



Integrating Creative Dance for Character Development in Early Childhood Education

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ABSTRACT

Although the importance of character building in early childhood is widely recognized, practical strategies for integrating it into daily learning remain underexplored. This study aims to examine the integration of creative dance into Early Childhood Education (PAUD) as a structured approach to character development, explored through the lens of learning planning and evaluation. Creative dance, as part of the creative arts, offers a developmentally appropriate approach to fostering social, emotional, and moral competencies. Using a qualitative case study approach, this research involved PAUD teachers implementing creative dance across six learning stages: warming up, exploring, skill development, creating, forming, and presenting. Each stage was analyzed for its potential to cultivate character values, including discipline, responsibility, tolerance, self-confidence, and cooperation. The findings suggest that creative dance can effectively support character development when implemented through planning and continuous evaluation. Its success largely depends on teachers' ability to align activities with children's developmental needs. This study highlights the need for targeted teacher training and institutional support to optimize the potential of creative dance in early childhood character education.

INTRODUCTION

Character building has become a crucial topic that needs to be addressed to keep pace with the era of globalization and its various impacts on a child's growth and development. Some essential character traits that children need to possess as a foundation for shaping their future personality and behavior include discipline, responsibility, honesty, self-confidence, cooperation, tolerance, independence, politeness, and creativity (Siswanta, 2017; Suwartini, 2017). A clear research gap exists in the lack of structured implementation and evaluation of creative dance as a means for character building in early childhood education. Character building is not merely a discourse but must be consistently applied in every educational institution, especially in Early Childhood Education (PAUD). Early childhood is a critical period of rapid growth and development that significantly shapes a child's future trajectory. Between the ages of 0 and 6 years, children optimally absorb fundamental life values (Annisa et al., 2023; Novianti Yusuf et al., 2023). Through positive habituation, social interactions, and direct experiences, the character can naturally form and become ingrained in the child (Mahardika, 2022; Mulianah Khaironi & Sandy Ramdhani, 2017; Rahmi & Hijriati, 2021). Thus, Early Childhood Education (PAUD) holds a strategic responsibility in laying the foundation for character development that will stay with the child throughout their life.

In practice, however, many teachers still face challenges in designing and evaluating art activities, including creative dance as part of character education. Some perceive art activities as merely supplementary or entertaining rather than as pedagogically meaningful tools. The lack of specific



training and guidance in integrating the arts into the character education curriculum contributes to the weak implementation of this approach in the field. As shown in a study by Nuraeni et al. (2025), the implementation of children's creativity faces several obstacles, including limited facilities, teacher competence, family support, and curriculum time. This highlights that teacher competence in implementing art-based learning is a key factor in the success of learning activities. Similarly, research conducted by Wahyudi and Julta (2025) indicates that the role of teachers in designing art activities remains suboptimal. The activities carried out tend to be inconsistent with the lesson plans (RPP), resulting in the implementation of dance learning in the Merdeka Curriculum falling short of the intended goals. Furthermore, a study by Budiman et al. (2020) reveals that academic competence and teaching skills are essential for integrating the arts into learning activities. These findings suggest that teachers' academic and pedagogical competencies continue to pose significant challenges to the effective implementation of art-based education.

Character building can be carried out through various activities that align with the child's world, encompassing physical, social, emotional, and moral aspects. One effective strategy for instilling character values is through an enjoyable and meaningful approach, such as the arts. Artistic activities enrich children's learning experiences not only aesthetically but also actively support various aspects of their development (Kurniawan, 2025; Steven et al., 2024; Telaumbanua & Bu'ulolo, 2024). Through the arts, children are encouraged to express their ideas and emotions freely. In the context of Early Childhood Education, art comes in various forms, one of which is creative dance.

