



Ethno-Project-Based Learning as a Community-Based Education Model for Preserving the Cultural Heritage

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Received: 26 June 2025; Revised: 25 March 2026; Accepted: 30 March 2026

Abstract: Cultural heritage plays a strategic role in shaping local identity and strengthening learners' character. The Ethno-Project-Based Learning model is a project-based instructional approach that integrates local cultural values as sources of learning, innovation, and skill development. This study aims to examine the implementation of this model within a learning community that collaborates with cultural figures and the local society, focusing on the transmission of Topeng Malangan culture as part of the local wisdom of the Greater Malang region. This research adopts a qualitative case study approach. Participants include cultural practitioners, community members, and learners from various age groups. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. The findings indicate that: (a) Ethno-Project-Based Learning is implemented through culturally grounded projects such as mask-making, traditional dance, and folklore storytelling, enabling contextual and experience-based learning; (b) learner engagement emerges through intergenerational collaboration, where cultural figures, facilitators, and youth interact as co-learners; and (c) the internalization of cultural values, such as responsibility, solidarity, and cultural ethics—is reflected in learners' participation, attitudes, and creative outputs during the learning process. These findings suggest that the model contributes to the transmission of cultural heritage by fostering active participation, meaningful engagement, and the internalization of value within the learning community. In this context, Topeng Malangan serves not only as a subject of study but also as a medium for character formation through the appreciation of embedded moral and cultural values.

Keywords: ethno-project-based learning, community education, cultural heritage, cultural preservation

How to Cite: Widyaswari, M., et al (2026). Ethno-Project-Based Learning as a Community-Based Education Model for Preserving the Cultural Heritage. *JPPM (Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat)*, 13 (1), 73-87. doi: <https://doi.org/10.21831/jppm.v13i1.87708>



INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country rich in cultural diversity, encompassing customs, traditional arts, and indigenous knowledge systems that shape the identity and values of each region. Local culture is not merely a symbolic representation of community life but also a living repository of philosophies, moral values, and practical skills that must be sustained across generations. One of the most distinctive cultural heritages in East Java is Topeng Malangan, a traditional



performance art that integrates storytelling, music, dance, and handcrafted wooden masks. Beyond its aesthetic function, *Topeng Malangan* serves as a medium for transmitting ethical values such as responsibility, cooperation, perseverance, and wisdom.

However, the continuity of such cultural heritage is increasingly challenged by modernization, digital lifestyles, and the declining engagement of younger generations with traditional art forms. In this context, cultural preservation cannot rely solely on documentation or performative display, but requires educational processes that are participatory, experiential, and embedded within community life. This shifts the focus from preservation as an outcome to preservation as a learning process.

One approach that addresses this need is Ethno-Project-Based Learning (Ethno-PjBL), which integrates local cultural practices into structured, project-based learning activities in community settings. Rather than positioning learners as passive recipients of cultural knowledge, this approach engages them as active participants in exploring, producing, and sustaining cultural expressions. In Malang, Ethno-PjBL has been implemented within a community of practice dedicated to preserving *Topeng Malangan*, involving cultural practitioners, educators, and learners across generations. Activities such as mask-making, *karawitan* (traditional music) training, dance performances, and storytelling are not only cultural practices but also function as organized learning experiences.

Within this setting, the learning process is informal yet systematically organized, enabling the development of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor competencies. (Ekpenyong et al., 2023; Gramatakos & Lavau, 2019; Rogoff et al., 2016). More importantly, learning occurs through participation in socially and culturally structured practices, in which cultural bearers act as facilitators, guiding learners through experiential and value-based engagement. This indicates that community education in cultural contexts operates not only through participation but also through culturally regulated forms of interaction.

