

## Revitalization of Religious Values Through the Reinforcement of Local Culture-Based Character Education in Pasuruan Regency

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### Abstract

The weakening religious character among the community, especially the younger generation, is a major concern. Values such as honesty, responsibility, tolerance, and social care are degraded due to the lack of integration of local culture in character education. The purpose of this study is to analyze how local cultural practices, such as village purification rituals and earth alms, play a role as a reinforcement strategy in strengthening religious character values. This study uses a qualitative phenomenological approach, with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. The informants consisted of community leaders, religious leaders, and cultural actors. The results of the study show that local cultural practices have functionally become a means of reinforcing character values through habituation, symbolism, and social example. Reinforcement occurs informally but consistently, reinforcing religious values, cooperation, and responsibility in the community. The conclusion of the study revealed that the community independently formed an effective character education system without the intervention of formal institutions, making local culture an educational instrument with spiritual and contextual value. The implications of these findings show the importance of reconstructing the community-based character education model and local culture, as well as opportunities to integrate traditional values into the national education system in a more applicable and sustainable manner.

**Keywords:** Reinforcement; Character Education; Local Culture; Religious Values; Community-Based Education

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia faces serious challenges in character education, especially in internalizing religious values to the younger generation (Andrianie et al., 2020). This character crisis is characterized by a decline in the moral quality of society, especially in the aspects of honesty, responsibility, tolerance, and social concern. This phenomenon not only occurs in urban areas, but also penetrates local communities such as the community around Belahan Temple, Pasuruan Regency. The flow of globalization and penetration of foreign cultural values is one of the dominant factors that cause the degradation of the nation's noble values (Hidayat & Hasmiza, 2025; Suradi, 2018). In addition, the lack of integration between the education system and local culture makes people lose their footing in the character that comes from their traditional roots (Insani, 2024). Cultural sites such as Belahan Temple hold various spiritual values and local wisdom that are full of moral teachings. However, these values have not been optimally utilized in shaping the character of society. This is a crucial issue because religious character education sourced from local culture has proven to have the power to strengthen individual identity and spirituality (Azra, 2019). In this context, Belahan Temple is not just a historical relic, but a representation of a potential source of value to be used as a basis for strengthening the religious character of the community. The disconnect between local culture and character education is the starting point of an urgent problem that needs to be studied in depth.

In response to these problems, the researcher is of the view that strengthening character education must be carried out contextually by exploring the potential of local values that live and develop in the community. In this case, the local culture around the Belahan Temple can be a strategic approach that serves as an effective and relevant means of character education. This approach is very important considering that the local community still carries out various cultural practices and spiritual rituals that have high educational values, such as the village purification ritual (*rumat desa*), and earth alms. These activities reflect the value of cooperation, respect for ancestors, environmental conservation, and deep spirituality. However, these cultural practices have not been systematically organized to be part of

structured character education. Therefore, efforts are needed to strengthen character education based on local culture so that these values can be internalized more optimally by the community. With this approach, character values are not only taught through instructional methods, but also through example, habituation, and direct experience in the socio-cultural life of the community. The researcher believes that through a reinforcement strategy designed based on local cultural values, a contextual, applicable, and sustainable character education model will be created, in line with the principles of Islamic education that prioritizes the integration between knowledge, charity, and morals (Rachmawati & Purwandari, 2022).

Various previous studies have proven the effectiveness of local culture in strengthening the character of the community. Graha et al. (2022) researched local culture-based character education in Cireundeu Traditional Village and found that character values such as honesty, social care, and love for the homeland were instilled through tradition and example. Research by Rispan & Sudrajat (2019) examines the local wisdom of Kalosara in Southeast Sulawesi in learning history, which has been proven to be able to shape the character of students through strengthening the values of cooperation and responsibility. Meanwhile, Nawawi & Bedi (2025) emphasized that character education based on local wisdom is effective in facing the challenges of the digital era.

A study by Hikmah (2023), who researched the tradition of Gending Seblang Banyuwangi, revealed that traditional rituals can form an attitude of tolerance and harmony between communities. Meanwhile, research by Nasir et al. (2022) about Tengku Inong's role in character education in Dayah Aceh shows how traditional and religious leaders play an important role in instilling the values of religiosity and social concern. On the other hand, a study by Ainia (2020) affirms that the integration of local values into formal education helps students understand cultural identity and strengthen social ethics.

