

Ujub Sesaji as a Vehicle of Character Education: A Thomas Lickona Perspective on Javanese Buddhist Puja Bakti in Boyolali Regency

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: character education; Thomas Lickona; <i>ujub sesaji</i> ; javanese buddhism; puja bakti	Character education embedded in indigenous religious ritual remains underexplored, particularly within syncretic Javanese Buddhist communities. This study examines the pedagogical function of the <i>Ujub Sesaji</i> ritual in Javanese-language <i>Puja Bakti</i> among Buddhist communities in Boyolali Regency, Indonesia, using Thomas Lickona's tripartite framework of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The study involved five purposively selected informants drawn from three vihara congregations in Boyolali Regency: a regency-level Buddhist religious extension officer, a senior religious figure (<i>sesepuh</i>), a temple chairperson, a women's community leader, and a youth representative, all of whom hold active roles in sustaining Javanese-language <i>Puja Bakti</i> within their congregations. Employing a qualitative descriptive-hermeneutic design, the study observed the sequence and verbal content of <i>Ujub Sesaji</i> during <i>Puja Bakti</i> services and analyzed semi-structured interview data together with ritual texts, verbal formulas, and the symbolic meaning of ritual offerings. The findings suggest that <i>Ujub Sesaji</i> functions as a non-formal moral learning practice: symbolic offerings cultivate moral cognition; Javanese recitation and communal participation intensify gratitude, reverence, compassion, and humility; and repeated ritual practice habituates sincerity, cooperation, discipline, and intergenerational responsibility. The study extends the discussion of character education beyond formal schooling by showing how local religious-cultural rituals can support community-based moral formation.
Article history: Received 2026-05-27 Revised 2026-06-02 Accepted 2026-08-03	

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1. INTRODUCTION

Character education has become a major concern in contemporary educational discourse as societies face accelerated globalization, digital disruption, and weakening communal bonds. Within this context, moral education cannot be reduced to the transmission of rules or cognitive instruction alone. It requires lived experiences that enable learners to understand values, feel their ethical force, and enact them consistently in social life. Much of this lived experience, however, occurs outside the classroom, in non-formal and community-based settings such as religious rituals, family ceremonies,

and cultural traditions, where values are transmitted through symbols, affect, repetition, and intergenerational memory rather than through formal instruction alone. Character education, therefore, needs sources beyond formal schooling if it is to account for how moral life is actually learned and sustained in everyday community settings. Recent studies on character education show that local wisdom, cultural practice, and community-based learning have become increasingly important clusters in educational research, particularly because they offer morally meaningful contexts close to people's everyday lives (Aulia & Anshory, 2025; Ruswinarsih et al., 2025). The *Ujub Sesaji* ritual within Javanese-language *Puja Bakti*, the focus of this study, is one such community-based practice, and its potential as a vehicle of character education has not yet been systematically examined.

Thomas Lickona's theory of character education remains one of the most influential frameworks for analyzing this integrated process, and it continues to inform character education research and policy well beyond the classroom settings in which it was first formulated, by offering a common vocabulary for linking the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of moral formation. Lickona (1992) argues that character is formed through three mutually reinforcing dimensions: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Moral knowing refers to ethical awareness, value comprehension, perspective-taking, moral reasoning, decision-making, and self-knowledge. Moral feeling concerns conscience, empathy, humility, self-respect, self-control, and the love of goodness. Moral action refers to the competence, will, and habit through which moral commitments become visible behavior. The strength of this framework lies in its refusal to separate cognition, emotion, and practice.

However, much character education research remains concentrated on formal schooling and classroom-based pedagogy. This focus is useful but incomplete. Moral formation also takes place in non-formal spaces such as religious rituals, family ceremonies, communal worship, and cultural traditions. These spaces do not teach values only through explanation; they also teach through symbols, affect, repetition, bodily discipline, social participation, and intergenerational memory. For this reason, ritual offers a particularly rich site for examining how character is formed in culturally embedded ways. *Ujub Sesaji* is pedagogically relevant precisely because it performs several of these functions at once: it narrates moral content through verbal recitation, encodes it in symbolic offerings, and reinforces it through repeated communal practice, making it a dense site for examining how moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action interact outside the classroom.