Creative dance is a form of learning that allows children the freedom to express movement ideas collaboratively in groups (Wulandari et al., 2020; Wulandari & Agustin, 2019). Children are encouraged to independently create dance movements, explore space, time, and energy, and are motivated to express feelings, experiences, or ideas through body movements. Therefore, creative dance is not just an art activity but also serves as a means for children to learn how to express emotions, cooperate with their peers, follow rules, and develop self-confidence and a sense of responsibility.

The integration of creative dance into Early Childhood Education learning cannot be done haphazardly. It requires structured learning planning that includes the character goals to be developed, the methods used, as well as media and strategies appropriate to the child's developmental stage. Additionally, teachers must be able to conduct evaluations that focus not only on the outcomes of the dance movements but also on the process of internalizing character values throughout the activities. Essentially, learning planning and evaluation play a crucial role in ensuring the quality of both the process and outcomes of early childhood learning (Magdalena et al., 2020; Nadlir et al., 2024). Without precise planning, the learning process risks becoming unfocused and less meaningful for children. Meanwhile, learning evaluation serves as a tool for reflection and measuring the effectiveness of the learning process (Fitrianti, 2018). Evaluation enables educators to assess how well learning objectives have been met, identify areas of strength and weakness in the instructional process, and refine strategies or methods to enhance their effectiveness.

Several studies have explored dance learning in early childhood education. Some of these focus on how dance learning contributes to the development of children's creativity. For instance, Dewi and Yufiarti (2021) examined Play-Based Learning Activities for Creativity in Children's Dance Movements, focusing on enhancing children's creative dance movements through a play-based approach. Similarly, Handayani et al. (2024) emphasized the use of a free-expression approach in dance learning to develop early childhood creativity. Another study by Rakimahwati (2014) focused on character strengthening through dance education. Likewise, the research conducted by Amalia et al. (2024) investigated the effect of creative dance learning on building self-confidence in early childhood at Ibunda Kindergarten. However, neither study explicitly addressed the aspects of planning and evaluation in the learning process.

Therefore, further exploration of the planning and evaluation processes in creative dance learning as a means of character development is essential. The novelty of this study lies in its analytical focus, which not only positions creative dance as an art learning method but also as a concrete strategy for designing and evaluating character education in early childhood. Unlike previous studies, which generally highlight the benefits of art in child development, this study explicitly examines the implementation mechanisms of creative dance learning strategies integrated with character values. This



area remains underexplored in the context of early childhood education. Consequently, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of character education practices based on the arts, particularly through creative dance, and to serve as a foundation for formulating more practical, contextual, and applicable learning guidelines in the field.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, as it enables the researcher to explore in depth the processes of planning and evaluating creative dance instruction as a means of character building in early childhood. The case study design was chosen over other qualitative approaches because it provides a contextual and holistic understanding of the phenomenon, focusing on the direct experiences and perspectives of the subjects within their natural setting. Thus, qualitative research enables the researcher to understand the phenomenon contextually and holistically based on the perspectives of the subjects studied (Raco, 2018; J. Setiawan & Anggito, 2018; Sugiyono, 2014). The participants in this study were six PAUD teachers from three different early childhood education institutions that actively incorporate creative dance into their teaching practices and focus on nurturing children's character development. Informants are selected through purposive sampling with criteria including (1) teachers who have taught for at least two years, (2) have experience in designing creative dance activities, and (3) are willing to actively participate in interviews and observations. The number of informants is adjusted according to data needs and the principle of data saturation.

Data collection is conducted through three main techniques: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation is carried out to directly see how teachers design and implement creative dance activities in the classroom, as well as how the evaluation process is conducted. In-depth interviews are used to explore teachers' understanding of the objectives, strategies, and challenges in integrating creative dance with character values. The collected data is analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis process refers to the three main stages proposed by Miles and Huberman (Sugiyono, 2014). The researcher reduces the data by sorting, selecting, and simplifying relevant information based on the study's focus. At this stage, excerpts or narratives related to topics such as activity planning, learning implementation, character evaluation, as well as teachers' challenges and solutions begin to be identified. The researcher thoroughly reads interview transcripts or observation notes and then assigns labels or codes to parts of the data deemed important. The reduced data is then presented in the form of matrices, tables, or thematic narratives, allowing the researcher to more clearly observe patterns and relationships among categories. The researcher concludes by identifying the emerging patterns and themes and then verifies these conclusions by comparing the data or through triangulation. The researcher groups data based on emerging themes, such as activity planning, learning implementation, character evaluation, and the challenges and solutions faced by teachers. Data validity is ensured through source and method triangulation, extended observation, and member checking with informants. This study took into account ethical considerations. Each participant provided their consent after receiving an explanation of the research's purpose and process. Participants' identities were kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used to maintain anonymity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Character development in early childhood education