Research by Maulidi et al. (2022) related to the internalization of character values through traditional arts in Madura, as well as studies by Prasetyo et al. (2023) about the educational value in the tradition of Sea Alms in Central Java, shows that cultural traditions are full of character values. These studies only describe traditional practices as educational media without paying attention to reinforcement mechanisms as a sustainable strategy in shaping the character of society. Thus, there is an important gap in previous studies, namely the lack of studies that explore in depth how local values are systematically strengthened in

the social life of the community through a reinforcement approach. Moreover, there has not been a single study that specifically discusses strengthening the religious character of the community around Belahan Temple, which is culturally very potent but has not been worked on academically.

The novelty in this study lies in its approach that uses reinforcement strategies to optimize character education based on local culture in the general public, especially in the Belahan Temple area. Unlike previous research that was only descriptive, this study offers a model of strengthening character values through social activities, cultural rituals, and community participation, paying attention to the developing socio-religious dynamics. Reinforcement here is understood as the process of strengthening character values through example, habituation, and social incentives, by behavioristic principles that have long been used in educational psychology (Skinner, 1976). The integration between the concept of reinforcement and local cultural values offers a new framework in character education that is contextual and practical, in line with the needs of modern society that faces various moral challenges.

This research uses Skinner's reinforcement theory (1976), which explains that behavior can be reinforced through consistent positive consequences. In the context of character education, reinforcement can be applied to reinforce moral values instilled through local culture. In addition, this approach is strengthened by the concept of character education according to Lickona (1991), which emphasizes the importance of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action as important components of character formation. In the framework of Islam, character education is relevant to *maqashid al-shari'ah*, which emphasizes the protection of intellect, religion, soul, descent, and property (Mahmud et al., 2023). Thus, the combination of behavioristic theory, Western character education principles, and values in Islamic education becomes a strong foundation for this research to develop an integrative and applicable local culture-based character strengthening strategy.

The main focus of this study is to identify and analyze the values of religious character contained in the cultural practices of the community around Belahan Temple. These values include honesty, responsibility, tolerance, social care, and respect for ancestors. This research also seeks to explore how these values are strengthened through cultural activities and social practices of the community, repetitively and sustainably. Another focus is to identify forms of reinforcement used by the community in transmitting character values to the younger

generation, both through traditional rituals, social activities, and family and community interactions.

This research aims to: (1) Describe in depth the forms of character education based on local culture that develop in the community around Belahan Temple; (2) Identify the values of religious character in vibrant and developing local cultural practices; and (3) Analyzing the role of local culture as an instrument of character education in shaping community morality. This goal is expected to be able to contribute to the development of locality-based character education theory and offer an educational model that is applicable, relevant, and by the needs of modern society.

The urgency of this research lies in the urgent need to create character education that is rooted in local values but still relevant to the challenges of the times. Religious character education instilled through local culture, such as the one in Belahan Temple, can be an effective alternative in dealing with the moral degradation of the community. This research is expected to be able to provide theoretical benefits in the form of strengthening the concept of character education based on local culture with a reinforcement approach. Practically, the results of this research can be a reference for the government, educational institutions, and the community in designing contextual and participatory culture-based character education programs.

## **METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods to explore the subjective meaning experienced by the community around Belahan Temple related to the weakening of religious character. This phenomenon is characterized by a decline in the internalization of values such as honesty, responsibility, and tolerance, even though cultural practices such as village purification rituals are still carried out. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it can reveal the deepest meaning of people's experiences and perceptions of the changes in values that take place, as well as open up space for the exploration of cultural meaning as a source of character education (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Phenomenology also allows researchers to understand spiritual experiences in complex social contexts (Pahutar et al., 2024). This research was carried out for three months, namely February to April 2025, with stages including informant mapping, field implementation, primary data collection through interviews and observations, and ethnographic

documentation. The focus is not only on cultural practices, but also on people's experiences and perceptions in interpreting the role of local culture in the formation of the religious character of the younger generation.