The growing literature on local wisdom and character education confirms this direction. Bibliometric and systematic studies indicate that local culture is increasingly recognized as a resource for moral resilience and cultural identity (Arjaya et al., 2024; Rahmawati, 2025; Sakti et al., 2024). Studies of Javanese rituals such as *slametan*, *nyadran*, *larung sesaji*, and related ceremonial forms also show that ritual objects and verbal expressions function as layered moral texts that transmit cosmology, social ethics, respect, solidarity, and communal responsibility (Andriyanto et al., 2022; Maulana et al., 2025; Sholeh et al., 2025). Taken together, this literature reveals a layered research gap: many studies examine local wisdom and character education in general terms; some studies examine Javanese rituals as carriers of moral meaning; yet very few studies analyze a Javanese Buddhist ritual specifically through Lickona's tripartite framework of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action.

This gap is particularly visible in the study of Javanese Buddhism. Buddhism in Java developed through long interaction with Javanese cosmology, ancestor reverence, local language, and communal ritual aesthetics. The result is not merely canonical Buddhism in a local costume, but a living religious-cultural synthesis in which Buddhist ethics and Javanese symbolic worlds mutually shape one another. Recent work on Javanese Buddhist communities highlights the role of language, ritual invention, tolerance, social solidarity, and symbolic practice in transmitting religious values (Buaban, 2025; Praptiyono & Mega Singamurti, 2025; Rizzo, 2024; Sukma et al., 2025; Tania & Yatno, 2025; Vidya & Utami, 2024). Nevertheless, the *Ujub Sesaji* ritual within Javanese-language *Puja Bakti* in Boyolali Regency has not been systematically analyzed as a vehicle of character education.

The present study addresses that gap by examining how *Ujub Sesaji* functions as a culturally grounded moral pedagogy. Its novelty lies in three contributions: applying Lickona's tripartite framework to a Javanese Buddhist ritual; interpreting the ritual's symbolic offerings as moral-learning

media rather than as purely devotional or decorative objects; and positioning *Ujub Sesaji* within *Puja Bakti* as a form of non-formal character education situated outside formal schooling. The objective of this study is to examine how *Ujub Sesaji* cultivates moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action within the Javanese Buddhist community of Boyolali Regency, and to consider the implications of this case for character education theory and practice. The central question guiding this objective is: how does *Ujub Sesaji* cultivate moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action within the Javanese Buddhist community of Boyolali Regency? By answering this question, the article contributes to three fields at once: Buddhist studies, Javanese cultural pedagogy, and character education theory. It argues that *Ujub Sesaji* should be understood not only as devotional performance, but also as a living moral curriculum that integrates doctrine, affect, communal action, and intergenerational responsibility.

2. METHODS

2.1. Analytical Framework

This study is grounded primarily in Lickona's (1992) model of character education. The framework is used not as a rigid checklist, but as an analytical lens for reading the pedagogical structure of the ritual. Moral knowing is identified in the way ritual symbols communicate ethical concepts; moral feeling is identified in the affective dispositions cultivated through language, rhythm, reverence, gratitude, and communal participation; and moral action is identified in the disciplined practices through which values are embodied in repeated behavior.

This framework is complemented by theories of ritual and interpretation. Durkheim (2016) understands religious ceremony as a social mechanism through which communities generate collective moral life. Turner et al. (2017) add that ritual produces *communitas*, a shared affective-social experience that binds participants into a moral community. Gadamer's (2008) hermeneutics provides the interpretive basis for reading ritual texts and symbols as historically situated meaning structures. Together, these perspectives allow *Ujub Sesaji* to be analyzed as a symbolic, affective, and practical site of character formation. This analytical framework is applied to the data only after they are described on their own terms; the following sections first report the field procedures used to generate the data, before Section 3 turns to the framework-based interpretation itself.

2.2. Research Design and Site

The research employed a qualitative descriptive-hermeneutic approach. A qualitative design is appropriate because the study seeks to understand the meaning of ritual practice in its natural social and religious setting rather than to measure variables statistically (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The descriptive dimension maps the observable sequence of *Ujub Sesaji*, including its verbal expressions, ritual actors, symbolic objects, and communal actions. The hermeneutic dimension interprets the moral meanings embedded in the ritual's language, gestures, offerings, and doctrinal references. Sections 2.3 to 2.5 below detail, in turn, the study's participants, interview procedures, and approach to ritual-text analysis.