Previous research has affirmed the importance of community-based approaches in heritage preservation. Sadono et al. (2018) explored the transmission of *Wayang* through family and community enculturation in West Java. Subiyantoro et al. (2020) stated how the tradition of mask art in Bobung Village is passed down across generations through family, community, and school-based learning. Amalia & Agustin (2022) emphasized the role of ethnopedagogical methods in empowering learners through localized education. However, these studies tend to focus on cultural transmission as a social or educational phenomenon without sufficiently explaining how learning processes are structured, organized, and sustained within community contexts.

Thus, there remains a conceptual gap in understanding how project-based learning, when integrated with cultural practices, functions as a structured model of community education. In particular, limited attention has been given to how such approaches organize participation, regulate learning processes through cultural norms, and sustain intergenerational knowledge construction beyond episodic cultural activities.

This study addresses this gap by examining Ethno-PjBL as a model of community education in the context of *Topeng Malangan*. It investigates how project-based cultural activities are structured as learning processes, how they facilitate the internalization of values and participation, and how they support intergenerational knowledge construction within the community.

The novelty of this study lies not merely in combining project-based learning and ethnopedagogy, but in conceptualizing how cultural practices are reorganized into a sustained learning system within community education. By positioning *Topeng Malangan* as an active learning medium rather than an object of preservation, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how culturally embedded, project-based approaches can support both educational processes and the continuity of cultural heritage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Ethno-Project-Based Learning

The application of ethnopedagogy-oriented learning is essential, especially in Indonesia, a culturally diverse nation with a wide range of local wisdom and traditions. Without early efforts to embed local cultural values through education, the rapid growth of digital technology and globalized lifestyles may erode indigenous knowledge systems and moral frameworks rooted in local cultures.

Ethnopedagogy is defined as an educational approach that emphasizes the transmission of cultural values and indigenous wisdom of a specific ethnic group or community (Nováková et al., 2021; Sakti et al., 2024; Sugiarto et al., 2025). This approach positions local knowledge not merely as content but as a foundation for shaping worldviews, social behavior, and moral development within society. Ethnopedagogy fosters character-building and cultural identity while contextualizing learning within learners' lived experiences.

Rahmawati et al. (2020) and Ratna et al. (2024) argue that ethnopedagogy is a source of innovation in multicultural education. It empowers learners by integrating local values into educational practices, promoting transformative learning that connects cultural authenticity with pedagogical relevance. Ethnopedagogy thus becomes a bridge between scientific knowledge and the development of culturally grounded learning models.

According to Selasih & Sudarsana (2018) The marginalization of local wisdom in education is reflected in behavioral changes in everyday life, as pragmatic and capitalist values have begun to replace traditional cultural norms. This shift underscores the need to revitalize indigenous values through context-based educational models that restore the role of local culture in shaping social life.

Ethno-Project-Based Learning (Ethno-PjBL) is a practical manifestation of ethnopedagogy that engages learners in project-based activities centered on local culture. Through EPBL, learners explore, construct, and reflect on cultural practices through real-world projects. As noted Martawijaya et al. (2023) and Muliadi et al. (2025) EPBL helps learners internalize cultural values while developing a sense of ownership and responsibility toward the preservation of heritage. Such a model enhances motivation and participation, allowing culture to be experienced and sustained through collaborative learning.

In essence, Ethno-PjBL does not merely treat local culture as instructional material but as a living context that learners co-create and conserve through active involvement. This approach is especially relevant for preserving intangible heritage such as *Topeng Malangan*, as it integrates meaningful cultural experiences, community engagement, and educational empowerment into one holistic model of cultural transmission.

In this study, Ethno-Project-Based Learning is understood not only as a conceptual approach but also as an analytical lens for examining how cultural values are embedded in learning activities. Ethnopedagogy provides a basis for identifying how local wisdom is transmitted and internalized, while project-based learning offers a framework for analyzing learner engagement through participation in cultural projects. Therefore, EPBL is used to interpret how cultural knowledge is constructed, experienced, and sustained through active learning processes within the community.