Based on the study's results, it was found that the majority of kindergarten teachers have a high awareness of the importance of character education from an early age. The teachers understand that character is the foundation for a child's development in various aspects of life, including within the family, at school, and in the broader community. The participants emphasized the importance of instilling core values from an early age, recognizing that traits such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and social awareness must be nurtured consistently to become lasting habits. One teacher expressed as follows.

"We always start the day with simple routines like greeting and tidying up toys, because that's



how children learn to be responsible and respectful.” Another teacher stated, “When a child tells the truth even after making a mistake, we praise them in front of the class. That’s where honesty begins to grow.”

These practical strategies reflect the educators’ belief that character education must be integrated into daily classroom activities to be genuinely effective. Although the understanding of the importance of character education is quite good, its implementation in the field still shows limitations in terms of teaching methods. Teachers generally continue to use conventional, one-way approaches. Character values are more often conveyed through lectures, direct advice, or verbal examples without actively involving children in the learning process. One participant admitted,

“We usually just tell the children to be honest or kind, but we rarely give them the chance to practice these values in real situations.” Another teacher shared, “Sometimes I remind them not to fight or throw trash, but I realize we don’t always follow up with activities that reinforce those messages.”

This makes character education passive and less engaging for young children. The predominantly verbal and instructive methods of delivery result in children not being fully engaged either emotionally or physically in character education. Early childhood is a developmental stage where children learn best through direct experiences, social interaction, and activities that engage their five senses. As one teacher reflected,

“Children learn more when they are involved when they plant trees, clean up their toys, or work together in a group.”

The lack of active involvement in the learning process hinders the deep and meaningful internalization of character values. The lack of active involvement in the learning process hinders the deep and meaningful internalization of character values.

Integrating creative dance for character development

This study found that only 2 out of 6 teachers use creative dance as a medium to instill character values in children. However, creative dance holds great potential in supporting holistic child development, including social-emotional aspects and the formation of strong character. Through dynamic body movements, free expression, and group cooperation, children not only learn values such as discipline, responsibility, tolerance, and self-confidence but also naturally and enjoyably develop their social and emotional skills. One teacher expressed,

“I actually want to use creative dance, but I feel less confident because I have never received special training. Besides that, time for activities like this is also limited.” Another teacher added, “We also don’t have adequate space to carry out dance activities, so we tend to choose teaching methods that are easier.” However, a teacher who has implemented creative dance said, “The children are very enthusiastic when invited to dance. They learn to cooperate, appreciate their friends, and freely express themselves. This helps them understand character values without feeling like they are being directly taught.”

Thus, the limited use of creative dance in character education is due to several obstacles, including the lack of teacher training, limited knowledge of how to integrate character values into artistic activities, and the perception that dance is merely a form of entertainment. Additionally, time constraints and inadequate facilities often discourage teachers from exploring creative and expressive teaching methods. These obstacles need to be addressed so that creative dance can become a more integral part of the character education process in early childhood education.

This study found that although all participants were aware of the importance of character education from an early age, their teaching practices remained dominated mainly by conventional



methods. Teachers generally relied on lecture-based approaches, direct advice, or verbal examples, which tended to limit active engagement from the children. These findings reveal a significant gap between teachers' awareness and their pedagogical implementation, highlighting the need for more dynamic and participatory strategies in early childhood character education. This indicates that the approaches used to instill character values in early childhood are still not effective. Learning activities should instead be conducted using adaptive and interactive approaches, making the experience more meaningful for the children (Ariandini & Hidayati, 2023; Dhobith et al., 2024; Revo Aditama Febrian et al., 2025).