The research site was the Javanese Buddhist community in Boyolali Regency, Central Java. This community was selected purposively because it continues to practice *Puja Bakti* in the Javanese language and retains *Ujub Sesaji* as part of its liturgical pattern. Data were collected through participant observation during ritual events, semi-structured interviews with the participants described in Section 2.3, and documentary analysis of *Ujub* texts and supporting liturgical materials, as detailed in Section 2.5. This combination of methods enabled the study to connect what participants do, what they say, and how ritual texts encode moral values.

2.3. Participants

Participants were purposively selected from Javanese Buddhist congregations in Boyolali Regency on the basis of their active, long-standing involvement in *Puja Bakti* and *Ujub Sesaji*, and their capacity

to speak to complementary vantage points on the ritual. The final sample comprised five participants drawn from three vihara congregations: a regency-level Buddhist religious extension officer, a senior religious figure (*sesepuh*), a temple chairperson, a women's community leader, and a youth representative. Table 1 presents an anonymized profile of the participants, using the same identifying codes assigned in the original fieldwork records.

Table 1. Anonymized Participant Profile

Code	Category	Gender	Age Range	Years Involved in Puja Bakti
Why	Religious extension officer	Male	45–54	Lifelong member; active in temple administration since adolescence
Syn	Senior religious figure (<i>sesepuh</i>)	Male	55–64	Lifelong member; active in temple administration since adolescence
Sty	Temple chairperson	Male	55–64	Lifelong member; active in temple administration since adolescence
Smr	Women's community leader	Female	45–54	Approximately 30 years (since relocating to the area through marriage)
Gci	Youth representative	Male	25–34	Approximately 10 years (since relocating to the area through marriage)

Note: Codes correspond to the identifiers assigned to participants in the original fieldwork records and do not reveal participants' full names or other identifying information.

The researcher's position relative to the community is reported here in line with reflexive practice in qualitative ritual research, since this position may shape both access to ritual events and the interpretive lens applied to participants' accounts. In this study, the researcher's position relative to the Javanese Buddhist congregations studied was that of an outsider, rather than a long-standing member of the congregation. This outsider position meant that the researcher relied primarily on participants' own explicit explanations to access the symbolic meanings of *Ujub Sesaji*, rather than on prior insider familiarity with the ritual. This reliance is consistent with the explanatory, didactic mode of the *Ujub* recitation itself, in which officiants already verbalize the meaning of each offering for the congregation, as described in Section 3.1.

2.4. Interview Procedures

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews guided by an interview protocol covering five thematic areas: participants' general background and length of involvement with the congregation; the condition of the local Buddhist congregation (membership, livelihoods, and participation in religious activities); the range of religious activities held at the vihara; the history and rationale of Javanese-language *Puja Bakti*, including its origin, its sequence of recitation, and the meaning of *Ujub Sesaji*; and any additional reflections participants wished to add. A total of five interviews were conducted, one with each participant. Interview length was not fixed in advance; consistent with conversational norms appropriate to interviews with community elders and religious figures, each interview was allowed to flow at its own pace until all guide topics had been addressed to the participant's satisfaction. Interviews were conducted primarily in Indonesian, with participants frequently using Javanese ritual and cultural terms (e.g., *uborampe*, *ketulusan*, *gotong royong*) when explaining concepts specific to the ritual, reflecting participants' preferred language of everyday and religious expression. With participants' consent, interview responses were documented in written form during and immediately after each interview; Javanese terms and expressions used by participants

were retained in their original form and glossed in Indonesian and English for analysis, since direct translation risked losing their nuance.

2.5. Ritual Text Analysis

In addition to interview and observational data, the study analyzed the verbal text of the Ujub recitation used during Puja Bakti at the research site, specifically the standard Ujub text used during the regular weekly Javanese-language Puja Bakti, as recorded in the congregation's own ritual guidebook (*buku panduan puja bakti*) referenced by several participants. Javanese terms and expressions in the *Ujub* text were translated into Indonesian and English in consultation with the religious extension officer and temple chairpersons interviewed in this study, who are themselves responsible for explaining the meaning of each offering to the congregation during the ritual, and symbolic meanings were interpreted using Gadamer's (2008) hermeneutic approach, which treats ritual language as a historically situated horizon of meaning rather than a fixed code. Doctrinal meanings explicitly grounded in Buddhist teaching were analytically distinguished from local Javanese symbolic associations by cross-checking each interpretation against participants' own explanations of each offering's meaning, supplemented by reference to established Buddhist ethical categories described in the literature (e.g., Vidya & Utami, 2024), allowing the analysis to show where the two systems of meaning converge and where they remain distinct.

