



Journal of Educational Sciences

Journal homepage: <https://jes.ejournal.unri.ac.id/index.php/JES>



P-ISSN
2581-1657

E-ISSN
2581-2203

Values of Character Education in Dampeng Dance at Wedding Ceremonies of the Subulussalam Community

Retno Dumilah*, Azizah Hanum OK, Yusnaili Budianti

Islamic Education, Postgraduate Program, State Islamic University of North Sumatra, Medan, 20235, Indonesia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 27 June 2025

Revised: 15 April 2026

Accepted: 16 April 2026

Published online: 26 April 2026

Keywords:

Character Education,
Wedding Ceremonies,
Subulussalam,
Ethnographic Approach

* Corresponding author:

E-mail: arjretnodumilahdj@gmail.com

Article Doi:

<https://doi.org/10.31258/jes.10.4.p.1036-1045>

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ABSTRACT

This study research explores the importance of preserving local cultural values that embody character education, particularly within traditional performing arts such as the Dampeng Dance. This dance is an integral part of wedding ceremonies in the community of Subulussalam City and carries deep symbolic and ethical meanings. The objective of this study is to identify and analyze the character education values embedded in the Dampeng Dance and to assess their relevance to community life. A qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method was employed in this research. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The findings indicate that the Dampeng Dance contains character values such as cooperation, responsibility, religiosity, courtesy, and respect for ancestral traditions. These values are reflected in the dance movements, costumes, accompanying music, and the context of its performance within traditional ceremonies. The conclusion of this study affirms that the Dampeng Dance functions not only as a form of entertainment or aesthetic expression but also as an educational medium for instilling and preserving character education values among the people of Subulussalam across generations.

1. Introduction

Culture is the identity of a nation that must be respected, preserved, and maintained so that the diverse cultures found in Indonesia continue to exist and become the heritage of its people. As a multicultural country, Indonesia possesses a wide range of traditions, customs, and artistic expressions that reflect the uniqueness of each region. These cultural elements are not only symbols of identity but also serve as a foundation for social cohesion and moral development within society. Traditional performing arts, particularly dance, play a central role in transmitting values and norms across generations. Through movement, rhythm, and symbolic expression,

dance becomes a medium through which communities communicate their beliefs, ethics, and collective experiences. Dancing can be understood as a rhythmic body movement performed in a particular place and time for social purposes, usually accompanied by music or singing (Al-gazalba, 1983). In the Subulussalam community, the Dampeng Dance is performed in important cultural and religious events such as weddings and circumcisions, functioning not only as entertainment but also as a medium for moral and social education. Previous studies have not sufficiently explored how the symbolic elements of traditional dances function as carriers of character values, particularly in the context of community-based education (Defriyadi et al., 2025; Nia Do et al., 2026). Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the character education values embedded in the Dampeng Dance and examining their relevance for strengthening community identity and educational practices.

Indonesia's cultural diversity represents both a national pride and a challenge, as it requires continuous efforts to preserve local traditions from the influence of external cultures. Globalization and modernization have brought significant changes to the way people perceive and engage with cultural practices. While these changes offer opportunities for innovation and cultural exchange, they also pose a threat to the sustainability of traditional arts. One of the enduring cultural forms that reflects this diversity is dance, which serves as a medium for expressing human intentions, thoughts, and emotions through rhythmic body movements. Traditional dance preserves ancestral, spiritual, and historical values, while modern dance emphasizes freedom of expression and emotional exploration (Indrayuda, 2013).

Dance in Indonesia is not only a form of artistic expression but also functions as a cultural practice used in religious ceremonies and social interactions. Dance originates from inner human expression conveyed through rhythmic movement accompanied by music, reflecting emotional and spiritual dimensions (Soedarsono, 1997). As a form of traditional art, dance integrates movement, rhythm, and meaning, making it a distinctive cultural expression (Sulastiono, 2006). Previous studies have shown that traditional dance also plays a significant role in preserving cultural values and strengthening social identity within various customary ceremonial contexts (Novita & Lestari, 2021).

