

Silat Training as a Medium for Child Character Formation

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the process of character formation through silat activities based on the experience of an elementary school student named Raihan. Character education is the main goal of national education; however, its implementation in practice often emphasizes academic achievement rather than the internalization of values through real experiences. This study uses a qualitative approach with a single case study design to analyze how discipline, responsibility, and social maturity develop through long-term engagement in structured silat practice. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with coaches and parents, participatory observation during training and competitions, and documentation in the form of training schedules and activity notes. The results show that discipline is developed through consistent attendance, time management, and adherence to training structures. Responsibility grows through the habituation of equipment preparation, participation in maintaining training facilities, and the execution of mentoring duties. Social maturity emerges through Raihan's role as an assistant coach, which requires behavior management, emotional control, and leadership in social interactions. Family support and the silat community environment strengthen the continuity of the character formation process by fostering emotional stability and consistent habituation of positive attitudes. This research confirms that character formation occurs through a continuous and integrated experiential process within a supportive social ecosystem. Silat activities thus have strong potential as a medium for character education rooted in cultural practices among elementary school-age children.

KEYWORDS Character Education, Silat, Responsibility, Social Interaction



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INTRODUCTION

Education is a systematic process directed at forming the intellectual capacity and personal qualities of students in a sustainable manner (González-Salamanca et al., 2020; Kioupi & Voulvoulis, 2019; Murodova, 2020; Wu & Shen, 2016). The orientation of national education places character development as an integral part of educational goals, parallel to the mastery of knowledge and skills (Fägerlind & Saha, 2016; Pradana et al., 2020; Reimers & Chung, 2019; Sakban & Sundawa, 2023). The practice of formal education in various institutions tends to emphasize measurable academic achievement, while the dimension of value habituation is often reduced to normative instruction (Akbar & Septia, 2025). Character formation requires a process of value internalization that occurs through concrete experiences and the active involvement of individuals in real social situations. This process necessitates a learning environment that exposes students to rules and the consequences of their actions. Experiential learning activities provide opportunities for students to build moral awareness through repetitive practice (Atfal, Yuniar, Santoso, & Rantina, 2023).

The experiential approach to character education provides a stronger foundation than verbal or declarative instructional methods. Non-academic activities offer a learning arena that enables intense interaction between individuals, the environment, and the structure of rules (Fiolanisa, Lestari, Prasasti, & Santoso, 2023). These activities place students in situations that demand time management, self-control, and resilience to stress (Ainscough et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2024). Experiences that occur regularly create patterns of habituation that influence attitudes and behavior formation. Scientific studies of character education through non-academic activities still require explorations based on individual experiences that are documented in depth (Bestari, 2023; Hyun, 2019; Mar et al., 2025; Nasrudin, 2023).

Silat, as a traditional Indonesian martial art, has a training structure that demands high levels of discipline and consistent self-control (Akbar et al., 2025; Ediyono & Dzakiria, 2016). The silat training process places participants in a series of activities that are gradual, measurable, and repetitive over a long period. Each training session involves physical and mental challenges that require individuals to manage fatigue, emotions, and concentration. These characteristics make silat a meaningful medium for learning values that are integrated into daily practice (Arian et al., 2025).

Raihan's journey in silat activities provides an empirical illustration of the dynamics of character formation in elementary school-age children. Raihan began practicing silat out of personal awareness of his physical condition, which he felt was not optimal. The training process has been carried out consistently since the third grade of elementary school, both within the school environment and in the silat community. A demanding training schedule requires time management skills to balance academic responsibilities, religious activities, and training commitments. Raihan's competition experiences shaped his mental readiness through continuous self-evaluation. His initial competition revealed limitations that prompted reflection on technical ability and physical preparedness. This reflective process encouraged a gradual increase in training intensity and quality. Participation in subsequent competitions presented psychological challenges that demanded focus, emotional control, and attitude stability in public settings.

The urgency of this research is underscored by several converging factors in contemporary Indonesian education. First, concerns about declining character values among youth have renewed the emphasis on character education at all educational levels. Second, the limitations of formal schooling in effectively instilling values through didactic methods highlight the need for alternative approaches embedded in authentic learning experiences. Third, Indonesia's rich cultural heritage—particularly traditional martial arts such as silat—represents an underutilized resource for values education that connects children with their cultural identity while simultaneously fostering character development. Understanding how silat training contributes to character formation can inform educational policy and practice aimed at utilizing cultural resources for holistic child development.

The trust given to Raihan as an assistant coach extends character formation into the realm of social responsibility and leadership through direct practice in the training environment. This role requires behavior management, discipline, and consistency of attitude in social interactions, thereby reinforcing the internalization of responsibility. Family support sustains the training process through guidance that builds emotional stability and long-term

commitment. The relationship among family, coaches, and the silat community creates a structured social learning system that strengthens value habituation. Raihan's character transformation is reflected in his increased discipline, independence, responsibility, and confidence—qualities that have developed alongside his long-term training process. His national achievements represent the culmination of character development that carries meaning beyond competitive success.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study examines the process of character formation through silat activities based on the experience of an elementary school student named Raihan. Character education is the main goal of national education; however, its implementation in practice often emphasizes academic achievement rather than the internalization of values through real experiences. This study uses a qualitative approach with a single case study design to analyze how discipline, responsibility, and social maturity develop through long-term engagement in structured silat practice. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with coaches and parents, participatory observation during training and competitions, and documentation in the form of training schedules and activity notes.

