



Analysis of the Role of Riau Malay Cultural Education in Improving Student Morale in Schools

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Abstract

Local cultural education plays a strategic role in shaping students' character and moral values, particularly in societies with strong cultural traditions such as the Malay community of Riau. This study aims to analyze the role of Riau Malay cultural education in enhancing students' moral development through the integration of cultural values into the curriculum, extracurricular activities, school environment, and the roles of teachers and the community. This research employs a qualitative approach using literature review and descriptive analysis. The findings indicate that Riau Malay cultural education contributes significantly to students' moral development through the internalization of traditional values, habituation of polite behavior, respect for parents and teachers, and the strengthening of cultural identity. The discussion highlights that teachers, families, and the surrounding environment are key determinants of successful cultural education implementation. The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive framework that positions local cultural values not only as moral guidance but also as a strategic foundation for character education policy. The findings provide practical implications for policymakers and educators in developing culturally responsive education models that support moral education while preserving local wisdom in the era of globalization.

Keywords: *Malay Riau Culture, Cultural Education, Student Morality*

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INTRODUCTION

In research, it was stated that Indonesia is a society that has a variety of local cultures and technologies that can be developed in life. So that the culture in the form of wisdom towards nature does not become extinct, it is important to preserve these noble values. Noble values need to be instilled and socialized to students through the learning process. Based on the most recent data from the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency (BPS) through the 2020 Population Census, Indonesia is a country with a very high level of ethnic diversity, consisting of more than 1,300



ethnic groups spread across various regions. Each ethnic group possesses distinctive local wisdom, encompassing worldviews, knowledge systems, and strategies for problem-solving and fulfilling daily needs. Therefore, to enhance the relevance and meaningfulness of learning for students, local wisdom values should be systematically integrated into the learning process.

Riau is one of the provinces in Indonesia that is rich in Malay customs and traditions, encompassing various forms such as arts, traditional ceremonies, clothing, architecture, and customary law. Culture plays a crucial role as it represents the identity of individuals and communities and constitutes a form of heritage that must be preserved (Soraya, 2022). Moreover, culture reflects the character of individuals and groups, shaping their personalities and social behavior (Arkas, 2022). The values embedded in Riau Malay culture strongly reflect Islamic principles, as Malay traditions are grounded in the concept of “custom based on Islamic law and Islamic law based on the Qur’an,” highlighting the deep integration of Islam within the cultural life of the community. This cultural foundation positions Riau Malay culture as a potential moral and social resource for contributing to a peaceful, just, and prosperous Indonesian society (Darmansyah, 2022).

However, despite the recognized importance of Riau Malay culture, existing studies have predominantly focused on descriptive cultural preservation or historical perspectives, with limited attention to how these cultural values are systematically integrated into educational practices and contribute to students’ moral development (Adnan, 2022). As a result, there remains a research gap in understanding the strategic role of Riau Malay cultural values as a foundation for character education within formal schooling contexts (Sufa, 2021). Addressing this gap is essential to strengthen national identity through regional diversity and to support the sustainable development of local cultural identity within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI).

Malay culture has become a strong identity in the traditions of the people in Riau Province (Saputra R. e., 2025). The strength of this tradition makes Malay culture one of the visions and missions of the Riau Provincial government in developing its territory, namely "The realization of Riau Province as the center of Malay economy and culture in a religious, prosperous society in Southeast Asia in 2020". Riau's vision is manifested in Regional Regulation No. 36 of 2001 which forms the basis for development in Riau until now. With the emergence of the Riau Vision 2020, the goal of development is to make Riau preserve Malay culture, even with the greater goal of making Riau the center in Southeast Asia. Thus, Malay

culture becomes the spirit and spirit in every step of development in this Lancang Kuning land area.

Malay history is thick with tradition so that students must study it well and carefully. By studying Malay history, it can take part in the development of students' character in their lives (Apriyani, 2024). The Riau Malay community has a rich and diverse cultural heritage, one of which is the motif of artworks that reflect local values, beliefs, and wisdom. Malay artworks cannot be separated from the challenges faced in the modern era (Azizan, 2022). Some of the things that are starting to erode in the Malay land include: The Loss of Traditional Motifs, Malay motifs that are commonly found in traditional fabrics, furniture, or home decorations are now increasingly rarely used. Then the change in interest in traditional dance, traditional Malay dances such as Zapin, Joget, or Inang, which used to be an integral part of traditional ceremonies and community celebrations, are now increasingly displaced by modern and contemporary dances.