The research subjects consist of three categories: community leaders, religious leaders, and cultural actors who have direct experience and authority in the preservation of local and religious values. The selection of participants was carried out using purposive sampling techniques, taking into account their involvement in cultural and religious activities and their ability to reflect on the meaning of the experience (Palinkas et al., 2015). Data collection techniques include in-depth semi-structured interviews, participatory observation of cultural activities such as village purification ritual and earth alms, as well as documentation in the form of archives, photos of activities, and traditional documents. Data triangulation was carried out to strengthen the validity of the findings by combining the results of interviews, observations, and document reviews. Interviews aim to dig deep into spiritual and cultural experiences, while observations are useful in capturing symbolic meanings that may not be revealed in verbal conversations. All data was collected by upholding the principles of research ethics, including informed consent, identity confidentiality, and data accuracy.

Data analysis was carried out following interactive techniques from Miles et al. (2019), namely through the process of data reduction, data presentation, and thematic conclusion drawn. The data obtained from interviews and observations were selected and categorized based on the theme of religious character values and local cultural practices. Furthermore, the presentation of data was carried out in the form of a descriptive narrative and a thematic matrix that described the pattern of meaning between informants. Conclusions are drawn by a reflective and interpretive process through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to uncover the essential structure of the participants' experiences (Smith et al., 2021). With this approach, the research not only produces a description of people's experiences in carrying out local culture but also unpacks the structure of meaning that accompanies it as a basis for strengthening religious character education amid rapid social change.

## **RESULTS**

Data on reinforcement in character education based on local culture was obtained through interviews with community leaders, religious leaders, and cultural actors in the Belahan Temple area. Observations are carried out during the implementation of traditional

rituals, social activities, and daily community interactions. Supporting documentation was obtained from archives of traditional activities, photos of cultural processions, and local records. Based on these results, it is known that the reinforcement process is carried out through daily habits, habituation of values in cultural activities, examples of community leaders, and sacred symbols interpreted by residents as part of value education. Strengthening religious values such as honesty, responsibility, and tolerance is carried out repeatedly through village purification ritual activities, cooperation in cleaning temples, and joint religious activities. This whole process is carried out with an informal approach, but is consistent and understood from generation to generation. The following is a summary of the observation and interview data tabulated in Table 1 below:

**Table 1.** Summary of observations and interviews

<b>Reinforcement Forms</b>	<b>Media Practice</b>	<b>Executive</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>Habituation of religious values</b>	Joint prayer, traditional praise	tahlil, Religious Figures	Weekly
<b>Social role model</b>	Cooperation to clean the temple	Public Figures	Monthly
<b>Symbolic reinforcement through local culture</b>	A Village Walk, A Walk Down the Aisle	Cultural and community actors	Annual
<b>Value-strengthening speech</b>	Moral messages in meetings and recitations	The whole society	Incidental

Table 1 shows that reinforcement in society is carried out naturally and informally through various forms of cultural activities. Community leaders explained that each social and cultural activity has its moral function. For example, cooperation is not just about cleaning the temple area, but as a consistent practice in building solidarity and collective responsibility. The religious leader added that religious activities carried out in the Belahan Temple area, such as tahlil and recitation, are always interpreted as character learning for young people. Strengthening is carried out by repeating religious values associated with the spiritual history of Belahan Temple and Islamic religious teachings. Meanwhile, cultural actors said that in every cultural procession, such as a village purification ritual and earth alms, there is a symbolic narrative that is used to instill a moral message. Traditions such as *ancak* processions, local dance performances, and the reading of ancestral prayers are a means

of reinforcement that is understood by the community. Documentation in the form of village archives and photos of activities proves the continuity of this practice for decades. Overall, these results show that reinforcement is carried out not only through activities but also through the cultivation of symbolic meaning, social habits, and the presence of exemplary figures in the community.

The phenomenon found in the field shows that there is a compatibility between the forms of reinforcement carried out by the community and the need to strengthen religious character amid modernization. The data obtained shows that although the term "character education" is not explicitly used, the community has been carrying out the practice of value reinforcement through cultural and spiritual activities. This is an important finding in answering the main problem of the research, namely, the weak religious character of the younger generation due to the loss of local cultural integration in the education system. Activities such as village purification ritual, cooperation, and recitation are informal means that strengthen the religious character of the community. These values are not instilled through a formal curriculum, but through social life and traditions. The disconnect between formal education and local culture found in the background of research problems can be bridged with this reinforcement approach. However, the results show that the sustainability of this practice still depends on the active participation of community leaders and cultural actors, so systematization is needed so that reinforcement can take place more sustainably and reach the younger generation more effectively.