In practice, the conventional approaches employed by the participants hold historical value and cultural familiarity. However, when evaluated in terms of their effectiveness within the context of child development, they still require further reassessment. This aligns with the characteristics of early childhood, in which learning activities should involve direct participation from children, social interaction, and multisensory engagement (Meilina et al., 2023; Ruhaena, 2015). Therefore, art-based learning can serve as an effective solution to make the learning process more participatory and creative, allowing character values to be instilled more deeply and sustainably.

Art in the context of Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is an inseparable part of the learning process. In practice, learning activities in PAUD are rooted in the principles of "learning with art," "learning through art," and "learning about art" (Fitria, 2019; Narawati & Ridwan, 2020; Ridwan et al., 2020). This highlights the relevance of integrating art into early childhood education, as it allows children to gain enjoyable and meaningful learning experiences while also serving as an effective medium for instilling character values. This was demonstrated by two out of six participants in the study who implemented creative dance, which, in practice, not only stimulates motor and cognitive development but also shapes children's personalities and fosters positive attitudes from an early age.

Unlike conventional approaches to dance education, creative dance is a learning model that gives children the freedom to independently create dance movements. Children are encouraged to transform their imagination into expressive dance forms, allowing them to explore and develop their unique movement vocabulary (Wulandari et al., 2021). This is closely related to strengthening the child's stimuli and responses during learning activities. As a result, the learning process becomes more active, enjoyable, and engaging, reducing the likelihood of boredom.

In practice, creative dance learning in early childhood education is carried out through several systematic stages, culminating in the child presenting their work as a whole. The learning stages include Warming Up, Exploring, Developing Skills, Creating, Forming, and Presenting (Ardiyanti et al., 2023; Wulandari et al., 2021; Wulandari & Agustin, 2019). Through each of these stages, children not only develop motor skills, imagination, and self-expression but also gradually build character traits such as discipline, self-confidence, cooperation, responsibility, and courage in expressing themselves to others.

Based on the research findings, one reason teachers have not yet implemented creative dance learning in the development of children's character education is their limited understanding of how to integrate this approach into lesson planning and evaluation. The success of a learning process is highly dependent on well-prepared, focused, and structured planning. In the context of creative dance learning in early childhood education (PAUD), teachers are expected to develop activity plans systematically and explicitly integrate character values into each stage of the learning process (Nurbani et al., 2024; A. Setiawan, 2014). To ensure that creative dance learning genuinely contributes to character development in young children, the learning steps and the character values to be fostered must be clearly and thoroughly outlined in the Daily Learning Implementation Plan (RPPH).

The process begins with the development of a learning theme that aligns with the overall educational goals and the specific activities planned for the students. These themes are typically adapted from the weekly or monthly curriculum themes implemented at the PAUD institution, ensuring consistency and coherence with broader learning objectives. Once the theme is established, the teacher proceeds to formulate clear and measurable learning objectives that encompass both dance instruction and the targeted character values to be developed, such as discipline, cooperation, and self-confidence.

In this stage, careful consideration is given to selecting appropriate media, tools, and learning materials that support both the motor and affective aspects of the activity. These may include music, props, visual aids, or story-based scenarios that stimulate children's imagination and engagement. The



teacher then outlines a sequence of creative dance learning steps, starting with warming up, exploring, developing skills, creating, forming, and finally presenting the outcomes.

Perform Simple Movements

Just like the warming-up stage in dance learning, which serves as the initial phase and foundation before proceeding to more complex dance activities (Gilbert, 2002). At this stage, the teacher guides children through simple movements to warm up their bodies before engaging in more complex dance motions. Through this activity, children learn discipline by following the teacher's instructions. As stated by the teacher,

"When I start the class with simple warm-up routines, the children become more focused. It's not just about getting ready physically it becomes a moment to practice listening, following directions, and caring for each other."