2. Community-Based Education

Community-based education is an educational approach rooted in the needs, culture, and participation of local communities. It emphasizes learning that emerges from real-life issues and communal experiences, often outside formal schooling. (Yusuf et al., 2022). According to Belete et al. (2022) and Fauziddin et al. (2022) Community-based education is shaped by shared goals, mutual interests, and cultural commitments, where facilitators and learners

collaboratively engage in meaningful learning processes that directly relate to community life. This approach typically evolves through stages such as relationship-building, role-sharing, consensus-building, and sustained engagement in collective knowledge exchange and reflection.

In the context of cultural heritage, community-based education provides a flexible and inclusive platform where collaboration among cultural actors, facilitators, and community members occurs organically. This form of education addresses both educational and cultural gaps by fostering knowledge-sharing, emotional engagement, and skill-building through authentic, place-based learning. The communal setting enhances the co-construction of knowledge and supports the long-term sustainability of local values and traditions.

Hufad et al. (2019) highlight that the strength of community-based education lies in its ability to foster continuous, purposeful collaboration with cultural stakeholders, such as local artists and tradition-bearers, to enhance learning quality and cultural relevance. This model is especially vital in informal and nonformal education contexts, where intergenerational learning and experiential practices, such as storytelling, mask-making, and traditional performances, are central to cultural transmission.

The core functions of community-based education include gathering and disseminating localized knowledge, facilitating consistent interaction between community members and cultural figures, promoting participatory learning, and empowering learners to integrate cultural experiences into their everyday lives. These processes support not only cognitive and practical development but also cultural continuity and community resilience. (Desfitri et al., 2024).

In the case of *Topeng Malangan*, community-based education serves as a living educational system where cultural knowledge is created, practiced, and transmitted across generations. Through active participation in cultural projects, such as mask-making, dance, and *karawitan*, learners develop a deeper connection with their heritage. This supports the goals of Ethno-Project-Based Learning as a model of community education: to preserve intangible cultural heritage, strengthen cultural identity, and empower communities to carry forward traditional values amid global change.

In this research, community-based education serves as a framework for analyzing patterns of interaction and collaboration among participants. It guides the interpretation of how learning is socially constructed through intergenerational engagement, shared responsibilities, and collective participation in cultural practices. The concepts of participation, collaboration, and knowledge co-construction serve as analytical indicators for understanding how the learning community sustains cultural transmission.

3. Cultural Heritage Preservation

Preserving local culture is not merely about safeguarding traditional artifacts or performances, but about maintaining the living knowledge systems and values embedded within them. The sustainability of intangible cultural heritage depends on its active transmission through generations and its continued relevance to contemporary community life. (Czesznek et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2021). In this regard, the process of cultural preservation must be integrated with community-based and educational approaches that empower people to engage directly with their traditions.

One such cultural expression that encapsulates moral, historical, and artistic value is *Topeng Malangan*, a traditional mask performance originating from Malang, East Java. *Topeng Malangan* combines storytelling, music (*karawitan*), dance, and handcrafted wooden masks, each of which carries symbolic and philosophical meanings. As noted Wahyuni et al. (2024) The stories embedded in *Topeng Malangan* contain moral teachings such as responsibility, honesty, wisdom, and social harmony. The performance is not only an art form but also a vehicle for character education and identity formation.

However, modernity and digital media culture have increasingly marginalized such traditional practices. Young generations tend to perceive local arts as outdated, and traditional

performance spaces are gradually disappearing. In this context, learning communities become essential agents of cultural transmission, particularly when they employ project-based learning, which allows participants to experience, create, and reflect on cultural content.

In the case of *Topeng Malangan*, integrating Ethno-Project-Based Learning into a learning community offers a promising model for sustainable preservation. Learners are not only introduced to the technical skills of mask-making and performing but also guided to understand the values and social functions behind the art form. This approach transforms heritage from something static into a lived, evolving practice, and strengthens local identity in an inclusive and participatory way.