The results show that discipline is formed through consistent attendance, effective time management, and adherence to training structures. Responsibility develops through the habituation of equipment preparation, participation in maintaining training facilities, and the implementation of mentoring duties. Social maturity emerges through Raihan's role as an assistant coach, which requires behavior management, emotional control, and leadership in social interactions. Family support and the silat community environment strengthen the continuity of the character formation process by fostering emotional stability and consistent attitude habituation. This research confirms that character formation occurs through a continuous and integrated experiential process within a social ecosystem. Silat activities have strong potential as a culturally rooted medium for character education among elementary school-age children.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Raihan underwent regular training on Wednesday nights, Friday nights, Sunday mornings or afternoons, and additional sessions at school every Saturday. The training schedule increased significantly ahead of major competitions, reaching up to five practices per week. This sustained pattern of attendance demanded high physical endurance and psychological commitment from a primary school-aged child. Managing time between silat training, school activities, and worship established discipline at the operational level of daily life and required careful time planning to balance academic duties and personal obligations without neglecting any aspect.

The habit of preparing training equipment one to two hours before departure reflected Raihan's awareness of time constraints and the discipline inherent in silat activities. Personal responsibility developed through his readiness to organize equipment and active involvement in maintaining training facilities. Raihan prepared his equipment independently and ensured its completeness before and after every session. He also collected remaining water and practice weapons and reported them to the coach as an expression of care for shared facilities.

This behavior reflected an understanding of responsibility extending beyond personal needs toward collective welfare.

Adherence to the training structure and the coach's instructions formed discipline in conduct and attitude. Raihan followed movement evaluations, technical corrections, and physical reinforcements as directed, even when the process required repetition and sustained effort. He received corrections related to stance power, speed, and stability as part of his quality-improvement process. Such obedience cultivated the ability to accept authority and control ego in long-term learning. Training conducted in suboptimal conditions—such as heavy rain, slippery fields, wet mats, or cramped spaces—further strengthened discipline and responsibility. Raihan participated in saving training equipment during sudden rain, demonstrating steadfastness and readiness to act amid unpredictable conditions.

A notable shift from external dependence to self-management became evident as Raihan grew more independent in managing attendance, preparation, and mental readiness without relying entirely on parents or coaches. This independence developed through experience handling demanding schedules, competitive pressure, and the additional responsibility of assisting the coach. Self-management thus emerged as the cumulative result of experiences that required consistency and maturity.

The continuous habituation of tasks fostered discipline and responsibility as integral parts of Raihan's personality. He engaged in routine training, independent practice, and mentoring duties as interconnected activities. Long-term repetition strengthened his attitude stability and ability to maintain commitment, demonstrating that discipline and responsibility evolved through the interaction between structured demands and gradually internalized awareness.

Social interaction within the silat community created a context for value learning through hierarchical and horizontal relationships. Raihan interacted closely with coaches, peers, and younger classmates during training, competitions, and organizational activities. These dynamics placed him in a social structure requiring compliance with group norms, behavioral regulation, and awareness of social role. Value learning occurred through consistent participation in structured and rule-based environments. The silat community reinforced value habituation through repeated, organized social interactions. Raihan participated in coordination meetings to arrange schedules, monitor attendance, and fulfill technical responsibilities—developing collective responsibility and group attachment. The internalization of values was reinforced by subtle social pressures that shaped daily practice behavior.

Family support formed the foundation for sustaining Raihan's character formation process. His parents provided assistance in scheduling, equipment preparation, and participation in activities such as briefings and competitions. This support fostered emotional stability, enabling Raihan to maintain training commitments over the long term. Family involvement also helped prevent conflicts between exercise demands and other childhood obligations.

The coach's trust in Raihan served as a catalyst for developing social responsibility and maturity. The coach entrusted him with the role of a training companion at school, which required managing younger students' behavior, maintaining order, and representing the coach

in practice sessions. This responsibility demanded consistency between learned values and social application.

The training environment itself functioned as an attitude-habitation system structured around rules, schedules, and stable behavioral expectations. Raihan faced direct consequences related to attendance, preparedness, and demeanor during practice. These mechanisms shaped behavior through consistent and controlled social experiences. Attitude habituation thus occurred through interactions between individual agency and institutional expectations that cultivated discipline and responsibility.

The process of character maturation through silat demonstrates a strong interrelation between individual development and the surrounding learning ecosystem. Raihan internalized the values of discipline, responsibility, and social care through sustained participation in an organized and supportive environment. The social context reinforced these values through physical practice and competitive experiences, confirming that character education achieves maximum effectiveness when embedded in a stable, long-term social system. The implications of these findings underscore the importance of strengthening character education practices rooted in cultural activities. Silat serves as an integrative medium combining physical training, social interaction, and family engagement within a single value-learning system. Effective character education thus requires environmental consistency to ensure deep value internalization. Cultural activity-based character education holds strong potential when supported by a structured and sustainable social ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

Silat activities serve as a medium for character formation among elementary school-age children through a structured and sustainable training process. Discipline develops through consistent attendance, effective time management, and adherence to established practice routines. Responsibility is fostered through the habituation of equipment preparation, participation in maintaining training facilities, and the assumption of social roles as assistant coaches. Social maturity and leadership emerge as the trainer's trust grows and the intensity of interaction within the martial arts community increases. The process of character formation unfolds through direct experience that requires long-term physical, mental, and social engagement.

Family support and the silat community environment create emotional stability and consistency of attitude, which reinforce the internalization of character values. These findings affirm that character formation does not occur instantaneously but develops through the accumulation of experiences integrated within a structured social ecosystem. Silat activities, therefore, hold significant potential as a culturally rooted medium for character education that aligns with the developmental needs of children.

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