2.6. Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. Observational notes, interview transcripts, and ritual texts were first condensed into descriptive codes capturing what occurred and what was said, independent of any theoretical category. These descriptive codes were then mapped onto the three analytical dimensions of Lickona's (1992) framework introduced in Section 2.1: data illustrating how participants come to understand or interpret ritual symbols were coded as moral knowing; data describing emotional or affective responses during the ritual were coded as moral feeling; and data describing concrete cooperative, disciplined, or caring behavior were coded as moral action. Keeping this second-stage theoretical coding analytically separate from the first-stage descriptive coding allowed the study to distinguish what participants actually said and did from the interpretive significance later assigned to it through Lickona's framework. Trustworthiness was strengthened through methodological triangulation and member checking. Interpretive claims were cross-checked across observation, interview, and document data, then compared with participants' own explanations of ritual meaning.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Ujub Sesaji Ritual in Javanese-Language Puja Bakti

Ujub Sesaji is a central component of Javanese-language *Puja Bakti* practiced by Buddhist communities in Boyolali Regency. *Puja Bakti* itself is a communal Buddhist worship service, while *Ujub* refers to the formal verbal declaration of intention, offering, gratitude, and supplication. *Sesaji* refers to the arrangement of symbolic offerings placed within the ritual space. Together, *Ujub Sesaji* creates a performative moment in which speech, object, gesture, memory, and communal presence converge. In Geertz's (2017) terms, the ritual functions as a cultural system: its symbols do not simply represent beliefs, but also orient conduct and shape how participants understand the world.

The ritual normally begins with the preparation of offerings by community members. This preparatory work is already pedagogical because it requires cooperation, attentiveness, and shared responsibility. The officiant, commonly a senior practitioner or elder, then leads the *Ujub* recitation. Ritual leaders explained that during the recitation, they deliberately identify each offering aloud and state its spiritual and moral meaning so that the congregation can follow along. Thus, in the observed

ritual context, the ritual is not silent symbolism alone; it is accompanied by verbal interpretation that makes moral meanings available to participants across generations.

The *sesaji* typically consists of five main symbolic elements. First, two candles are used: a red candle, *lilin abrit*, associated with maternal blessing, and a white candle, *lilin pethak*, associated with paternal blessing. Together, they represent the moral light transmitted by parents. Second, clear water, *toya wening*, symbolizes purity of thought, speech, and conduct. Third, fruits, including hanging fruits or *pala gumantung*, symbolize the karmic relation between past action and present circumstance. Fourth, a circular flower arrangement, *sekar atepung gelang*, evokes impermanence and the cycle of life. Fifth, several forms of tumpeng express wisdom, the trials of life, and communal blessing. Participants confirmed that these five symbolic elements are consistently present in every performance of *Ujub Sesaji*, rather than varying by the type of occasion or celebration; the core symbolic structure of the offerings remains stable even as the surrounding liturgical sequence may be adapted to particular events, such as ancestral commemorations (*kiriman*, *pendak pisan*, *pendak pindo*, *nyewu*) or the annual *nyadran* ceremony.

In the observed ritual context, the use of Javanese is crucial. Language situates Buddhist teaching within the emotional and cultural world of the community. Sukma et al. (2025) show that Javanese in Buddhist devotion deepens spiritual meaning by connecting doctrine with local identity. In *Ujub Sesaji*, the mother tongue makes Buddhist values feel close, familiar, and affectively powerful. The ritual, therefore, reflects a syncretic but coherent religious pedagogy: Buddhist ethical concepts are transmitted through Javanese symbolic language, communal memory, and embodied performance.

