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Cultivating Javanese character through community-based arts education: evidence from Sanggar Asri Laras, Indonesia



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received 2026-02-22

Revised 2026-05-14

Accepted 2026-06-18

Keywords

Arts Studio

Community-based arts education

Javanese Character

Character Education

Javanese Personality

ABSTRACT

This study sets out to examine the impact of Sanggar Asri Laras in Kalongan Village, Papahan, Karanganyar Regency, on developing Javanese character and identity among young people through the education of traditional arts, including *karawitan*, dance, and *wayang*. A qualitative descriptive method was employed to gather data through participant observation at the site, literature analysis, and detailed interviews with key individuals such as studio managers, teachers, and students. The research ensured data reliability by applying source and method triangulation techniques. What makes this study unique is its comprehensive examination of studio administration in the digital era, focusing on fostering a secure cultural environment for youth to counteract the adverse effects of globalization and technology dependence. The results indicate that Javanese identity development happens not just through standard physical activities but also via everyday habitual practices, such as organizing shoes, the *salim* tradition, sitting cross-legged, group prayers, and religious seminars, which are absorbed as a guideline for ethical conduct (*unggah-ungguh* and manners). Through an engaging, mentor-driven teaching method and the incorporation of language tools (*Krama* and *Ngoko*), the sanggar effectively converts these habits into an ethical awareness that encourages self-discipline, humility, and emotional balance in the social interactions of students. In conclusion, informal arts education rooted in local traditions serves as a powerful means of maintaining the integrity of the youth during the challenges of modernization.



1. Introduction

Global society is currently encountering a significant ethical crisis and a deterioration of morals, especially among the youth. Despite the benefits of globalization and digital innovations, these developments have clearly contributed to a decline in ethical standards and a weakening of social bonds. The existing social landscape reveals an increase in criminal activity among young people, leading to illegal acts, physical aggression, and a decline in empathy and civility online (cyberbullying). The excessive engagement with social media, in the absence of supportive physical cultural environments, risks intensifying social anxiety and individualism, which should be rooted in harmony, humility, tolerance (*tepa selira*), and good manners (*unggah ungguh*). Given that schools and families often struggle to cope with this cultural shift, there is an urgent need to revive character based on traditional local wisdom. The ongoing global ethical dilemma is encouraging various communities to re-explore local educational knowledge through art [1]. Art is not isolated but serves as a social tool (social technology) for nurturing relationships and fostering a community [2].



Engaging regularly in cultural activities can help mitigate mental health issues and reduce aggressive behavior among youth [3]. Thus, revitalizing traditional local art forms is essential to cultural resistance, helping to combat the cultural disconnection experienced by younger generations [4]. The importance of art extends beyond the attractiveness of its final product; it lies in the sociocultural processes that influence the daily values of those involved [5].

In this regard, art communities and studios serve a vital function as a third space for adolescents developing their moral identities during their transitional periods [6]. A prime example can be found in the Sanggar Asri Laras, located in the Kalongan village of Karanganyar District. This sanggar was established out of a desire among community leaders to protect Javanese culture. As an extracurricular organization, the Sanggar Asri Laras acts as a platform for creative artistic expression while also promoting character development among local children. Through an organized approach, the sanggar assists numerous pupils by imparting discipline and moral values through traditional art education. Art education in extracurricular settings has been found to be more flexible globally in addressing adolescent moral challenges compared to the rigid structure of formal educational curricula [7]. This situation directly contradicts and poses a risk to the Javanese principles of character. The topic of declining character in today's digital age has led to extensive scholarly conversations globally, viewing arts education not just as an artistic endeavor, but as a practical and strategic approach for enhancing morality and restoring identity. Current academic discussions indicate that as young people become more connected to digital spaces, there is a pressing need for physical and culturally rooted programs. In this light, at least five recent studies offer key insights into how the arts can help counteract character decline. Initially, research by Saputra *et al.* [8] underscored the powerful effect of arts education in shaping the cultural identity of young individuals. Their investigation showed that involvement in the arts acts as a mental grounding, shielding adolescents from feeling culturally out of place amid a flood of global, unrestricted digital media. By taking part in local artistic activities, young people foster a deep sense of community and cultural pride, which serves as a protection against the self-centered tendencies encouraged by contemporary technology.