Character education in the community of the Belahan Temple area is transmitted through social life, religious practices, and cultural activities that are carried out regularly. The results of the interviews stated that values such as honesty, cooperation, respect, and responsibility were instilled through example and interaction between community members. Observations show that in every community activity, moral messages are always inserted, both through oral speech, cultural symbols, and real behavior. Documentation from photos of village purification ritual activities and site preservation guest books shows the continuity of this educational activity. Religious leaders explained that religious teachings in this region are not only ritual, but also include social morality. Cultural actors emphasized that character values are passed down through oral traditions and traditional ceremonies. The following is a summary of the forms of character education based on the data source:

**Table 2.** Forms of character education of the people of the Belahan Temple area

Character Value	Learning Resources	Planting Method	Implementation Time
<b>Honesty</b>	Studies	Examples of religious figures	Daily and weekly
<b>Responsibility</b>	Community Cooperation	Direct practice	Monthly
<b>Tolerance</b>	A Dialogue Between Villagers	Cross-group interaction	Daily and Annual
<b>Social care</b>	Earth's alms and help others	Habituation through ritual	Weekly and Annual
<b>Religiosity</b>	Prayers in the Temple and ancestral pilgrimage	Symbolic meaning	Daily and Celebration

Based on Table 2. Showing character values that develop in society are not taught verbally in the form of formal teaching, but grow from experience and participation in cultural and social activities. Community leaders said that children learn responsibility not from theory, but from the practice of cooperation carried out from an early age. Religious leaders emphasized that the teachings about honesty and tolerance are easier for children to accept when associated with the historical story of King Airlangga and the spiritual value of Belahan Temple. Meanwhile, cultural actors said that the value of social care was formed through the experience of participating in earth alms activities, where residents contributed their produce selflessly. Character education is also strengthened through symbolic meanings, such as holy water from the statue of Dewi Sri, which is considered a symbol of cleansing the soul. In the documentation, it was also found that residents made tahlilan and prayer together as educational moments that were not only for spirituality, but also for internalizing character. All of this shows that character education is embedded in the social and spiritual life of the community, making it part of a strong cultural habitus.

This data on character education reinforces the finding that although society has a rich value system, there is no systematic mechanism that makes these values part of a structured educational strategy. The disconnect between the potential of local culture and the process of character formation, which is the main problem in this study, is evident in the field. Values such as religiosity, responsibility, and social care do live in community practice, but they tend to be casuistic and have not been integrated into formal or broader community learning

programs. This makes the characters formed informal and unable to answer the challenges of the times comprehensively. This research shows that the potential of local culture in shaping character is very large, but it still requires a reinforcement model and a systematic approach so that it can be used as a foundation for a more structured and sustainable character education.

The local culture of the people of the Belahan Temple includes various practices, values, symbols, and social structures that are alive and inherited from generation to generation. From the results of observations, interviews, and documentation, it was found that local culture is closely related to the spiritual history of Belahan Temple, which is the center of cultural and religious activities. Values such as respect for ancestors, environmental preservation, and deep spirituality are very thick in every cultural procession. Some of the local cultures that continue to be carried out today include: village purification ritual, earth alms, and pilgrimage to ancestors. These traditions contain strong moral messages and value education, but are often overlooked as part of character education. A summary of data on local culture can be seen in Table 3 below:

**Table 3.** Local culture of the people of Belahan Temple

Local Culture	Philosophical Meaning	Values Instilled	Implementation Time
<b>Village Purification Ritual</b>	Reinforcement and spiritual reinforcement	Religious Freedom, Religion	Once a year
<b>Earth Alms</b>	Gratitude for the harvest	Social care, responsibility	Harvest season
<b>Pilgrimage of Petilasan</b>	Respect for ancestors	Respect, historical continuity	Friday Night and 1 Suro
<b>Carnival Ancak</b>	A symbol of prosperity and social unity	Solidarity, gratitude	Once a year

