

Internalization of Cultural Educational Values in Character Formation in Early Childhood

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Abstract

Instilling educational cultural values for early childhood is the main foundation in shaping character because there are still children's behaviors that are not fully aligned when applying the values that have been given. This study aims to describe the educational stages of instilling cultural values on early childhood character formation in Ananda Telkomas Makassar Kindergarten through a qualitative descriptive approach. School principals, educators, and students were made subjects in this study, while the process of obtaining data was carried out using observation, interviews, and documentation which was then processed using the Miles and Huberman model. The findings of the study show that value instilling is applied through the combination of learning activities and daily routines, such as praying, saying greetings, marching in an orderly manner, and maintaining cleanliness, with educators acting as the main example. The implementation received support from a supportive school atmosphere and the participation of parents, although obstacles were still found in the form of unstable implementation of values and differences in the condition of children's backgrounds. The characters that emerge include discipline, responsibility, honesty, caring, and the ability to work together. Therefore, instilling values that are carried out in a sustainable manner and integrated into daily activities is considered to be able to help the formation of early childhood character optimally.

Keywords: internalization of values; educational culture; character; early childhood.

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INTRODUCTION

Character education for early childhood is a crucial issue because this period is considered a golden age, influencing the development of a child's personality in the future. During this phase, children are more easily accepted by the values, norms, and customs of their environment (Munandar, 2021). Therefore, instilling cultural educational values should be implemented from an early age through learning activities and daily routines (Rustini et al., 2022). These values play a role in fostering discipline, a sense of responsibility, and concern in children's social life (Rika Devianti, Suci Lia Sari, 2020). However, their implementation still shows a discrepancy between the values conveyed and children's behavior in daily activities (Pertiwi, 2023).

Cultural values in education are not only used as guidelines for behavior but also as a medium for character formation through social relationships within the school environment (Husain & Walangadi, 2021). Integrating cultural values into learning activities has been shown to promote children's moral and social development when implemented consistently (Febriani et al. 2025). Furthermore, sociocultural theory explains that children's development is influenced by the social and cultural conditions around them (Zhou, 2024). Meanwhile, social learning theory explains that children's learning occurs through observing and modeling the behavior of those around them (Nwachukwu et al., 2024).

Despite its crucial role, the process of internalizing cultural values in education still faces various challenges, such as a lack of consistency in implementing these values and differences in children's backgrounds (Erviana et al., 2022). Furthermore, a lack of synergy between schools and families is also a hindering factor in character formation in children (Karoso et al., 2025). This situation indicates that the process of internalizing these values has not yet been optimally implemented, even though it has been implemented through learning activities and daily routines (Febriani et al., 2025).

Based on these issues, this study focuses on how the stages of internalization of cultural educational values affect the character formation of early childhood, including implementation in learning activities, routine habits, supporting and inhibiting factors, and the resulting character. has the aim of explaining in detail the stages of internalization of educational cultural values so that a comprehensive picture can be obtained regarding the practice of character formation in early childhood in educational environments.

This research is relevant to the development of culture-based character education studies for early childhood. Several previous studies have focused more on the implementation of values in specific activities (Febriani et al., 2025; Pertiwi, 2023), resulting in a lack of comprehensive discussion of the stages of internalization of values in learning activities and routine habits. Therefore, this study contributes by examining the stages of internalization comprehensively, encompassing aspects of learning activities, routine habits, and contextual factors that influence their success (Widiastuti & Cholimah, 2023).

Early childhood education (ECE) is the first level of education and plays a significant role in developing a child's character, personality, and readiness for subsequent stages of education. ECE focuses not only on intellectual aspects but also on social, emotional, moral, and cultural development through meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences (Rahmawati et al., 2025).

In the educational process, values serve as guidelines for determining one's attitudes and behavior in social life. Cultural values, derived from customs, traditions, and societal norms, serve as the foundation for character formation in children from an early age. Educational cultural values are the integration of cultural values into the learning process, aimed at shaping students' attitudes, behaviors, and character in their daily activities (Istiningsih, 2025).

The stages of instilling cultural values in education occur through a process of value change, value exchange, and value absorption. The values imparted are not merely intellectually understood but also embedded in the child's attitudes and behavior (Khoiriyah et al., 2025). In the context of early childhood education, these stages are significantly influenced by routine habits, role models, and intersocial relationships within the school environment.

The implementation of cultural values in kindergarten can be implemented through learning activities or daily routines. Activities such as playing traditional games, singing traditional songs, and implementing local cultural values such as Sipakatau, Sipakainge, and Sipakalebbi can help children understand moral and social values more concretely (Zulkarnaen, 2022). The implementation of cultural values in kindergarten can be implemented through learning activities or daily routines. Activities such as playing traditional games, singing traditional songs, and implementing local cultural values such as Sipakatau, Sipakainge, and Sipakalebbi can help children understand moral and social values more concretely (Musi & Lismayani, 2025).