Expanding on the idea of identity, certain forms of traditional arts have been shown to foster unique social values. Research conducted by Ramadani [9] indicated that training in traditional dance is an exceptionally effective way to encourage tolerance. Their findings revealed that the coordinated movements and the requirement for spatial awareness in traditional dance motivate learners to cultivate empathy and mutual respect, thus turning physical alignment into social unity. Likewise, combining ethnopedagogy with the arts has been effective in addressing the cultural disconnect brought about by globalization. According to Putra *et al.* [10], ethnopedagogical methods in arts education reconcile generational differences, ensuring that indigenous knowledge is smoothly integrated into contemporary educational frameworks. This approach guarantees that students connect with cultural elements on a deeper level, grasping the historical and ethical significance behind them rather than just memorizing them. Moreover, the environment where arts education occurs is crucial to its effectiveness. Paranti *et al.* [11] suggested that managing arts education at the community level—rather than exclusively in formal educational settings—enhances enduring cultural strength. Community-led initiatives create a more natural, inclusive, and emotionally nurturing educational atmosphere, vital for character development. In these environments, the traditional teacher-student hierarchy often gives way to a mentor-mentee relationship, fostering greater intrinsic motivation among young participants. Supporting this psychological perspective, Yanti *et al.* [12] found that performing arts are essential for the internalization of character through systematic familiarization processes. Their research highlighted that moral principles like discipline, independence, and responsibility are not learned instantly but rather ingrained through repeated, structured artistic practices that gradually shift from mere rules to internalized personal habits.

Despite the strong evidence supporting the benefits of arts education for children's character growth, there is still a significant lack of research in this area. Most of the earlier studies have primarily focused on traditional schools, concentrated on the theoretical interpretation of artworks, or looked at character development in a broader cultural framework. There is a scarcity of research that specifically explores how informal, community-based studios blend digital adaptation with the strict practices of unique local ethics, like the Javanese ideas of *andhap asor* (humility) and the structured *Krama* language system. Despite these five studies affirming the beneficial impact of arts education on children's character growth, most existing research has predominantly concentrated on formal educational institutions or has simply examined the philosophical significance of artistic works. The

unique aspect of this study is its focus on the non-formal educational environment of Sanggar Asri Laras, which specifically aims to nurture Javanese character traits. This research emphasizes the complete integration of studio management in the context of the digital era, incorporating lessons on verbal ethics and daily behavioral guidelines. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to illustrate how community studios can serve as a vital moral anchor that adapts to technological advancements while staying deeply connected to the cherished principles of Javanese culture.

2. Method

This research utilized a descriptive-qualitative approach through a case study framework. A qualitative phenomenological method was selected to delve deeply into the significance of the participants' everyday activities [13]. This case study framework allowed the researchers to investigate the phenomenon of an art studio institution within defined spatial and cultural contexts [14]. The investigation took place at the Sanggar Asri Laras in the Kalongan village of Papahan, Karanganyar Regency, starting in January 2026. Research participants were chosen using purposive sampling, which was later supplemented with snowball sampling to identify the most relevant and comprehensive informants. Key informants in this research included the sanggar director (Mr. Sunarso), artists and instructors, students, the participants' parents, and local residents who attended as observers. Primary data were gathered through participant observation and thorough interviews. The researchers actively engaged in various studio activities such as karawitan, dance, puppetry, and kethoprak practices—to witness the natural behaviors and social interactions of the participants. These strategies of participant observation and thorough interviews supported each other, enhancing the reliability of qualitative data triangulation [15].