The Dampeng Dance, originating from the Aceh Singkil region, reflects the cultural richness and social values of the local community. This dance is deeply rooted in the traditions of the Singkil people and has been passed down from generation to generation as part of their cultural heritage. It is traditionally performed during ceremonies such as weddings, circumcisions, and the reception of honored guests, serving as a symbolic medium that conveys messages, advice, and communal prayers (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2013; Efendi & Abubakar, 2020). The performance of the Dampeng Dance is not only an artistic display but also a ritualistic act that embodies the collective identity of the community. The movements of the Dampeng Dance, which often resemble silat, symbolize protection, unity, and respect for guests.

These movements are carefully choreographed to reflect the values upheld by the community, such as bravery, solidarity, and mutual respect. In addition, the accompanying poetry or chants contain moral teachings and social values that guide individuals in their daily lives. The integration of movement and verbal expression in the Dampeng Dance creates a powerful medium for conveying ethical principles and cultural norms.

In addition to its artistic and symbolic functions, the Dampeng Dance is also closely related to the social structure and customary institutions of the Aceh Singkil community. The existence of customary institutions, as regulated in Qanun Aceh Number 10 of 2008, highlights the importance of preserving cultural traditions as part of societal order and identity (Pemerintah Aceh, 2008). These institutions play a crucial role in maintaining the continuity of cultural practices, including traditional dances, by ensuring that they are performed in accordance with established norms and values. Through these mechanisms, the Dampeng Dance continues to serve as a medium for reinforcing social cohesion and cultural identity within the community.

Historically, the Dampeng Dance is associated with the figure of Teuku Gemerinting, who is believed to have developed the dance by incorporating elements inspired by natural observations and cultural interactions between Aceh Singkil and Minangkabau traditions. This historical background reflects the dynamic nature of cultural development, where traditions evolve through interactions with other cultures while maintaining their core identity. Over time, the Dampeng Dance has evolved into an integral part of community life, symbolizing not only artistic expression but also social cohesion and cultural continuity. The dance has adapted to changing social contexts while preserving its essential values, demonstrating its resilience as a cultural practice.

However, in recent years, the popularity of the Dampeng Dance has declined among urban communities, who tend to favor modern entertainment forms. The influence of digital media, popular culture, and global entertainment has shifted the preferences of younger generations, leading to a decreased interest in traditional arts. This shift poses a significant challenge to the preservation of cultural heritage, as the transmission of traditional knowledge relies heavily on active participation and engagement. The decline in interest also raises concerns about the potential loss of cultural identity and moral values embedded in traditional practices. Therefore, there is an urgent need to revitalize traditional arts such as the Dampeng Dance by integrating them into contemporary educational and cultural programs.

From a theoretical perspective, cultural practices such as traditional dance can function as informal educational media that transmit values such as cooperation, respect, responsibility, and religiosity (Firdaus et al., 2025; Hidayah, 2026). These values are not taught explicitly but are internalized through participation in cultural activities and observation of social interactions. In a broader context, culture-based character education integrates social and multicultural values into everyday life as part of character formation (Handayani & Indartono, 2016). The process of learning through cultural practices is holistic, involving cognitive, emotional, and behavioral

dimensions. In the context of the Dampeng Dance, participants learn to coordinate their movements, follow instructions, and work together as a group, fostering a sense of discipline and teamwork. At the same time, they are exposed to moral teachings embedded in the performance, which shape their attitudes and behaviors. These values are embedded in symbolic actions, performance structures, and community participation, making traditional dance a relevant medium for character education in contemporary society. The communal nature of dance performances encourages interaction and collaboration, reinforcing social bonds and mutual understanding. This is also supported by studies that show how traditional dance in ceremonial contexts contributes to character education and cultural preservation (Lubis et al., 2025). By engaging with traditional dance, individuals not only develop artistic skills but also acquire important life values that contribute to their personal and social development.