The uniqueness of this research lies in the local context of Ananda Telkomas Makassar Kindergarten, which internalizes Bugis-Makassar cultural values as part of early childhood character education. The value of Sipakatau is realized through the habit of mutual respect for teachers and friends, Sipakainge is applied when teachers guide children to remind each other when they make mistakes in a polite manner, while Sipakalebbi is realized through the habit of respecting opinions, saying thank you, apologizing, and using polite language. These three values are the characteristics of local Makassar culture that distinguish this research from character education studies that only use universal values without linking them to the local wisdom of the local community.

However, the stages of instilling cultural values in education do not always occur optimally. The success of these stages is influenced by several factors, such as teacher behavior, consistently implemented routines, a supportive school environment, and parental participation. Conversely, a lack of consistent value implementation, differences in children's backgrounds, and limited facilities can hinder the process of value absorption (Munawaroh, 2018).

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a qualitative descriptive research type. This approach is used to understand the phenomenon naturally by emphasizing the meaning and stages of instilling educational cultural values in early childhood character formation. This research was conducted at Ananda Telkomas Makassar Kindergarten located at Jl. Perumtel Raya C1 No. 38 Telkomas, Biringkanaya District, Makassar City, South Sulawesi Province. The research was carried out from May to June 2026. The location was determined based on the consideration that the institution has implemented educational

cultural values in learning activities and daily routine habits. The research subjects consisted of 1 class teacher, 1 teacher, and 13 children in group B who were selected purposively because they were directly involved in the implementation of the internalization of educational cultural values.

The information sources in this study are divided into primary and supporting data. Primary data were obtained directly from teachers, who served as primary informants, along with observations of children's behavior and activities during daily routines. Supporting data, on the other hand, were obtained from supporting archives, such as learning activity programs, school regulations, activity documentation, and relevant literature. The information gathering process was carried out using observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were used to directly observe children's activities and social relationships within the school environment. Interviews were used to obtain information regarding informants' experiences and perspectives on the stages of instilling cultural values in education. Documentation was used to supplement the information in the form of archives, photographs, and activity notes.

In this research, the researcher acts as the main instrument whose task is to determine the focus of the research, obtain information, process information, and provide interpretations of the results found in the field. Information processing was carried out using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes the stages of information acquisition, information simplification, information organization, along with conclusion drawing and verification. The processing stages were carried out interactively and continued uninterrupted until the information reached saturation point. The validity of the information was checked using source triangulation, method triangulation, and time triangulation techniques. Furthermore, transferability, dependability, and confirmability tests were conducted to ensure the information obtained was valid, stable, and accountable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Process of Internalizing Values in Learning and Habituation

Research findings show that the internalization of cultural educational values at Ananda Telkomas Kindergarten in Makassar is implemented through integration into learning activities and daily routines. In learning activities, teachers not only convey material intellectually, but also instill values such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, and the ability to work together through various activities, such as group play, storytelling, and other interactive activities. These values are embedded contextually so that children can understand their meaning and apply them to real-life situations.

Introduction to Cultural Symbols

The introduction of cultural symbols is carried out as an initial stage in the internalization of values. Teachers use visual media such as pictures and videos to introduce culture to children.

This is reinforced by the results of interviews with teachers:

"Usually, we first introduce cultural symbols like traditional clothing or traditional houses through pictures or videos. After that, we explain them simply so the children understand their meaning, and then we invite them to

participate in activities."(Teacher Interview)

Singing Regional Songs

The process of internalizing cultural values is also carried out by singing regional songs. This activity aims to introduce Indonesian culture while also applying the values contained in the song lyrics. Based on interviews, the teacher explained that:

"We usually start by playing a folk song to the children, then inviting them to sing along. After that, we briefly explain the meaning of the song in simple language."(Teacher Interview)

Traditional Games

Besides songs, cultural values are also internalized through activities that introduce traditional games. These games are not only fun but also help students learn social values. Based on interviews with teachers:

"Usually, we first introduce traditional games to children, explain how to play them, and then demonstrate. After that, we invite the children to play together."(Teacher Interview)

Folklore

Another activity carried out in the process of strengthening cultural values is listening to folk tales. Folk tales are used as a way to convey moral messages that children can understand. Based on interviews, teachers stated that:

"Usually, we read or tell the children a folk tale first. After that, we explain the story's message in simple language."(Teacher Interview)

In addition to learning activities, the stages of instilling values are also implemented through continuous routines. Daily routines such as praying at the beginning and end of learning activities, greetings, lining up in an orderly manner, sharing with peers, and maintaining cleanliness are used as primary tools in developing children's behavior. These routines are implemented continuously so that the values imparted are not only understood but also become embedded in the children's daily routines. These findings demonstrate that the stages of instilling values are more effective when implemented through repeated, real-life experiences rather than simply delivered through theoretical instruction.