Lack of Appreciation for Carving: Malay carving which is loaded with aesthetic and symbolism values has also experienced a decline in appreciation (Putri, Relevansi Pendidikan Islam Berbasis Melayu di Era Media Sosial: Integrasi Adab dan Teknologi: Penelitian, 2025). Modern houses rarely use traditional carved elements, and many people prefer modern construction materials that are more practical and efficient (Purnomo, 2024). In order to realize lucky, virtuous, intelligent, and commendable human beings, the Malays passed on their guidance in various ways, both through verbal expressions and through examples and examples. The weakening transmission of Riau Malay cultural values has increasingly reduced students' exposure to local moral teachings that traditionally guide behavior, attitudes, and social interactions (Saputra, 2024). As oral traditions and everyday cultural practices are less frequently introduced within families and schools, students experience limited opportunities to internalize values such as respect for elders, social responsibility, and communal harmony (Azkiya, 2025). This decline does not merely affect the preservation of cultural expressions but has direct implications for students' moral development, particularly in shaping character and ethical conduct. Therefore, the diminishing presence of Riau Malay cultural values in students' daily lives highlights the urgency of integrating local cultural education into formal learning contexts to strengthen moral education and cultural identity (Reinaldy, 2024).

In this study, it is concluded that the important role of Riau Malay Cultural Education, commonly known as BMR, is very important to be applied in schools. This opinion is in line with the findings (Husna, 2025) which states that the urgency of strengthening local cultural values in education is getting higher, considering that

the young generation is under pressure from global information flows that can erode the noble values of their nation (Novriansyah, 2024). Therefore, learning based on local culture is not only a form of preservation, but also an effort to form a generation that has an identity, national spirit, and good morals in accordance with Islamic values, especially in the subject of Riau Malay culture, especially in Riau province where the majority of the population is Malay. Based on preliminary observations conducted at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Al-Kifayah Pekanbaru in January 2026, several aspects were identified as critical for enhancing students' moral development. The initial observation involved classroom visits over five school days and interactions with 60 students and 5 teachers. One key finding was that students' exposure to local cultural values was limited, highlighting the need to strengthen Riau Malay Cultural Education within the learning process. The implementation of this cultural education aims to enhance students' moral development, increase their understanding of Malay customs and traditions, and provide moral guidance through various forms of Riau arts and cultural expressions.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research method using a normative-evaluative model. This model is designed to evaluate normative aspects, such as theories or concepts, within a qualitative framework (Wulandari, 2025). The data were collected through a combination of literature review, semi-structured interviews with teachers and parents, and classroom observations at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Al-Kifayah Pekanbaru. To ensure data validity, the study applied triangulation by cross-verifying information from different sources and methods, as well as member-checking with participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. The collected data were then systematically analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved coding the data into categories, identifying patterns, and interpreting the findings in relation to the research objectives. This approach allowed the researcher to provide a comprehensive depiction of the implementation of Riau Malay Cultural Education and its impact on students' moral development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Education not only develops cognitive skills but also plays a crucial role in shaping students' character and moral values. In the context of technological advancement and globalization, local cultural values serve as an important foundation for fostering moral development among young generations. This study is based on a literature review of 25 peer-reviewed articles and policy documents

published between 2015 and 2025, focusing on local content subjects (*mata pelajaran muatan lokal*) and the integration of Riau Malay culture in primary education. Local content subjects aim to equip students with knowledge, skills, and behaviors that allow them to understand their environment and community needs in accordance with local norms, supporting both regional and national development (Sukri, 2023). Previous studies indicate that each region possesses unique traditions, languages, cuisine, music, and traditional architecture (Sesspani, 2025). However, globalization and technological change present challenges to preserving local culture, particularly among the younger generation. Riau Malay culture, as a heritage rich in norms, values, and ethics, provides a relevant resource for character education. The reviewed literature shows that integrating these cultural values into school curricula can positively influence students' moral development (Safitri, 2023)

Internalization of Riau Malay Cultural Values in the Learning Process

The findings of this study indicate that Riau Malay cultural education plays a significant role in instilling moral values in students. Values such as politeness, respect for parents and teachers, mutual cooperation, and humility are consistently fostered through classroom instruction as well as other school activities. This aligns with the study by Pitriai et al. (2024), which found that the traditional Tari Inai dance conveys moral messages about how the Malay community adheres to and practices customary traditions in various activities, including wedding ceremonies and the application of Inai. In the school context, teachers integrate Malay cultural practices through morning ceremonies (*upacara adat*), student-led pantun recitations, traditional music and dance performances, and cultural project assignments, providing students with hands-on experiences to internalize these values. Teachers also utilize diverse learning media, such as folktales, poems, traditional games, and real-life examples, to reinforce the moral and cultural lessons in daily school life (Muskania, 2022).

The internalization of cultural values takes place through a process of habituation and example. Students who are often involved in activities based on Riau Malay culture tend to show better moral behavior. This is in accordance with the concept of character education which emphasizes the importance of the school environment and culture as a means of moral formation (Yunus, 2021).

Malay Culture-Based School Environment as a Media for Moral Formation

The analysis of the hidden curriculum in Riau Malay cultural education is both interesting and relevant. However, the discussion can be further strengthened

by comparing these findings with similar studies in other regions, such as Minangkabau, Bugis, or Javanese cultures, to clarify its theoretical position within the national context. For instance, research on Minangkabau cultural education emphasizes communal responsibility and matrilineal values, while studies on Bugis traditions highlight moral lessons through *passapu* (rituals) and social hierarchy, and Javanese culture often integrates character values through *tutur* (oral teachings) and traditional ceremonies. By situating the findings within this broader national perspective, the study can better illustrate how Riau Malay cultural education contributes uniquely to moral and character development in Indonesian schools.