Secondary data were acquired through document reviews, including studio records, photographs of activities, and related field notes. The observation phase was conducted intensively over a period of four months, allowing the researchers to immerse themselves fully in the sanggar ecosystem. During these sessions, the researchers adopted a participant-as-observer role, taking detailed field notes that captured not only the verbal instructions given by the teachers but also the non-verbal cues, spatial arrangements, and the unspoken behavioral norms practiced by the students. The in-depth interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 45 to 60 minutes per session. The interview protocol was designed to elicit open-ended narratives, prompting informants to reflect on their personal transformations, their understanding of Javanese philosophies, and their coping mechanisms when facing modern digital distractions. Furthermore, the thematic analysis employed in this study followed a rigorous six-phase approach. Initially, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by transcribing the interview recordings verbatim and repeatedly reading the field notes. This was followed by the generation of initial codes, where specific behaviors (e.g., shoe arrangement, hand-kissing) and verbal expressions were tagged. These codes were subsequently collated into broader, overarching themes that directly corresponded to the research objectives, such as 'Habitation of Humility' and 'Digital Adaptation'. The themes were continuously reviewed and refined through peer debriefing sessions to ensure that the analytical narrative accurately represented the complex socio-cultural dynamics observed in the sanggar. The gathered data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The aim was to identify trends in the character development implementation within the sanggar to promote Javanese personality traits like *Andhap Asor* (humility), solidarity, and *Tepa Selira* (compassion). The analysis involved data reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions. To ensure the findings' validity, the researcher implemented both methodological and source triangulation. Source triangulation was confirmed through surveying the participants to verify that the researcher's interpretations corresponded with the respondents' real-life experiences [16].

3. Results and Discussion

The results of this study reveal that Sanggar Asri Laras transcends the traditional boundaries of a mere performing arts studio, functioning instead as a dynamic socio-cultural laboratory for character formation. Through rigorous participant observation and in-depth interviews, the findings demonstrate that the transmission of Javanese personality traits is not achieved through didactic, classroom-style instruction, but rather through deeply embedded, daily habituation. This section presents a comprehensive analysis of how artistic practices are inextricably linked to moral education. It highlights the profound mechanisms through which traditional values—often perceived as archaic by

modern youth—are preserved, contextualized, and internalized by the younger generation amidst the relentless pressures of globalization and digital disruption. To systematically unpack these empirical findings, the ensuing discussion is organized into several interrelated themes. It begins by establishing the socio-geographical context of the studio, illustrating how its rapidly modernizing suburban environment necessitates and shapes community cohesion. Following this, the analysis delves into the specific pedagogical approaches employed during the learning process, examining how the embodiment of Javanese philosophies—such as *rukun* (social harmony) and *andhap asor* (humility)—is integrated into musical and physical training. Furthermore, the discussion explores the theoretical dimensions of Javanese personality and character development through the lens of Bourdieu's habitus, explaining how repetitive physical gestures transform into durable moral dispositions. Finally, it addresses the contemporary challenges faced by the studio, detailing the adaptive, mentor-driven strategies and digital negotiations utilized to maintain cultural relevance for Generation Z. Administratively, Sanggar Asri Laras is situated in the hamlet of Kalongan, within Papahan Village, Tasikmadu District, Karanganyar Regency. Positioned conveniently along the Solo–Tawangmangu road, this area is experiencing significant demographic and cultural transformations due to modernization. While the local population is now involved in various professions within the service and industrial sectors, the ethos of mutual cooperation along with socio-religious practices remains deeply rooted. In this ever-evolving suburban setting, informal arts organizations act as a bridge for community unity [17]. Sanggar Asri Laras functions as an essential platform that encourages community engagement through inclusive cultural events while safeguarding local identity in the face of urban development.

3.1 Learning in the Sanggar

From a conceptual standpoint, the Javanese character is best understood not just as an ethnic identity but as a cultural-psychological framework grounded in two key principles: *rukun* (social harmony) and respect (awareness of social hierarchies) [18]. The principle of *rukun* demands that individuals prioritize community harmony over personal desires—a value increasingly challenged by modernization [19]. At Sanggar Asri Laras, this theoretical context is not imposed as doctrine but is instead actively practiced through the daily engagement in the arts of *karawitan*, dance, and *wayang*. This community-driven approach to arts education helps dismantle social class barriers and inherently nurtures social empathy [20]. The incorporation of Javanese identity into the studio activities is immediately noticeable when students enter the practice space. Mastery of the gamelan essentially reflects social skills, as the collective harmony of the ensemble relies on each musician embracing the principle of *Andhap Asor* (humility) [21]. Observations made on-site demonstrate that the principle of *Andhap Asor* is practically reflected in the established conduct rules. Students must arrive 15 minutes early to properly remove their shoes, greet their instructors and senior peers with “*Kula Nuwun*,” and perform the traditional *salim* (hand kiss) before touching the gamelan instruments. This practice is supported by a direct statement from the studio instructor, Mr. Suyatno, who emphasized that character development is the absolute priority:

"For us, mastering the gamelan or dance is secondary; the priority is always 'adab' (manners). It is completely useless if a child can play the kendang perfectly but walks past an elder with their chest puffed out, without saying 'ndherek langkung' (excuse me). That is why the 'salim' (hand-kissing) tradition before every practice is non-negotiable here."

A typical gamelan practice session serves as a microcosm of Javanese societal ideals. For instance, when a novice student struggles to grasp the rhythmic patterns of a specific *gending* (musical composition), the correction process is highly illustrative of Javanese pedagogy. Instead of reprimanding the student publicly, which would cause *isin* (shame) and disrupt the emotional harmony of the group, the instructor approaches the student subtly, often playing alongside them to physically guide their tempo. The role of the *Kendang* (drum) player, who acts as the conductor of the gamelan ensemble, further emphasizes collective sensitivity. The students are trained to listen intently to the drum's cues rather than solely focusing on their own instruments. This auditory synchronization translates into a psychological conditioning where students learn that their individual actions must always be subjugated to the collective rhythm and harmony of the community. Such immersive experiences demonstrate that the studio does not merely teach musical notes, but orchestrates an environment where the suppression of ego becomes a daily, lived experience. Additionally, this sanggar employs a hierarchical use of language, applying Javanese *Krama Inggil* for interactions with

seniors and *Ngoko* for conversations among friends as a means to instill ethical values. Upholding the Javanese language variations proves to be a useful psychological approach for enhancing emotional intelligence and self-discipline in teenagers [22]. This method of communication encourages students to continually evaluate social situations and put their own egos aside. Research has indicated that emotional involvement in this traditional craft is positively associated with elevated interpersonal intelligence [23]. This is evident in the atmosphere of tolerance within the studio; even though most members follow Islam, the leadership fosters respect among different faiths, such as by sharing greetings during each group member's religious celebrations.

Beyond the auditory and interactional training found in *karawitan*, the pedagogical structure of traditional Javanese dance instruction at Sanggar Asri Laras offers another profound layer of character building. Traditional Javanese dances, such as the *Bedhaya* or *Wira Tamtama*, demand a high degree of kinesthetic discipline, balance, and spatial awareness. During the instructional process, students are trained to maintain specific bodily postures for extended periods, a practice that requires physical stamina and mental endurance. Instructors utilize these demanding physical requirements to teach the value of *gati* (perseverance) and *tlaten* (patience). If a student fails to execute a specific gesture, such as the precise angle of the wrist (*ngrayung*) or the fluid shifting of weight (*sebeh*), they are required to repeat the sequence under the close supervision of the mentor. This bodily discipline fosters a psychological disposition of resilience; students learn to perceive corrective feedback not as a personal critique, but as a necessary step toward artistic and personal perfection. Furthermore, collective dancing reinforces social cohesion, as the visual beauty of the performance depends on the synchronization of all dancers, thereby suppressing individual exhibitionism in favor of collective harmony.

