ability of individuals to control themselves to remain obedient to rules and targets even when facing fatigue or temptation to deviate from a predetermined pattern (Kharisma et al., 2022; Nadhif & Rohmatika, 2020). Within the framework of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila, this value aligns with the "independent" dimension, which emphasizes the importance of self-regulation and consistency in the learning process, so that *Jathil* can be a model for students to

understand that discipline is the main foundation for mastering competencies and achieving long-term goals.

CONCLUSIONS

The art of Reog Ponorogo contains rich character values, including leadership, courage, cooperation, hard work, creativity, and discipline, which are reflected in the characters and symbols in the performance. These values relevance to the goals of character education and the Profil Pelajar Pancasila, so they have great potential as a contextual character learning medium in schools. The use of Reog Ponorogo as a learning resource is expected to be able to bridge efforts to preserve local culture with the need to strengthen the character of the younger generation in the modern era.

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