Table 3 shows that the local culture of the people of Belahan Temple is still very alive and is carried out with collective awareness. Community leaders said that the village purification ritual is not only a tradition, but also a moment to strengthen solidarity between residents. Religious leaders added that activities such as pilgrimage and pilgrimage to ancestral temples are considered a form of spiritual submission and strengthening of faith values. Cultural actors emphasized that symbols such as ancak or sacred statues have a deep

educational role, because they contain historical narratives and moral messages that are passed down from generation to generation. Documentation in the form of photos of cultural carnivals, local ancient manuscripts, and activity records proves that this culture continues to be preserved. This indicates that local culture is not only a tool for the expression of identity, but also a vehicle for effective character formation through experiences, symbols, and emotional involvement of the community in carrying it out.

The reality on the ground shows that the local culture around Belahan Temple contains great potential as a medium for the formation of the religious character of the community. However, the gap between the potential of local culture and the implementation of the formal character education system is still very real. Local culture, which is rich in religious, spiritual, and social values, has not been systematically utilized as part of character education strategies in schools and in community programs. This is the main problem raised in the research, that the character of society is weakened due to the loss of the relationship between education and cultural values. Therefore, this data reinforces the urgency of the need to integrate local culture into community-based character education reinforcement programs so that these noble values remain sustainable and able to form a generation that is moral and resilient to face the challenges of the times.

## **DISCUSSION**

Based on field findings, it can be concluded that the local cultural practices of the Belahan Temple community, such as village purification ritual and earth alms, have functionally become a vehicle for reinforcement of the values of religious character, responsibility, and cooperation. This strengthening process occurs not through the formal education system, but through collective habits, social examples, and participation in traditional and spiritual activities. Religious and cultural figures play the role of character-forming agents, not just verbally, but through symbols, narratives, and direct actions that are culturalizing in people's lives. Values such as respect for ancestors, sanctity of life, and social solidarity are not taught through theory, but are interpreted in every cultural procession. Reinforcement occurs due to the repetition and consistency of activities, as well as the internalization of socially and spiritually accepted meanings. Thus, this result confirms that character education does not have to depart from formal institutions, but can grow from local cultural practices that have strong spiritual and cultural legitimacy in society.

When compared to several previous studies, the uniqueness of this study lies in its success in empirically explaining how local culture not only functions as a tool for preserving traditions but also as a strategic instrument in the reinforcement of religious character. For example, research by Rispan & Sudrajat (2019) about Kalosara in Sulawesi or Prasetyo et al. (2023) about Sea Alms in Central Java both emphasize the educational value of local culture, but do not explore the mechanism of strengthening values sustainably. In this case, the study at Belahan Temple not only describes local values but also analyzes how the community reinforces these values through routine and reflective activities. The involvement of religious leaders and cultural actors who act as reinforcement agents makes this research approach more holistic. While other studies tend to focus on the description of cultural phenomena, this study encourages an understanding of how culture is actively used as a contextual medium of character reinforcement, according to the socioreligious context of the Belahan Temple community. This shows that the reinforcement approach used in this study has a more applicable and innovative contribution to the development of character education models based on local wisdom.

The results of this study show that character strengthening does not have to be monopolized by formal educational institutions, but can be done organically through the forces of local culture that live in the community. This is an important reflection amid a moral crisis of the younger generation that is increasingly distant from spiritual and social values (Syofrianisda, 2023). Local culture, which is interpreted as ancestral heritage, turns out to be able to play a transformative function if revived with the right approach. It is also a reminder that modernization and globalization do not have to get rid of traditions, but rather integrate them as a basis for character education rooted in the social reality of society. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, this is in line with the concept of *Ta'dib*, which prioritizes the formation of manners through the integration of knowledge, charity, and morals (Khasanah et al., 2023; Rachmawati & Purwandari, 2022; Zahra et al., 2024). Therefore, local cultural practices such as those found in Belahan Temple are not only a form of cultural expression, but also a means of religious character education by *maqashid al-shari'ah*, because they instill the value of protecting intellect, soul, and religious context.