Additionally, children are encouraged to understand the importance of taking care of their bodies to stay ready for movement and avoid injury. In this context, the warming-up activity not only prepares the child physically but also serves as a fun and contextual medium for internalizing the character value of responsibility. Along these lines, Musfiroh (2014) states that meaningful learning for early childhood must be connected to direct experiences and activities that involve the child's emotions as well as social interactions.

Explore body movement

The next stage is exploration, which provides children the opportunity to freely and creatively explore various body movements. At this stage, children are encouraged to develop independence and curiosity while also fostering tolerance and mutual respect. These values naturally emerge as children experiment with different styles and rhythms, both individually and in groups. According to Purnama et al. (2021), effective early childhood education enables children to take initiative and make choices, thereby supporting the development of autonomy and self-confidence. Similarly, Dewi (2013) emphasizes the significance of social interaction in the learning process, where children acquire knowledge and skills through play-based exploration and peer collaboration in an engaging and supportive environment.

As part of this stage, the teacher included an activity in the lesson plan that invited the children to demonstrate tiger movements, using the stimulating prompt, "Let's see how you would move like a tiger." As a result, during implementation, the children were able to respond with a variety of creative movement expressions. This moment illustrates how children naturally learn to accept and appreciate differences in how movements are expressed.

From a pedagogical perspective, this activity reflects thoughtful lesson planning, in which the teacher intentionally selects a theme (such as animal movements) to stimulate imagination, creativity, and social interaction. The open-ended nature of the activity provides space for children to make their own movement choices, aligning with learning objectives that emphasize not only physical development but also the internalization of values such as mutual respect, empathy, and self-confidence.

Advancing Expertise

The next stage is developing skills, which focuses on strengthening the movement abilities previously explored. At this phase, children begin to be trained to master specific movement skills in a more directed, repetitive, and systematic manner. The teacher provides guidance to help children improve and refine their movements in terms of technique, coordination, and expression. This stage emphasizes the development of character values, such as perseverance and discipline. Children learn that mastering a movement requires consistent practice and patience. According to Hadian et al. (2022), Character is built through habits that are instilled repeatedly, accompanied by role models and reinforcement from the environment.

In the teacher's lesson plan, it was decided to repeat the "tiger" dance movement pattern five times. This was intended to help the children perform the movements more in sync, with more stable



hand positions and more confident facial expressions. According to the teacher who designed the lesson plan,

“At this stage, I want the children not to give up easily. I emphasize that everyone can do it as long as they’re willing to try repeatedly. Through this, the children learn discipline—not only in movement, but also in their attitude.”

Composing Dance Movements

The Creating stage involves forming a sequence of movements that have been developed into a complete dance routine performed in groups. This stage serves as a platform for developing decision-making skills, where children choose the movements that best express their ideas. Here, the character value of responsibility begins to grow as each movement choice reflects the child’s expression that must be respected and accounted for. Teacher A said

“I deliberately chose animal movements like the tiger for this session because it’s a theme that excites children. But more importantly, I wanted to see how they would express themselves differently. I noticed that even the shy ones became more expressive when we allowed them space to explore. The appreciation among peers really stood out.”

As stated by Fisherby Fisher (2008), creative activities such as art provide children with space to develop independent thinking and decision-making skills that reflect their values and self-identity.

Forming

The Form stage in creative dance learning represents a pivotal phase where children transition from spontaneous movement exploration to the deliberate organization of movements into a cohesive and meaningful dance sequence (Lestariani et al., 2019; Purdhani et al., 2022). At this point, learners are encouraged to reflect on the movements they have previously discovered during the exploration and development stages and begin structuring them into a performance-ready format. This involves making decisions about the order, repetition, and variation of movements to enhance expression and coherence.