3.2 Javanese Personality

The personality traits of the Javanese are focused on nurturing individuals who not only uphold traditions but also play a role in national and civic life. The majority of participants at Sanggar Asri Laras reside in the Solo Raya area, which is closely linked to Central Javanese cultural practices yet increasingly influenced by contemporary lifestyles. In spite of these transformations, the Sanggar persistently imparts essential teachings like *Nrimo* (accepting situations), *Pasrah* (trusting in God), *Sungkan* (showing respect), *Welas Asih* (demonstrating compassion), and *Ikhlas* (being sincere). To understand the depth of these teachings within the sanggar context, one must examine how they are operationalized in the face of adversity or failure. *Nrimo* (acceptance) and *Ikhlas* (sincerity) are not taught as passive resignation, but rather as active emotional resilience. When students face difficulties in mastering complex dance choreography or intricate musical notations, the instructors guide them to embody *Ikhlas* to embrace the grueling process of learning without harboring frustration or demanding immediate gratification, a stark contrast to the instant-reward culture prevalent in the digital era. Similarly, the concept of *Sungkan* is meticulously woven into the fabric of the sanggar social hierarchy. It manifests as a profound, internalized reluctance to offend or overshadow others. In practice, this means senior students naturally assume the role of mentors for the younger ones, guiding them with *Welas Asih* (compassion) rather than asserting dominance. The impact of these teachings is highly palpable to the participants' families. A mother of a 14-year-old student shared her observation regarding her daughter's behavioral shift: "*Since joining Asri Laras, my daughter has become much more patient. Before, she used to get easily frustrated if she couldn't do something immediately. Now, she understands the concept of 'tlaten' (perseverance). The instructors taught her that mastering a movement requires 'ikhlas'—accepting the difficult process without complaining.*" This creates a cyclical, self-sustaining ecosystem of respect where authority is earned through care and wisdom, rather than demanded through age or status. Although the current youth tend to adopt a more liberal and logical mindset, these foundational values help instill a composed and dignified attitude in their interactions with the broader society.

3.3 Character Development

Sanggar Asri Laras plays a crucial role in shaping the character of the youth through comprehensive social engagement. The cultural background of Javanese artistic circles is rooted in sharing oral traditions and careful observation rather than relying strictly on academic texts [24]. For instance, discipline is imparted through the systematic joint arrangement of gamelan instruments. This practice aligns with the view that gamelan instruments reflect Javanese cosmology, which demands spatial and musical collaboration among performers [25]. This cooperative experience illustrates that creating music together not only fine-tunes the ear but also thoroughly nurtures patience and self-

control among the participants [26]. The internalization of values at the Sanggar Asri Laras can be examined through Pierre Bourdieu's habitus framework. Ethical values are not merely committed to memory; they must be cultivated through regular physical engagement (embodiment) and familiarization [27]. The sanggar functions as a social environment where the essence of Javanese personality is absorbed through proper cross-legged positioning while playing the gamelan and the smooth movements of dance. This determination results in a resilient character and a profound respect for work, as evidenced by the achievements of sanggar participants in various performances and artistic competitions.

Applying Bourdieu's lens, Sanggar Asri Laras functions as a site of 'cultural reproduction' that intentionally counters the dominant, fast-paced habitus generated by modern capitalism and digital consumerism. The physical spaces of the sanggar—the *pendopo* (open pavilion) and the seating arrangements on the floor—dictate a specific bodily hexis that forces the students to physically lower themselves, thereby enacting humility. Over time, these repeated physical gestures bypass conscious cognitive processing and settle into the subconscious as a durable disposition. The students do not merely 'act' Javanese while in the sanggar; the continuous reinforcement of these bodily and linguistic practices restructures their internal moral compass. Consequently, when these youths step out of the sanggar and re-enter the broader, chaotic societal landscape, they carry this internalized sanctuary of calmness, discipline, and respect with them. The sanggar, therefore, operates as a vital counter-hegemonic space where traditional cultural capital is accumulated and utilized as a psychological shield against the alienating effects of globalized modernity. These insights affirm previous studies while providing new viewpoints. While the research conducted by Yanti *et al.* revealed that character development in formal school settings arises from a strict educational framework, the results from Sanggar Asri Laras illustrate that community-based, informal education permits a more natural integration of character traits. Additionally, these outcomes enhance the understanding of research conducted by Hantoro and colleagues in 2022 presents solid proof that upholding oral ethics within sanggar settings plays a vital role in sustaining virtuous character in today's globalized world.