In this study, cultural heritage preservation is approached not merely as an outcome but as a process that can be analyzed through learning activities. The preservation of Topeng Malangan is examined through indicators such as value internalization, continuity of practice, and the transformation of cultural knowledge into lived experiences. By integrating this perspective with EPBL and community-based education, the study analyzes how cultural preservation occurs through structured, participatory, and experience-based learning processes.

To integrate these perspectives, this study employs an analytical framework that connects ethnopedagogy, project-based learning, and community-based education. Ethnopedagogy is used to examine the transmission and internalization of cultural values, project-based learning is used to analyze learner engagement and experiential learning processes, and community-based education is used to understand patterns of social interaction and collaboration. These interconnected frameworks guide the interpretation of the findings, allowing the study to explain how cultural learning is structured, experienced, and sustained within the learning community.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study approach. This approach was selected to explore in depth the implementation dynamics of the Ethno-Project-Based Learning (Ethno-PjBL) model in the context of community-based education. Qualitative methods enable researchers to naturally capture social realities, including behavior, interpersonal relationships, organizational functions, and culturally embedded experiences. (Hennink et al., 2020; Yin, 2017). A case study is considered appropriate for this research as it allows for an in-depth examination of a community learning practice within a specific setting, namely, a cultural community focused on the preservation of *Topeng Malangan*. The researcher serves as the primary instrument for observing, understanding, and interpreting data holistically.

The research was conducted at Sanggar Asmorobangun, a cultural community in Malang Regency, East Java, which has consistently implemented intergenerational cultural learning practices centered on Topeng Malangan. The fieldwork was carried out over three months, with regular site visits to capture the continuity and dynamics of the learning activities.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their active involvement and relevance to the research focus. The selection criteria included: (1) individuals directly engaged in preserving and transmitting Topeng Malangan culture; (2) participants involved in designing or facilitating cultural learning activities; and (3) learners who actively participated in the learning projects. A total of 15 participants were involved, consisting of one cultural figure (aged 45), four community organizers (aged 25–30), and ten learners from different age groups.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Each interview was conducted in a semi-structured format to allow flexibility while maintaining focus on key themes. Participatory observation was conducted during cultural learning activities, including mask-making, dance rehearsals, and storytelling sessions, enabling the researcher to capture real-time interactions and practices. Secondary data were obtained from community documents, activity records, and archival materials.

To ensure trustworthiness, this study applied several validation strategies. Data triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. Source triangulation was also applied by involving participants from different roles (cultural figures, organizers, and learners). Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with selected participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. In addition, the researcher maintained reflective field notes to enhance transparency and minimize subjective bias during the analysis process.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles et al. (2018), consisting of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During data reduction, the researcher conducted open coding to identify key themes, including learner participation, value internalization, intergenerational interaction, and the implementation of E-PBL. These codes were then grouped into broader categories to develop meaningful patterns. Data display involved organizing findings into narrative descriptions, thematic matrices, and selected participant quotations to support analytical clarity.

In the conclusion and verification stage, findings were interpreted iteratively by comparing patterns across data sources and continuously revisiting the data to ensure consistency and credibility. This process enabled the researcher to construct a comprehensive understanding of how Ethno-Project-Based Learning operates as a community-based educational model for cultural preservation.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the study. All participants were informed about the purpose of the research and provided voluntary consent before their involvement. Participants' identities were kept confidential by using pseudonyms in reporting the findings. The researcher ensured that participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw at any stage without consequences. Additionally, the study respected local cultural norms and values during data collection and interaction within the community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. RESULTS

1. Implementation of Ethno-Project-Based Learning in Community-Based Settings

The Implementation of Ethno-Project-Based Learning (Ethno-PjBL) in community-based learning in Greater Malang demonstrates strong collaborative dynamics between cultural figures, local communities, and learners across age groups. The learning process focuses on projects that preserve the local Topeng Malangan cultural heritage through hands-on activities such as mask-making, traditional dance training, and folklore storytelling. This approach has proven effective in contextualizing learning, fostering cultural awareness, and enhancing active community participation.