Greeting and Praying

The process of absorbing cultural values into daily habits begins with greetings and prayers before and after the teaching and learning process. This activity is carried out routinely every day as a way of instilling good manners and developing religiosity in children. This is as expressed by a teacher in an interview:

"We usually get the children into the habit of greeting and praying before and after class every day. Initially, the teacher demonstrates, and then the children follow along."(Teacher Interview)

Maintain cleanliness

The process of instilling cultural values is also carried out by teaching and training students to regularly maintain a clean school environment. This activity aims to instill the value of environmental responsibility from an early age. Based

on interviews, teachers explained that:

"We usually teach our children to maintain cleanliness, such as throwing rubbish in the right place and tidying up toys after use."(Teacher Interview)

Queue in an Orderly Manner

The habit of queuing is also an important part of the process of internalizing cultural values, particularly in instilling discipline and patience in children. Based on interviews with teachers:

"We usually teach children to queue when washing their hands, entering class, or getting food. First, we demonstrate the correct way to queue."(Teacher Interview)

Speaking Politely

Furthermore, the internalization of cultural values is also carried out through the practice of speaking politely in daily interactions. This activity aims to instill the values of politeness and respect for others. Based on interviews, teachers stated that:

"We teach children to speak politely, such as using the words please, sorry, and thank you."(Teacher Interview)

The significance of these findings suggests that instilling values involves a series of stages that simultaneously involve intellectual, emotional, and behavioral aspects. Children not only learn values but also experience and apply them directly. These findings demonstrate that learning activities that utilize a contextual and experiential approach significantly contribute to the character development of early childhood.

These findings align with Albert Bandura's social learning theory, which explains that children learn through observing and modeling the behavior of others. In this context, teachers play a key role as role models for children. Furthermore, Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory also explains that children's development is influenced by social relationships and the culture of their environment.

These research findings are further supported by previous research, which explains that consistently implementing routine habits can foster character development in early childhood, particularly in the areas of discipline and responsibility (Febriani et al., 2025; Widiastuti & Cholimah, 2023). Therefore, it can be concluded that combining learning activities with routine habits is an appropriate strategy for instilling cultural values in education.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Internalization Process

Research findings indicate that several factors contribute to the success of instilling cultural values in education, including teacher role models, a supportive school climate, and parental participation. Teachers play a key role as role models for children. Behavior. Teachers' attitudes, consistently applied in the application of values such as discipline, courtesy, and a sense of responsibility, provide concrete examples that are easy for children to follow.

The school environment plays a significant role in creating conditions conducive to the instilling of values. A well-organized, clean environment with a positive culture encourages children to behave in accordance with the values they are taught. Furthermore, parental participation is a crucial element in

strengthening the value-instilling process at home, thus creating continuity between school education and the family environment.

However, the study also found inhibiting factors in the value instillation stage, including a lack of consistency in the application of values, differences in children's backgrounds, and minimal collaboration between schools and families. Not all children have a family environment that supports the application of values similar to those implemented at school, which can lead to differences in behavior.

Data processing findings indicate that value instillation is a complex process influenced by various external factors. This finding aligns with sociocultural theory, which explains that a child's development is inextricably linked to the social and cultural conditions of their environment. A lack of alignment between school and family can hinder the value instillation process because children receive different stimuli in the two environments.

Furthermore, these findings reinforce previous research, which explains that the success of character education is significantly influenced by the consistent application of values and the involvement of various parties. Without this consistency and collaboration between teachers and parents, the values imparted in schools will struggle to effectively instill in children.

From the researcher's perspective, these supporting and inhibiting factors demonstrate that instilling values is not simply a school responsibility but also requires the active involvement of families and the social environment. Therefore, a more collaborative approach to early childhood character education is needed so that the values imparted can be applied sustainably across various aspects of a child's life.

The Character of Children that is Formed

Research findings show that the character traits emerging in early childhood at Ananda Telkomas Kindergarten in Makassar include discipline, responsibility, honesty, caring, and the ability to work together. These traits are evident in the children's behavior during daily routines, such as waiting their turn, completing tasks, sharing with friends, and maintaining a clean environment.