3.4 Sanggar Asri Laras Challenge

The Sanggar Asri Laras organization functions as a cultural bastion, shielding the youth from the adverse impacts of globalization. Contemporary advancements introduce issues like declining morals, the embrace of a consumer-driven way of life, self-centered behaviors, and dependence on technology. Thus, the younger populace requires an intermediary that merges their digital skills with the conservation of regional identity. The evolution of Javanese performing arts should consistently adapt while maintaining its essential values amid the influences of widespread pop culture. In order to tackle these issues, the educators at Sanggar Asri Laras use engaging teaching methods and position themselves as both guides and peers for their learners. The prevalence of screen culture has compelled the informal education sector to reconsider its strategies to stay relevant to Generation Z. Observations indicate a sense of emotional closeness when teachers avoid strict hierarchical barriers, frequently sitting in circles and conversing with students during breaks. Students confirm that their instructors exemplify a nurturing approach, akin to that of a friend or mentor, rather than merely issuing stringent directives. Consequently, they perceive themselves as part of a family and feel quite at ease throughout the training and educational experiences at the sanggar. Cultural education tends to be much more effective when it aligns with the digital interests of youth and is facilitated by a supportive mentor. Moreover, this sanggar shows its flexibility by not outright banning the use of digital devices. Instead, the sanggar leadership encourages students to harness technology for documenting their practical assignments. Sharing this collaborative art documentation on platforms like TikTok or YouTube serves as a means of connecting with cultural pride that resonates with the Generation Z dialect. This incorporation of technology is underscored by the sanggar leaders who acknowledge Generation Z's penchant for tech, thus utilizing electronic devices to showcase artworks on platforms like TikTok and YouTube, ensuring the preservation of Javanese culture in today's context. This hands-on experience illustrates that digital literacy entails more than just the technical know-how; it also includes the capacity to use technology to spread affirmative cultural values.

The empirical findings of this study demonstrate that the habituation within Sanggar Asri Laras effectively addresses a critical deficit in the contemporary psychological development of Generation Z. Modern digital environments, characterized by instant gratification and algorithmic confirmation bias, often foster a hyper-individualistic mindset and heightened emotional volatility among youth. The cultural practices of the sanggar, conversely, cultivate what Javanese philosophy defines as *reneh*,

raras, riris—a state of emotional calm, aesthetic sensitivity, and cautious deliberation. By enforcing the use of *Krama Inggil*, which requires a slower tempo of speech and conscious lexical selection, the sanggar introduces a psychological 'deceleration' mechanism. This linguistic restraint forces adolescents to pause and consider the status, feelings, and context of the interlocutor before responding, directly countering the impulsive communication patterns observed on social media platforms. The sanggar director, Mr. Sunarso, further elaborated on the psychological rationale behind this linguistic rule during an interview: "We strictly enforce the use of *Krama Inggil* when the youth speak to the instructors. It is not just about preserving the language; it is a psychological exercise. When they use Krama, they are forced to lower their ego, think carefully before they speak, and actively acknowledge social harmony." Therefore, the sanggar does not merely preserve historical art forms; it serves as an active therapeutic arena that restores psychological equilibrium, emotional stability, and interpersonal civility to a generation deeply alienated by the hyper-accelerated nature of the digital age.

4. Conclusion

This research concludes that Sanggar Asri Laras, as a flexible, informal arts education setting, has taken a significant role in forming the Javanese traits and identity of the younger generation. Unlike the cognitive-focused curriculum found in formal educational settings, this sanggar emphasizes moral principles such as *Andhap Asor* (humility), tolerance, and *Tepa Selira* (empathy) through practical, everyday activities. This process of internalizing values is evident both physically, through traditions like *Gotong Royong* and *Salim*, and linguistically, through the use of the *Krama Inggil* language hierarchy. In the light of the potential ethical decline associated with digital transformation, Sanggar Asri Laras does not distance itself from modernization. Instead, the leadership of the sanggar adopts a robust, mentor-driven teaching strategy that empowers students. Additionally, the proficient use of devices to document artistic work on social media (like YouTube and TikTok) demonstrates that the preservation of the noble qualities of the Javanese character can coexist harmoniously with modern influences. Paired with the digital skills of Generation Z. In general, this education model focused on community offers a significant academic insight into how local wisdom can be maintained as a moral safeguard while remaining pertinent in a globalized world.

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