The learning process unfolds in four main stages: (a) exploration of local cultural values, facilitated by local cultural figures; (b) planning and designing cultural projects, guided by community facilitators; (c) implementation of collaborative projects, such as mask-making workshops, traditional dance reconstructions, and folklore documentation; and (d) reflection and presentation of cultural works, conducted in community forums.

Learners are actively involved in designing, carrying out, and evaluating their projects, with support from facilitators and cultural resource persons. In addition to strengthening cognitive and psychomotor skills, this Ethno-PjBL model also fosters affective values such as cultural identity, pride, social responsibility, and intergenerational collaborative spirit.

The following are the thematic analysis results based on interviews, participatory observations, and documentation:

Table 1. Thematic Analysis of Implementation of Ethno-Project-Based Learning in Community-Based Settings

Main Theme	Subtheme	Quotes and Findings	Interpretation
Community Involvement	Collaboration between cultural figures and locals	“We want the younger generation to know the origins of these masks...” (Cultural Figure)	Involvement of local figures strengthens authenticity and cultural continuity.
Contextual Learning	Projects based on local culture	Observation: Activities such as mask-making, dance performances, and storytelling were conducted in the art studio in groups and within the local cultural context.	Real-life projects make learning more meaningful and contextual.
Cultural Identity Strengthening	Reflection on local values	“Now I understand the meaning behind the colors and shapes of the mask, and why it’s important to preserve. I used to think masks were just decorations.” (Learner)	Learners internalize local cultural values through reflective learning.
Skills Development	Artistic, cultural literacy, and teamwork skills	Products: Wooden masks with local symbols, classical Malang dance performances, and digitally documented folktales. Learners were involved in the production and presentation stages.	Ethno-PjBL promotes both hard and soft skills development.
Intergenerational and Inclusive Learning	Participation of children, youth, and the elderly	“I shared stories from my childhood and mask tales with the children. They loved listening and taking notes.” (Elder) Children also documented these stories with drawings and texts.	This model fosters intergenerational learning and promotes social inclusiveness.
Learner Role Transformation	From passive recipients to active agents	“At first I just watched. Then I helped make the masks and eventually started teaching the kids too.” (Learner)	Learning shifts from passive to participatory; learners become facilitators.
Implementation Challenges	Availability of tools and sustainability	“The challenge is finding traditional tools—not all of them are still available.” (Community Facilitator)	There is still a need for a stronger ecosystem and infrastructure to support cultural learning efforts.

The implementation of Ethno-Project-Based Learning (Ethno-PjBL) in community learning settings has proven effective at reviving local culture through collaborative, contextual learning. This model not only enhances learners’ technical skills but also fosters emotional connections to their cultural heritage. Its success greatly depends on the involvement of cultural figures, availability of learning media and spaces, and cross-sector support, including from local governments and educational institutions.

Ethno-PjBL emphasizes the direct involvement of community learners at every stage of the culturally based learning process.



Figure 1. Community learners' initial mask-making at Sanggar Asmorobangun

Figure 1 documents the early phase of the mask-making activity, in which learners, both beginners and advanced participants, actively carve wooden blocks. This process not only hones technical skills such as carving and coloring, but also instills a sense of responsibility for preserving local cultural values. This activity exemplifies Ethno-Project-Based Learning by integrating technical skills, cultural values, and contextual learning experiences. The project-based approach aims to spark enthusiasm among learners, foster an engaging, non-monotonous environment, and cultivate sustainable motivation to learn through meaningful, hands-on experiences.

At Sanggar Asmorobangun, the implementation of Ethno-PjBL showcases a strong integration of local cultural values and 21st-century skills.



Figure 2. Implementation of Ethno-PjBL at Sanggar Asmorobangun

Figure 2 shows a group of learners participating in a cultural practice activity, specifically the initial stage of making *Topeng Malangan*. This project reflects the application of Ethno-PjBL, in which learners are not only engaged in practice-based learning but also guided to understand the symbolic meaning of masks as cultural heritage. In this context, ethnopedagogy functions not merely as a method but as a value foundation that makes the learning process more contextual, innovative, and meaningful for the community's well-being.