As textual evidence of this verbal interpretation, an excerpt of the actual *Ujub* recitation is presented below: “*Dene pancoko ginagangan ingkang kapundet arupi abrit kalian pethak inggih mralambangaken abrit wahyu saking ibu, pethak wahyu saking bapa. Inkang mangejowantah dumadi titah ing madyo podo*” (Meanwhile, the offering placed in the vessel, manifested in the colors red and white, symbolizes that red is the divine spark (essence) from the mother, and white is the divine spark (essence) from the father. Which then manifests into a created being in this mortal world); *Inkang ongko kalih sarono sesaji tirto wening, inggih tirto jati, sarono sesaji tirto minongko pralambanging gesang ingkang tansah andap asor miwah nglembah manah dumateng sasomo samaning dumadi*” (The second is the offering of clear water, which is the true water. This water offering serves as a symbol of a life that is always humble, respectful, and compassionate toward all fellow living beings).

3.2. Moral Knowing in Ujub Sesaji

Moral knowing in *Ujub Sesaji* appears through the interpretation of ritual symbols. Lickona (1992) explains that moral knowing includes moral awareness, knowledge of values, perspective-taking, moral reasoning, decision-making, and self-knowledge. In the ritual, these capacities are cultivated not through abstract moral lectures, but through symbolic pedagogy. Each offering becomes a material sign that participants are invited to read, remember, and internalize.

Ritual leaders and elder practitioners explained that the red and white candles teach filial responsibility and intergenerational gratitude. Their light reminds participants that moral life is received from parents, ancestors, teachers, and the community. Clear water teaches purity and ethical self-discipline. It converts the abstract ideal of clean thought, speech, and conduct into a visible and sensory form. Fruits teach consequence and causality: present life is connected to prior actions. The circular flowers teach impermanence, helping participants understand that life must be lived with humility and awareness of change. The tumpeng teaches resilience, wisdom, and communal blessing, because food is shared and never understood as a purely private possession.

The temple chairperson (Sty) described the meaning of the offerings in the following terms: “*Ujub* means presenting the offerings together with their true meanings; that meaning is a teaching that guides the congregation’s life, once it is understood and inwardly absorbed”. A senior religious figure, the *sesepuh* (Syn), offered a similar reflection, drawn from years of involvement in the ritual: “*Ujub* means presenting the offerings placed on the altar, conveying them through offering verses that carry deep meaning corresponding to each type of offering presented”.

This symbolic interpretation demonstrates how ritual objects operate as moral texts. They model an ethical order and offer practical templates for conduct. Geertz (2017) argues that religious symbols both represent reality and shape reality by guiding action. *Ujub Sesaji* does precisely this. Participants do not simply see candles, water, fruits, flowers, and rice; they learn to see parental duty, purity, karmic consequence, impermanence, and communal solidarity. The material world becomes a medium of moral reasoning.

Within the community's Buddhist horizon, these meanings are also connected to familiar ethical categories such as *dāna* (generosity), *sīla* (ethical discipline), and *bhāvanā* (inner cultivation) (Vidya & Utami, 2024). The ritual, therefore, serves as a bridge between doctrinal understanding and everyday life: Javanese symbolic forms, such as candles, water, and tumpeng, give sensory and culturally familiar shape to these Buddhist ethical categories, while the categories, in turn, give the symbols a doctrinal grounding that extends beyond local custom alone. Even community members without formal Buddhist education can grasp ethical ideas because these ideas are mediated by objects, language, and practices that are already culturally recognizable. This confirms the argument of ethno-pedagogical studies that local wisdom supports moral understanding more effectively when it is embedded in lived experience (Milandar et al., 2026; Sakti et al., 2024).

3.3. Moral Feeling in *Ujub Sesaji*

Moral feeling is the affective dimension that moves ethical knowledge toward commitment. Lickona (1992) emphasizes that a person may know what is good but fail to act if the heart is not formed. *Ujub Sesaji* is especially strong in this affective dimension because it combines mother-tongue recitation, reverent posture, silence, rhythm, shared symbols, and communal participation. The result is not merely information about virtue, but an emotional experience of gratitude, humility, compassion, reverence, and inner peace.