Therefore, examining the Dampeng Dance through an ethnographic approach provides valuable insights into how cultural expressions contribute to the development of character education. An ethnographic approach allows researchers to explore the meanings and values embedded in cultural practices from the perspective of the community members themselves. This approach emphasizes the importance of context and lived experience in understanding cultural phenomena, making it particularly suitable for studying traditional arts. Based on the background described above, the objective of this study is to identify and interpret the character education values embodied in the Dampeng Dance and to evaluate their relevance for contemporary character education initiatives within the Subulussalam community. By highlighting the educational potential of traditional dance, this study aims to contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage and the development of character education strategies that are rooted in local wisdom.

2. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative ethnographic approach, allowing for a holistic interpretation of cultural practices through extended fieldwork. Data collection involved participant observation, in-depth interviews with elders, cultural practitioners, and community leaders, as well as documentation of performances. Data analysis followed Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification to ensure validity. Triangulation of sources and member-checking were applied to enhance credibility. Literally, ethnography means “writing about a group of people.” Ethnography literally means ‘writing about a group of people’ and is defined as a qualitative research design used to describe and analyze cultural groups (Creswell, 2012).

Based on its etymology, the term ethnography comes from the words “ethno” (nation) and “graphy” (to describe), so ethnography aims to describe a culture comprehensively, covering all aspects of culture, both material aspects such as cultural artifacts (tools, clothing, buildings, etc.) and abstract aspects such as experiences, beliefs, norms, and value systems of the group being studied. Based

on this term and explanation, ethnography can be defined as a method that explains, describes, and identifies various characteristics of humans (nations) from general to specific aspects. Ethnographic design is a qualitative research procedure for describing and analyzing various cultural groups with the aim of interpreting various patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language that develop over time. The Center for Cultural Studies defines culture as everything related to human behavior and beliefs (Le Compte et al., 1993).

The term ethnography is familiar to social researchers. Ethnography is actually one of the approaches in qualitative research methods that seeks to explore a community's culture. This is in line with Creswell (2019) opinion, which places ethnography as one of the principles of social science research methods that fall under the category of qualitative research. Ethnography is a form of research that focuses on sociological meaning through closed field observations of sociocultural phenomena. Ethnographic researchers usually focus their research on a particular community. Ethnography is a social science research method. This research relies heavily on closeness, personal experience, and participation, not just observation by researchers trained in the art of ethnography.

Ethnographic research includes language, rituals, economic and political structures, stages of life, interactions, and communication styles. To understand the ethnographic patterns of a group, ethnographers usually spend a considerable amount of time conducting interviews, observing, and collecting documents about the group to understand their culture, including the various behaviors, beliefs, and languages used by the group. The ethnographic method is a means of branching out local perspectives, family and community knowledge data, and closed and personal community experiences. Ethnography enhances and broadens perspectives from above and below and enriches the research process, channeling perspectives from both the grassroots and the top. Researchers can then share such findings with the wider community.

3. Results and Discussion

Field Data Collection

Field data collection in this study was conducted through an ethnographic approach involving direct interaction with the Subulussalam community. The researcher carried out participant observation during Dampeng Dance performances at wedding ceremonies, as well as in-depth interviews with key informants, including traditional leaders, cultural practitioners, and community members. The purpose of this data collection was to explore deeply the meanings, values, and character education elements embedded in the Dampeng Dance. The interview process was guided by a set of structured and semi-structured questions to ensure the consistency and relevance of the data obtained. The following table presents the list of interview questions used to collect primary data in the field. The complete list of interview questions used in the field data collection is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview Questions for Field Data Collection

No	Interview Questions
1	What is the meaning of the Dampeng Dance for the Subulussalam community, especially in wedding ceremonies?
2	What values are contained in the movements of the Dampeng Dance?
3	How does the Dampeng Dance reflect moral and social values within the community?
4	What is the role of poetry or chants in conveying character education values in the Dampeng Dance?
5	How do community members interpret the symbols and movements in the Dampeng Dance?
6	What character values can be learned by younger generations through participation in the Dampeng Dance?
7	How is the Dampeng Dance preserved and transmitted across generations in the Subulussalam community?
8	What challenges are faced in maintaining the existence of the Dampeng Dance in modern society?