Overall, Ethno-Project-Based Learning serves as a bridge between technical skill development and the transmission of cultural values. Initial activities, such as selecting and carving wood blocks, along with collaborative mask-making practices, demonstrate active participation by learners of diverse ages and abilities. This learning approach encourages not only the mastery of artistic skills but also a deeper understanding of the symbolic and moral values embodied in the *Topeng Malangan* culture. The integration of cultural values and practices, along with collaboration at each stage of the project, makes the learning process more meaningful and contextual. It raises awareness of the importance of preserving cultural heritage. Thus, Ethno-PjBL has proven to be effective in creating a holistic and transformative learning experience.

2. Learner Engagement and Intergenerational Collaboration

One of the main strengths of implementing Ethno-Project-Based Learning (Ethno-PjBL) in community-based learning is the emergence of active learner engagement and meaningful intergenerational collaboration. In the context of the *Topeng Malangan* cultural community, the learning process serves not only as a medium for transmitting local cultural values but also as a platform for active participation across age groups in project-based activities.

Learner engagement in this study refers to participation involving cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Learners are not only physically present but also demonstrate curiosity, interest, and critical reflection on the cultural values they learn and experience firsthand. This is evident in their enthusiasm during activities such as mask-making, learning traditional dances, and documenting folk stories through creative media.

Meanwhile, intergenerational collaboration is realized through educational interactions between older people (cultural elders, parents), youth, and children. This collaboration enables the natural transfer of cultural values, life experiences, and narratives. Older people not only serve as sources of knowledge but also as facilitators of values, while the younger generations become active, creative, and reflective cultural successors.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis of Learner Engagement and Intergenerational Collaboration

Main Theme	Subtheme	Quotes and Findings	Interpretation
Learner Engagement	Cognitive, affective, behavioral participation	"It was my first time carving a mask, and I wanted to learn the meaning behind its colors and shape." (Learner)	Learners engage actively and reflectively with cultural content.
Intergenerational Collaboration	Elder-youth-child interaction	Observation: Elders shared folklore while children listened and illustrated the stories.	Generational exchange fosters mutual respect and deep cultural understanding.
Cultural Value Transmission	Role of elders as cultural facilitators	"I told them how we used to perform the mask dance in my childhood." (Elder)	Elders act as cultural transmitters, guiding learning through lived experience.

Findings indicate that the Ethno-Project-Based Learning (Ethno-PjBL) approach successfully fosters comprehensive learner engagement, emotionally, intellectually, and socially. Learners of all ages do not merely act as passive recipients of information, but become active agents in cultural activities that hold educational value. This engagement is further strengthened by intergenerational collaboration, which naturally facilitates the transfer of values and lived experiences in relevant and contextual ways.

This model demonstrates that community-based learning is not only effective in developing skills but also in building social bonds, strengthening cultural identity, and creating a sustainable learning ecosystem. Therefore, learner engagement and intergenerational collaboration emerge as key indicators of successful learning in a vibrant and dynamic local cultural context.

3. Cultural Values Internalization and Heritage Preservation Outcomes

One of the key outcomes of implementing Ethno-Project-Based Learning (Ethno-PjBL) within the *Topeng Malangan* cultural community is the internalization of local cultural values and tangible contributions to heritage preservation. This learning model does not focus solely on producing artistic outputs but also emphasizes the meanings, values, and philosophies embedded in each cultural practice integrated into the project.

Cultural values internalization occurs when learners go beyond merely knowing about cultural content. They reflect, embody, and apply these values in their attitudes, actions, and

worldview. This process unfolds through direct engagement in cultural activities such as creating sacred masks, performing traditional art, and sharing oral narratives rich in moral and spiritual meaning.