The Javanese language intensifies this affective effect. Javanese contains registers, honorific forms, and moral expressions that naturally evoke respect and relational sensitivity. When Buddhist devotion is voiced in Javanese, doctrine becomes intimate rather than distant. Keeler (1984) and Sukma et al. (2025) help explain why local language matters: language is not a neutral container of meaning, but a cultural medium that shapes emotional depth, social position, and ethical self-awareness. In *Ujub Sesaji*, participants hear moral teaching in a language that belongs to their familial and communal world.

Participants described four affective states as especially prominent. First, reverence is cultivated toward the Buddha, ancestors, parents, elders, and the moral order. Second, gratitude is evoked through offerings of food, water, and flowers, reminding participants that life is received, sustained, and shared. Third, compassion is cultivated through prayers and intentions directed not only to the self but also to the welfare of all beings. Fourth, inner peace emerges from the ritual's meditative rhythm and focused attention, which participants associated with mindfulness, *sati*, sustained over the course of the recitation. These affective states correspond closely to the four *brahmavihāra* of Buddhist ethics: *mettā* (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (appreciative joy), and *upekkhā* (equanimity). The temple chairperson (Sty) reflected on the affective resonance of Javanese-language prayer in these terms: "Especially the *Ujub Sesaji*, or the offering prayer delivered in Javanese, feels more deeply touching to the heart...so that when the prayer is in Javanese, there is a stronger conviction that the prayer will be received".

Hoffman's (1996) work on empathy helps clarify the pedagogical significance of this process. Empathic concern grows through repeated emotional activation, especially when people encounter practices that direct attention toward the needs and dignity of others. *Ujub Sesaji* repeatedly activates such concern through verbal offerings, collective prayer, honor for parents and ancestors, and communal reflection. The emotional energy of the ritual, therefore, strengthens the motivational basis of moral action.

Collective ritual also amplifies emotion. Durkheim (2016) shows that ritual can generate a shared moral energy that exceeds individual feeling. Turner et al. (2017) similarly emphasize *communitas* as a moment of shared belonging. In *Ujub Sesaji*, synchronized recitation, shared posture, and common

symbolism produce an affective community. Participants feel that they are part of a larger moral order. This feeling is central to character education because it binds moral knowledge to identity and belonging.

3.4. Moral Action in *Ujub Sesaji*

Moral action is the point at which moral knowledge and moral feeling become visible conduct. For Lickona (1992), moral action consists of competence, will, and habit. Competence refers to the practical capacity to do what is right; will refers to the motivational strength to act ethically; habit refers to repeated practice until virtue becomes stable. *Ujub Sesaji* cultivates all three dimensions because it is not a one-time statement of belief, but a repeated communal practice that trains participants in concrete moral behavior.

Participants engaged in five observable forms of moral action. The first is cooperation. Preparing *sesaji* requires *gotong royong*. Community members gather objects, arrange offerings, prepare ritual space, and coordinate responsibilities. These acts rehearse solidarity, mutual respect, and social responsibility. The second form is discipline. Regular attendance at *Puja Bakti* and careful participation in *Ujub Sesaji* require commitment over time. The third form is sincerity. Participants are expected to perform gestures and recitations not mechanically, but with *ketulusan*, a sincere orientation of the heart.

The fourth form is caring for others. Before, during, and after the ceremony, community members assist elders, guide younger participants, share food, and maintain social harmony. Compassion becomes practice rather than a slogan. The fifth form is intergenerational responsibility. Elders transmit ritual knowledge to younger members by teaching the meaning of offerings, correcting ritual sequence, and explaining the moral language of the *Ujub*. In this way, the ritual preserves cultural memory while also forming new moral subjects.

The youth representative (Gci) reflected on how this intergenerational transmission is sustained in practice: "Younger generations, in particular, are given the opportunity and space to learn, so that this tradition can be preserved and made sustainable". He also noted that some younger members have not yet fully memorized the recitation or its accompanying songs, which he saw as a reason that continued training is needed so that the tradition is not lost.

This process resembles Aristotle's understanding of habituation, in which virtue is formed through repeated virtuous acts until it becomes a stable disposition (Crisp, 2014). *Ujub Sesaji* is a ritualized form of moral habituation. Over months and years, participants learn to cooperate, attend, give, respect, remember, and care. The values are not simply taught; they are practiced until they become socially expected and personally meaningful. Character is formed through repetition, but the repetition remains intelligent because it is supported by symbolic explanation and affective depth.