Theoretically, these findings reinforce the idea that the reinforcement approach in character education does not have to be structural and top-down (Ngalu, 2019), but can be done culturally and participatively (Retnasari et al., 2021). This adds a new perspective to the development of a theory of locality-based character education, in which culture plays a role

not only as an object of preservation, but also as a subject of value teaching. Practically, this research provides important implications for education policymakers and community movers. The results can be used as a basis for developing a character education model that is contextual, community-based, and does not depend on formal institutional devices. Local governments and educational institutions can take advantage of the potential of local culture that has been proven to contain character-building values to be integrated into school activities, Islamic boarding schools, and community development programs. Thus, character education is not only the responsibility of teachers or administrators of educational institutions, but also of all social elements involved in cultural sustainability.

The results of this research were formed because of the social and spiritual structure of the Belahan Temple community, which is still tied to the ancestral value system. The symbolic and spiritual power of the temple as a sacred site gives legitimacy to the cultural practices that take place around it (Bassin, 2024). This reinforces the role of local culture as a value reinforcer, as it is not only considered a historical heritage but also a part of the religious life of the community. In addition, the absence of a structured character education model from formal institutions encourages the community to maintain the function of character education informally through traditional and religious activities. The repetition of cultural activities, the presence of role models, and the spiritual meaning of cultural symbols are factors that cause character value reinforcement to run effectively. This pattern is in line with Skinner's theory (1976), which means that reinforcement occurs when a value or behavior is given consistently with positive results. In the context of the Belahan Temple community, "positive results" are not measured materially, but socially and spiritually, such as the creation of order, harmony, and respect for religious values.

Based on the results of this study, concrete actions that can be taken are to design a character education model based on local culture that integrates community activities such as village purification ritual and earth alms into non-formal education programs, schools, and Islamic boarding schools. This model should involve cultural actors, religious leaders, and the educational community in one collaborative framework. The local government and the site manager of the Belahan Temple also need to document and compile learning modules based on local traditions, which can be used as a reference for learning contextual characters. In addition, cultural activities that have been going on for generations need to be strengthened with structural support, such as legal recognition, funding, and training for the younger generation, so that they are not interrupted in the transmission of values. On the

academic side, more collaborative research is needed between higher education institutions and local cultural communities to evaluate and develop character education models that can respond to modern challenges while maintaining the cultural identity of the community. Thus, the results of this research become a strong basis for the transformation of character education actions that are not only effective but also contextual and rooted in culture.

## CONCLUSION

The main findings of this study show that without a formal curriculum design, the community around Belahan Temple has consistently carried out a systematic, contextual, and highly spiritually valuable character education reinforcement process through cultural rituals such as the village purification ritual and earth alms. These activities are not just traditions, but a means of learning religious character, such as honesty, responsibility, and cooperation, that are naturally instilled in the younger generation through direct experience and collective participation. This educational process takes place in a sacred social space, independent of formal institutions, but lives through cultural symbolism and communal consciousness that is passed down from generation to generation. These findings challenge the assumption that character education is only effective if it is formally designed by school institutions. On the contrary, the people of the Belahan Temple proved that substantial moral transformation can grow from cultural roots that have been spiritually and historically tested. This research provides a theoretical contribution by strengthening the integration between phenomenological approaches and reinforcement theory in the context of non-formal education, as well as practical contributions in the form of character education models based on local culture that can be adapted as an alternative strategy in strengthening religious and moral values amid globalization challenges.

However, this study has a limited scope because it only focuses on the community around Belahan Temple, so the application of the results to other social contexts needs to be done with contextual considerations. This limitation is not a weakness, but rather a methodological consequence of a phenomenological approach that emphasizes more on the depth of understanding rather than broad generalizations. In addition, this study has not directly explored the involvement of the younger generation as participatory subjects in the process of character education through local culture. Therefore, further studies can be directed towards participatory research involving youth in the preservation of traditions, the

development of culturally based integrative curricula, as well as comparative studies in regions with different cultural and religious characteristics. This approach will enrich the external validity of the reinforcement model found and strengthen the argument that local culture-based character education is a systemic strategy that has the potential to be implemented across communities. Thus, the results of this research are not only an academic foundation in the study of Islamic character education but also a practical foothold for the development of education policies based on local wisdom.

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