At the same time, heritage preservation outcomes are evident in the collective awareness and initiatives by learners and communities to document, regenerate, and disseminate cultural practices to future generations. The cultural projects foster the creation of artifacts, documentation, and public events that reinforce the tangible presence of local culture.

Table 3. Thematic Analysis of Cultural Values Internalization and Heritage Preservation Outcomes

Main Theme	Subtheme	Quotes and Findings	Interpretation
Cultural Values Internalization	Reflection on moral, spiritual, and social values	<p>“When I was making the mask, I realized why the eyes were carved narrow—they said it symbolizes humility and avoiding arrogance.” (Learner)</p> <p>“The folk stories taught us not to be greedy and to respect our elders.” (Learner)</p>	Learners do not merely know cultural values, but begin to understand and internalize noble values in their actions and self-awareness.
Heritage Preservation Outcomes	Documentation, regeneration, and cultural performance	<p>“The children created their own storybooks from the folktales they heard. They will be displayed and read by their younger siblings.” (Facilitator)</p> <p>“We performed at the village hall, and many came. Now people know this culture is still alive.” (Cultural figure)</p>	Cultural preservation is realized through concrete projects: digital documentation, public performances, and intergenerational value regeneration among community learners.
Collective Cultural Awareness	Pride and responsibility toward heritage	<p>“I feel proud to be from Malang. It turns out our culture is unique and can teach valuable lessons to children and others.” (Parent)</p> <p>“I used not to care, but now I want to teach my younger sibling so they understand these stories too.” (Learner)</p>	The learning process nurtures a sense of belonging, pride in local identity, and active civic awareness for sustainable cultural conservation.

Findings show that Ethno-Project-Based Learning (Ethno-PjBL) not only impacts participants' skills and knowledge but also leads to deep internalization of cultural values and tangible practices of cultural preservation. This process enhances learners' understanding of local morality, strengthens intergenerational relationships, and promotes collective actions to safeguard cultural heritage.

This model has proven effective in bridging learning and preservation, values and actions, and the connection between older and younger generations within a unified learning community. Thus, Ethno-PjBL has strong potential as a sustainable strategy for culture-based education, particularly amid globalization and the erosion of local identity.

In the digital age, cultural preservation is not limited to direct practice but also involves strengthening the presence of culture in virtual spaces.



Figure 3. Promoting *Topeng Malangan* culture through digital platforms for international recognition

Figure 3 illustrates the outcome of a community initiative that introduces the *Topeng Malangan* culture to international audiences via digital media, including websites and other online platforms. The participation of foreign visitors in cultural activities, such as painting traditional masks, symbolizes the universal appeal of local culture.

These findings reveal that cultural preservation is no longer confined to local spaces; it can be expanded through effective digital communication strategies. The impact is evident not only in the increased visibility of local culture but also in the growing collective awareness among communities of the need to value and preserve their cultural heritage. When outsiders show interest in our culture, it serves as a mirror, affirming that this heritage is worth protecting, transmitting, and celebrating.

B. DISCUSSION

The implementation of Ethno-Project-Based Learning (Ethno-PjBL) in the *Topeng Malangan* community reveals a distinct pattern of cultural learning that goes beyond symbolic transmission toward lived experience. Rather than merely introducing cultural values through instruction, the model embeds these values within sustained participation in cultural practices. Learners not only understand values such as respect, responsibility, and humility but also demonstrate them through concrete roles in collective activities, such as preparing performances, assisting senior practitioners, and maintaining discipline during rehearsals. This indicates that value internalization occurs through repeated social practice rather than isolated cognitive understanding. This finding aligns with social constructivist perspectives, which emphasize that knowledge and values are constructed through interaction and contextual experience. (Saif Husam Mohammed et al., 2020; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978), but extends them by showing how such processes are structured and regulated within cultural practices.