In Buddhist terms, this dimension corresponds to practical realization. Moral teaching must move from understanding into practice. *Ujub Sesaji* enables that movement by locating ethical values in public action. It turns gratitude into offering, reverence into posture, compassion into prayer, solidarity into preparation, and responsibility into intergenerational transmission. This is why the ritual can be described as a moral action in community form.

3.5. Intentionality and Interpretation in *Ujub Sesaji* as Character Education

A further question raised by these findings is whether *Ujub Sesaji* is intentionally used as a vehicle of character education or whether its pedagogical function is better understood as an interpretive outcome of the present analysis. The evidence supports a layered answer. At the level of ritual leadership, the practice carries a deliberate didactic intention: as shown in Section 3.1, officiants do not perform the recitation in silence but actively name each offering and state its moral meaning aloud for the congregation. This explicit verbal teaching indicates that, at least for those who lead the ritual, *Ujub Sesaji* already functions as a conscious instrument of moral instruction, even if it is not labeled as "character education" in the community's own vocabulary.

Among the wider congregation, by contrast, the moral effects of the ritual appear less as the product of an explicit pedagogical program and more as an emergent, cumulative formation that builds

through repeated participation, as described in Section 3.4. Most participants do not attend *Puja Bakti* with the conscious aim of receiving moral instruction; rather, moral knowing, feeling, and action accumulate gradually as a by-product of sustained communal practice. Read together, these two layers suggest that *Ujub Sesaji* is best described neither as a fully intentional curriculum nor as a purely incidental side effect, but as an instance of designed transmission embedded within lived practice: the ritual leadership intentionally encodes moral content into the recitation, while the congregation internalizes that content through repeated, embodied, and largely informal participation. This layered intentionality is itself a finding of theoretical interest, since it shows that non-formal moral education can operate simultaneously through deliberate instruction and emergent habituation within the same cultural practice.

3.6. Educational and Policy Implications

The findings have theoretical, pedagogical, and policy implications. Theoretically, the study extends Lickona's model beyond its usual school-based application. The case of *Ujub Sesaji* shows that moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action can be integrated within indigenous religious ritual. This does not mean that ritual should replace formal education, but it does show that character education has wider social locations than classrooms. Indigenous ritual can be understood as a non-formal pedagogy that integrates symbols, emotions, habits, and communal memory.

Pedagogically, Buddhist leaders, religious educators, and community teachers can use *Ujub Sesaji* more deliberately as a character education resource. The symbolic meanings of offerings can be made explicit; participants can be guided to reflect on the emotions generated by the ritual; and community discussions can connect ritual values to daily behavior. Such strategies would strengthen all three dimensions of Lickona's framework. They would also help younger generations understand that ritual is not empty repetition, but a meaningful practice of moral formation.

At the policy level, the findings support Indonesia's Character Education Strengthening program, *Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter*, established through Presidential Regulation Number 87 of 2017. The program encourages the integration of religious, cultural, and community values in character education. *Ujub Sesaji* represents precisely the kind of living local wisdom that this policy framework should recognize. However, such traditions are often underused because policy implementation tends to privilege standardized school programs over community-based moral resources. Stronger collaboration among schools, Buddhist communities, cultural institutions, and local governments could help incorporate indigenous pedagogical resources into broader character education initiatives.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that, analyzed through Thomas Lickona's framework, *Ujub Sesaji* functions as a non-formal character education practice through symbolic understanding, affective participation, and repeated communal action. Moral knowing emerges through the interpretation of ritual symbols; moral feeling emerges through Javanese-language recitation and shared ritual emotion; and moral action emerges through cooperative, disciplined, and intergenerational practice within the Buddhist community of Boyolali Regency. The study's main theoretical contribution is to show that Lickona's tripartite model, originally developed for formal school settings, can be meaningfully extended to non-formal, religious-cultural contexts, where moral knowing, feeling, and action are integrated through ritual rather than curriculum.

These findings carry policy relevance for Indonesia's character education agenda, suggesting that living religious-cultural traditions such as *Ujub Sesaji* deserve recognition as community-based resources for moral learning alongside formal school programs. The findings suggest that *Ujub Sesaji* can be understood as a culturally embedded form of non-formal character education, but further research is needed to examine how younger participants internalize these values over time.

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