A school environment that is full of cultural symbols and practices can be a powerful "hidden curriculum". When students get used to seeing and interacting with an environment full of cultural values, they begin to internalize it in their daily behavior. A supportive environment also reinforces the moral message that teachers convey in the classroom.

Challenges in the Implementation of Riau Malay Cultural Education

The study identifies several challenges in implementing Riau Malay cultural education, including the lack of structured learning resources, limited teacher cultural competence, and the influence of global culture, which has shifted students' interest away from local traditions. Teachers often rely solely on textbooks and lectures without interactive media, leading to passive students who perceive Riau Malay Cultural Education (BMR) as burdensome (Sesspani, 2025), a finding consistent with Chaerani major challenge is the limited in-depth understanding of Malay culture among teachers, as most are not of Malay ethnic origin. To address these challenges, policy-based solutions are recommended, such as providing targeted teacher training on Malay cultural content, developing digital and interactive learning media, and incorporating hands-on cultural projects in the curriculum. These operational measures can enhance teacher preparedness, student engagement, and the effective internalization of Malay cultural values in schools (Chaerani, 2023).

Although Malay cultural education has a significant impact on student morale, its sustainability needs to be supported by school policy support, teacher training, and the provision of modern and attractive teaching materials. The integration of technology in cultural teaching is also a necessity so that students remain interested and the relevance of cultural education is maintained (Hidayat, 2021). This method facilitates the process of cultivating character because the values of local wisdom that have been learned in previous environments, such as home and school, will help achieve educational goals (Alivia, 2025).

The Purpose of Applying Riau Malay Cultural Education in Learning

The results of this study conclude that there are several objectives in the implementation of Riau Malay Cultural Education in schools, which are as follows:

Instilling Malay Moral and Ethical Values

Riau Malay cultural education aims to instill moral values such as good manners, respect for parents and teachers, maintain self-dignity, and behave according to customary norms. These values are the basis for the formation of students' character in daily life.

Strengthening Students' Identity and Identity

Through cultural learning, students are expected to understand and love the Riau Malay cultural heritage so that they have pride in local identity. This is important so that students do not lose their identity in the midst of global cultural influences.

Preserving Local Cultural Heritage

The implementation of Riau Malay cultural education serves to preserve traditions, customs, language, arts, and noble values that have the potential to be lost if not passed on to the younger generation.

Forming Character of Discipline and Responsibility

There are many elements of Malay culture that teach discipline, hard work, and responsibility such as in the arts of dance, silat, pantun, and customs. Its application in schools aims to build students' character through habituation and direct practice.

Increasing Social Sensitivity and Mutual Cooperation

Malay culture emphasizes the value of togetherness, deliberation, and caring for others. Culture-based learning aims to foster social sensitivity, helpfulness, and family spirit in students.

Developing Social and Communicative Skills

Traditions such as rhymes, poems, and petatah-petitih train students in polite, structured, and meaningful communication. It aims to cultivate the ability to socialize well in a variety of situations.

Connecting Learning to Real-Life Contexts

Riau Malay cultural education makes learning more relevant because it is associated with the cultural environment around students. The goal is for students to more easily understand lessons through concrete examples from their own cultures.

Increasing Appreciation for Arts and Culture

Another goal is for students to get to know the art of dance, traditional music, language, and Riau Malay customs so that they have a higher appreciation for the art and cultural richness of the region.

CONCLUSION

Riau Malay cultural education has been shown to play a strategic role in shaping students' moral character in schools. Through the internalization of cultural values via teaching, modeling, and habituation, students develop politeness, respect, mutual cooperation, and humility. This aligns with (Putri, 2025), who emphasize that integrating Malay value-based education in the digital era is increasingly important given the evolving communication culture and learning patterns of younger generations. In Malay tradition, education focuses not only on knowledge acquisition but also on moral and social refinement, as reflected in *tata krama*, *adab*, and proper etiquette. A school environment emphasizing Malay culture functions as a hidden curriculum, naturally reinforcing character formation. Practically, these findings suggest that Riau Malay cultural values can be systematically integrated into primary school curricula through dedicated lessons, cultural activities, and project-based learning. Future research could further explore comparative studies between urban and rural schools or investigate how digital technologies can support the teaching of Malay cultural values, enhancing both engagement and moral development.

Nevertheless, the implementation of Riau Malay cultural education still faces challenges, such as limited learning resources, lack of teacher competence in the field of culture, and strong global cultural influence. This is supported by research (Puspita, 2023). where he found that the value system that has been built in Malay life must remain sustainable and find its momentum to return and become the norm in Malay life so that it can still face the challenges of the times. Therefore, policy support, teacher training, and the development of teaching materials that are attractive and adaptive to technology are needed.

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