Analysis of Interview Results

The data obtained from in-depth interviews were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach to identify patterns of meaning related to character education values in the Dampeng Dance. The analysis process involved data reduction, categorization, and interpretation based on recurring responses from informants. The findings reveal that the Dampeng Dance embodies various character values that are consistently reflected in its movements, performance structure, and cultural context. These values are grouped into several main themes, including moral values, social values, and religious values. A summary of the thematic findings is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis of Interview Results

No	Interview Focus	Key Findings	Character Values Identified
1	Meaning of Dampeng Dance	Considered a cultural identity and ceremonial symbol	Cultural awareness, identity
2	Dance Movements	Movements symbolize protection and unity	Responsibility, cooperation
3	Social Function	Strengthens relationships and community solidarity	Togetherness, mutual respect
4	Poetry/Chants	Contain advice, prayers, and moral messages	Religiosity, ethics
5	Symbol Interpretation	Movements and formations represent harmony	Tolerance, unity
6	Youth Involvement	Media for learning discipline and teamwork	Discipline, cooperation
7	Cultural Transmission	Passed down through generations informally	Responsibility, respect for tradition
8	Modern Challenges	Decreasing interest among younger generations	Awareness, cultural preservation

Based on Table 2, it can be seen that the Dampeng Dance is not only a form of artistic expression but also a medium for internalizing character education values within the community. The dominant values identified include cooperation, responsibility, religiosity, and mutual respect, which are consistently reflected in both the performance and the meaning behind the dance. The findings also indicate that the integration of movement, music, and poetic elements plays a significant role in shaping moral and social behavior among participants. Furthermore, the Dampeng Dance serves as an informal educational medium that allows individuals, especially younger generations, to learn important life values through direct participation. The process of cultural transmission occurs naturally through observation, imitation, and involvement in traditional ceremonies. However, the study also reveals challenges in maintaining the sustainability of this tradition due to the influence of modernization and changing cultural preferences. Therefore, efforts to preserve and promote the Dampeng Dance are essential to ensure that its embedded character values continue to be transmitted across generations.

The History of Dampeng Dance in Subulussalam City

Recently, residents of Subulussalam, a city located in the northern part of Aceh Tenggara Regency, bordering Lawe Alas District and Dairi Regency (North Sumatra), which borders Aceh Singkil Regency in the south, have been abuzz over the city government's plan to build a three-dimensional statue of Dampeng to be placed at the Malikussaleh intersection in Simpang Kiri District. The budget for this project has even been approved in the 2017 Subulussalam Regency/City Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBK) at a cost of Rp1.9 billion through the Subulussalam Public Works and Public Housing Agency (PUPR). Dampeng is a dance art form originating from Kampong Laemate (Air Mati).

Kampong Laemate is one of the villages with a long history in the watershed area in the city of Subulussalam, which extends to Aceh Singkil. The uproar over the rejection of this statue "project" has many dimensions. At least some of the reasons for the community's rejection are: it is not in accordance with Islamic law; it is contrary to customs and traditions; it is a waste of funds given the poor economic situation in Subulussalam; poverty rates are still high and unemployment rates are high. Perhaps if we look deeper into the inventory, there will be several other reasons for the rejection. Regardless of the clamor of certain parties' interests in the construction of the statue, the government and people of Subulussalam should focus on the vision of developing Subulussalam as a young city that needs good "nutrition" to grow and develop as a strategic crossroads city. It is unfortunate that every time the regional elections approach, there are always issues that can heat up the atmosphere and lead to divisions in a community that has been comfortable until then. Observing the development of Subulussalam, physically it appears to be on the rise, but the data confirming the economic condition of Subulussalam is not yet encouraging.

According to 2016 BPS data, the poverty rate in Subulussalam in 2015 was still relatively high, reaching 15,000 people or 20% of the city's a population of 75,000, only 2% above Aceh Singkil, which ranks second among the poorest regions in Aceh. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate in Subulussalam City has also been on

the rise since 2012, standing at 8.25% and increasing to 9.85% in 2013 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2016). This means that the unemployment growth rate has reached 1.6% annually. The growth rates of unemployment and poverty are actually keeping pace with the population growth rate, which averages 2.41% annually. This means that the government has not been able to implement economic development programs for the people of Subulussalam.