Children typically engage in group settings during this stage, which promotes collaboration and shared creativity. They are guided to incorporate fundamental dance elements such as tempo (speed and rhythm), movement levels (high, medium, low), space utilization, and simple floor patterns (such as straight lines, circles, or diagonals) to enrich the aesthetic and narrative quality of their dance. Through this process, children not only learn how to compose a dance but also how to communicate ideas and emotions through structured physical expression. Through this process, children not only learn how to compose a dance but also how to communicate ideas and emotions through structured physical expression. Therefore, verbal communication skills also need to be enhanced as a complement to delivering messages more comprehensively (Sani et al., 2021).

Importantly, the Form stage serves as a critical moment for character development. Working collaboratively requires children to engage in active listening, respect others’ creative input, and practice tolerance when differences in ideas or preferences arise. Decision-making becomes a shared responsibility, encouraging mutual respect and a sense of collective ownership over the creative product (Irene Astuti Dwiningrum et al., 2024). The teacher intentionally facilitates these social interactions to ensure that both the artistic and moral dimensions of learning are addressed simultaneously.

Showcasing

The Presenting stage is the final phase in creative dance learning, where children perform their work in front of their teacher and peers. This moment is significant as it marks the culmination of the learning process and serves as a space for the child to achieve self-actualization. At this stage, children develop self-confidence and independence through individual practice. Additionally, they are encouraged to develop commitment and responsibility, as they are expected to perform according to what has been agreed upon and practiced together with their group. At this stage, the teacher planned for the children to showcase the results of their dance creations. The first group performed a tiger dance,



the second group acted as birds, and the third group portrayed monkeys. Teacher A said,

"I will be very proud to see how the children can perform with confidence. It's not about perfect movements, but about their willingness to show themselves and fulfill their group's commitment."

In addition to lesson planning, evaluation is essential to reveal the success of the planned learning activities. Evaluation activities need to be carried out continuously and systematically (Fitrianti, 2018; Magdalena et al., 2020). In its implementation, teachers need to strive to conduct direct observations of children's attitudes and behaviors throughout the creative dance learning process. Additionally, all forms of evaluation should be systematically documented.

Challenges faced by teachers in integrating creative dance with character education include limited time, lack of specialized training, and minimal institutional support in providing adequate media and space for movement. Despite these obstacles, teachers demonstrate creativity in overcoming limitations, such as by transforming classrooms into dance areas or using simple homemade musical instruments to accompany activities.

The findings of this study align with previous research that highlights the role of art, particularly creative dance, as an effective medium for fostering character values in early childhood (Marani & Rantina, 2023; Zannatunnisya et al., 2024). This study confirms that, when applied through an appropriate approach, dance education functions not only as a motor activity or form of artistic expression but also as a medium for shaping attitudes such as discipline, cooperation, and self-confidence. However, this study also extends existing knowledge by providing a deeper examination of the implementation challenges faced by teachers, particularly in the areas of planning and evaluation, which have not been optimally integrated with character values. These findings differ slightly from earlier studies that tend to emphasize program success without critically addressing the readiness and capacity of educators (Erisza Maudyna & Roesminingsih, 2023; Risdianto et al., 2024). Therefore, this research not only reinforces the importance of art in character education but also underscores the need for systemic interventions, including teacher training and the development of more practical and contextually relevant implementation guidelines.

CONCLUSIONS

Creative dance has proven to be an effective medium for shaping the character of young children in early childhood when properly integrated into the learning process. Creative dance has the potential to nurture key character values in young children, such as discipline, responsibility, cooperation, tolerance, and self-confidence. Its successful implementation relies on structured planning and ongoing evaluation. This study underscores the importance of viewing art, particularly creative movement, as a meaningful and engaging medium for character development.

To maximize its impact, it is essential to strengthen teacher capacity through targeted training, provide adequate facilities, and develop practical, context-based learning guidelines. Future research is recommended to explore the long-term effects of creative dance on children's behavior and character development, providing further insights into its sustained educational value.

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