However, not all children demonstrate the same level of consistency in implementing these values. Some children still require further guidance and reinforcement, particularly under certain circumstances. This demonstrates that the value instillation process is an ongoing process that requires considerable time.

Theoretically, these findings are in accordance with the concept of character education put forward by Thomas Lickona, who explains that character formation includes three main elements, namely moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Children not only need to understand values, but also need to feel and apply them in their daily activities.

Furthermore, the findings of this study are reinforced by previous research, which explains that real-life experiences and repeated routine habits have a significant influence on character development in early childhood (Febriani et al., 2025; Pertiwi, 2023). This situation shows that learning activities that involve children's active involvement are more effective in developing behavior than learning activities based on theory.

From the researcher's perspective, the character that emerges in children is the result of a combination of learning activities, routine habits, and the social

environment. The success of instilling values is not only measured by the child's understanding of those values, but also by their ability to consistently apply them in daily activities.

DISCUSSION

The research results show that the instillation of cultural educational values occurs through a combination of learning activities and routine habits. Interview excerpts show that teachers consciously structure activities that are not merely intellectual but also involve affective and psychomotor aspects. From Thomas Lickona's theoretical perspective, learning activities, such as introducing cultural symbols and folklore, illustrate the stage of moral knowing, while singing and playing traditional games begin to touch on the element of moral feeling. Meanwhile, daily routines, such as greetings, lining up in an orderly manner, and speaking politely, are forms of moral action.

Interview findings indicate that intersocial relationships in traditional games are an important means of value formation. This is consistent with Lev Vygotsky's theory, which emphasizes the significant role of the social environment in children's development. Furthermore, teachers' explanations regarding children's imitation behavior demonstrate the modeling stages described by Albert Bandura. Children learn through observing and imitating the teacher's behavior.

The results of this study are in line with research Febriani et al. (2025) which shows that the integration of cultural values into learning activities and habits can strengthen the character formation of early childhood through repeated learning experiences. The study emphasizes that the success of character education depends not only on the delivery of material, but also on the active involvement of children in various activities that contain cultural values. The findings of this study strengthen these results because teachers at Ananda Telkomas Makassar Kindergarten internalize cultural values through the introduction of cultural symbols, regional songs, traditional games, folk tales, and daily habits so that children have the opportunity to understand and practice these values in everyday life.

In addition, the results of this study also support the findings Widiastuti and Cholimah (2023) which explains that storytelling is an effective medium for instilling character values in early childhood. In this study, folktales serve not only as entertainment but also as a means of introducing local Bugis-Makassar cultural values, particularly the values of Sipakatau, Sipakainge, and Sipakalebbi, so that the internalization process takes place more contextually, according to the child's social environment.

However, interview findings also revealed obstacles in the form of irregularities between the school and family environments. This situation suggests that the instillation of cultural values cannot be maximized without support from the family environment. Therefore, the research findings suggest that the instillation of cultural educational values will be more effective if implemented sustainably through learning activities, routine habits, and role models, along with support from collaboration between the school and family.

The findings of this study also confirm the results of previous research. Karoso et al. (2025) which explains that the success of internalizing cultural values is greatly influenced by the synergy between schools and families. In this

study, parental involvement was a key factor in maintaining the consistency of cultural value implementation outside the school environment. The same condition was found in this study: when parents apply the same values at home, children exhibit more consistent behavior than children who have not received reinforcement from the family environment. Thus, character formation is not solely the responsibility of educational institutions, but requires continuity of education between schools, families, and the social environment.

On the other hand, this study found that differences in family backgrounds lead to varying levels of internalization of cultural values in each child. This finding complements research Erviana et al., (2022) which states that a child's character develops according to the social and cultural context in which they interact. Thus, the effectiveness of internalizing cultural values is influenced by the consistency of the experiences a child receives across various environments.

CONCLUSION

The process of internalizing cultural educational values at Ananda Telkomas Kindergarten in Makassar is implemented through a combination of learning activities and daily routines that are carried out continuously. Values such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, caring, and the ability to work together are instilled through teacher role models, daily routines, along with the support of the school atmosphere and parental participation. Therefore, the focus of the research problem can be answered: instilling values is not merely takes place in formal learning activities, but is also implemented through daily routines that are carried out repeatedly, along with being influenced by supporting and inhibiting factors originating from the environment and the child's character.

The research findings demonstrate that early childhood character development will be more effective if cultural values are implemented in a unified, sustainable manner, and involve collaboration between schools and families. However, the study was limited to a single institution and its subject area, making the results infeasible for general applicability. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve more institutions, employ a variety of methods, and examine in more detail the role of families in strengthening the instillation of cultural values in education.

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