A key characteristic of this case is the integration of sacred and artistic dimensions into the learning process. The making of masks is not treated solely as a technical activity but as a culturally regulated practice involving rituals, symbolic meanings, and ethical constraints. This creates a layered learning experience in which technical competence, cultural meaning, and

moral discipline are developed simultaneously. Culturally responsive learning has been widely recognized for its role in shaping character and social awareness (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019; Gay, 2015). This case demonstrates that learning in cultural communities is not only responsive but also normatively governed by cultural rules that determine how knowledge is accessed, practiced, and legitimized.

Another important finding is the transformation of learners from passive participants into active cultural agents. Learners are not merely recipients of knowledge but contributors who reinterpret and reproduce cultural expressions. This is reflected in their involvement in producing folklore books, organizing performances, and sharing knowledge with younger peers. Such transformation reflects the principles of participatory heritage, where communities actively engage in preserving and redefining their cultural assets. (Iaione et al., 2022). However, this study further shows that when participation is structured through project-based activities, it generates a stronger sense of ownership, enabling learners to function not only as participants but also as cultural transmitters.

The intergenerational interaction observed in this study also demonstrates a more dynamic form of community-based education. Instead of a unidirectional transfer of knowledge from elders to younger generations, the learning process is characterized by reciprocal relationships. Younger participants contribute creativity and reinterpretation, while elders provide cultural legitimacy and guidance. This finding supports previous arguments that community-based learning fosters collaboration and the construction of shared knowledge. (Purnomo & Solikhah, 2021), yet it extends this perspective by showing how intergenerational learning operates as a co-constructive and sustained system rather than a linear transmission process.

More importantly, these findings allow Ethno-PjBL to be positioned more explicitly within the framework of community education rather than solely as a cultural preservation practice. The learning process observed in this study reflects key characteristics of community education, including collective participation, contextualized learning, and the integration of social roles. However, this case also suggests an extension of existing community education frameworks by showing that learning is not only socially constructed but also culturally regulated and continuously reproduced through practice.

From a conceptual perspective, this study proposes that Ethno-PjBL operates as a community-based learning system with three interrelated dimensions: (1) culturally embedded practice, where learning occurs through participation in meaningful cultural activities; (2) project-structured participation, which organizes learning into purposeful and collaborative tasks; and (3) intergenerational co-construction, which sustains learning through reciprocal relationships between community members. These dimensions provide a more specific articulation of how community education can function in culturally rooted contexts, addressing a gap in the literature that often treats community-based learning as broadly participatory without detailing its internal structure.

The context-specific nature of the Topeng Malangan community means that the identified patterns may not be directly transferable to other cultural or educational settings. Further studies are needed to examine how Ethno-PjBL operates across different community contexts and whether similar mechanisms of cultural regulation, project structuring, and intergenerational interaction are evident. Despite these limitations, the study offers an initial conceptual contribution by demonstrating how project-based approaches can reorganize cultural participation into a sustained learning system, potentially strengthening both value internalization and the continuity of cultural heritage. (Almeida & Morais, 2025; Shofwan et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION

Ethno-Project-Based Learning (Ethno-PjBL) functions as a culturally grounded learning model that engages learners as active participants in constructing knowledge through contextual, project-based activities rooted in local wisdom. In the context of *Topeng Malangan*, this model supports the revitalization of traditional practices while facilitating the development of character and social competence by integrating cultural values into learning processes. The findings show that values such as cooperation, patience, craftsmanship, and moral responsibility are not merely introduced conceptually but are practiced and reinforced through collective activities, including mask-making, performance preparation, and storytelling. Cultural figures play a dual role as tradition bearers and facilitators, enabling intergenerational learning through shared cultural experiences. Furthermore, the involvement of learners in hands-on activities, digital dissemination, and collaborative cultural practices indicates that learning extends beyond participation toward active contribution in cultural transmission. In this sense, Ethno-PjBL repositions the learning community from passive recipients to active agents in sustaining cultural practices. These findings suggest that integrating project-based learning with cultural practices can provide a structured yet flexible approach to supporting the continuity of intangible cultural heritage, particularly within community-based education settings.

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