The community must also reap economic benefits from all development activities carried out by the government. If this development principle becomes the foundation for every development activity, then it can be assured that the regional economy will grow and regional economic indicators will continue to improve. The community's rejection of the construction of the dampeng dance statue should not be responded to with issues of religious beliefs within the community, because from the perspective of material benefits and advantages, this development can actually be postponed or even canceled without causing any problems. This issue reflects that many people in Subulussalam are still positioned at the lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, particularly physiological and safety needs. Therefore, fulfilling these fundamental needs should be prioritized in regional development policies (Maslow, 1954).

Reviving the art of dampeng dance as part of the local cultural heritage is a positive effort, but building a dampeng statue does not yet have sufficient justification at this time, both from the perspective of the community and the economy of the city of Subulussalam. Initially, before the construction of this monument, the mayor at that time, Mr. Merah Sakti, wanted to show that the people of Subulussalam had their own arts and culture. The purpose of building this monument was the mayor's intention to ensure that the arts in Subulussalam would not disappear in the future. However, after the announcement of the construction of the Dampeng dance statue, most of the community and a number of MUSPIDA parties, namely MAA (Aceh Customary Council), MPU Aceh, DPRK, and local youth, firmly rejected this construction (Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama Aceh, 2013).

This rejection was also marked by a protest demonstration against the mayor, which was held in front of the Jamik As-Sylmi Mosque. In order to reach a mutual decision, the mayor of Subulussalam finally held a meeting to find a middle ground to resolve this issue. During the meeting, which was attended by several representatives of the community at that time, a mutual agreement was reached to revise the design of the Dampeng Dance statue. The original plan was for a three-dimensional statue made of cast resin and white cement, but this was revised or changed to a sculpture made of brass plates, which was then cast in East Java. After the completion of this monument, there was no unrest among the community regarding the existence of the Tari Dampeng Monument. As the author asked both sources regarding the current Dampeng Dance Monument, Mr. Damhuri did not object or disagree, but rather said that the existence of the Dampeng Dance Monument is a manifestation of the culture of Aceh Singkil itself, and that culture knows no territorial or administrative boundaries. Now, the existence of the Dampeng Dance Monument, which has been sealed off to prevent vandalism,

stands in the middle of the city's traffic and no longer causes any problems for the people of Subulussalam itself.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the Dampeng dance is not merely a form of traditional performance, but a meaningful cultural medium that plays a vital role in preserving and transmitting character education values within the Subulussalam community. The findings demonstrate that the Dampeng dance contains three primary dimensions of character values, namely moral, social, and religious values, which are deeply embedded in its movements, musical elements, poetic expressions, and performance context. The circular formation of the dance reflects unity, togetherness, and a collective sense of responsibility in protecting honored guests, symbolizing strong social cohesion within the community. Furthermore, the incorporation of silat-inspired movements emphasizes vigilance, discipline, and readiness, which represent moral responsibility and the importance of safeguarding others. The presence of poetic recitations accompanied by traditional musical rhythms illustrates the emotional and spiritual aspects of the community, contributing to the development of inner values and reinforcing a sense of shared identity. In addition, the diversity of movements such as coordinated steps, body gestures, and spatial formations symbolizes the acceptance of differences and highlights the importance of harmony in social life. The use of colorful costumes, including yellow, red, white, green, and black, further reinforces symbolic meanings related to leadership, courage, purity, and prosperity, reflecting the philosophical values upheld by the community. Overall, this research confirms that the Dampeng dance functions not only as a cultural heritage artifact but also as an effective medium for character building and the preservation of local wisdom across generations. Therefore, future efforts should focus on strengthening the integration of traditional arts into educational practices, enhancing cultural awareness among younger generations, and utilizing digital platforms to promote and sustain the existence of local cultural heritage in a modern context.

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How to cite this article:

Dumilah, R., Hanum OK, A., & Budianti, Y. (2026). Values of Character Education in Dampeng Dance at Wedding Ceremonies of the Subulussalam Community. *Journal of Educational Sciences*, 10(4), 1036-1045.