



From Ritual to Character: A Tri Hita Karana-Based Morning Assembly Model for Holistic Character Education in Early Childhood

Mekel Putu Ayu Sekar Sari^{1,*}, Ida Bagus Putu Arnyana¹, Gede Wira Bayu¹

¹ Department of Early Childhood Education, Graduate School, Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Bali, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study aims to examine how a Tri Hita Karana-based Morning Assembly program functions as a holistic character education practice in early childhood education.

Methodology: A qualitative case study was conducted in an early childhood education institution in Bali, implementing a Tri Hita Karana-based Morning Assembly program. Participants were selected using purposive sampling and included teachers directly involved in Morning Assembly, along with the school principal as a supporting informant. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation, document analysis, and reflective field notes. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis to identify patterns across implementation structure, teacher mediation, internalization processes, and ecosystem reinforcement.

Main Findings: The findings reveal that Morning Assembly operates through a structured three-phase sequence—pre-activity, core activity, and closing reflection—systematically embedding spiritual, social, and ecological values into daily routines. Teachers play a central mediating role by embodying and interpreting Tri Hita Karana values in relational practice. Character internalization occurs through repeated exposure, emotional engagement, reflective facilitation, and consistent reinforcement within a culturally coherent ecosystem.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This study proposes a Holistic Character Education Model grounded in Tri Hita Karana, demonstrating how local philosophical wisdom can be operationalized into a structured pedagogical system in early childhood education. Unlike character education approaches that emphasize discrete moral instruction, the model conceptualizes character formation as a cyclical, ecosystem-based process that integrates spirituality, social harmony, and ecological responsibility into daily lived experience.

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Corresponding Author:

Mekel Putu Ayu Sekar Sari,

Department of Early Childhood Education, Graduate School, Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha,

Jl. Udayana No. 11, Banjar Bali, Singaraja, Bali, 81116, Indonesia

Email: ayusekarsari90@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is widely recognized as a decisive stage for building holistic character [1] because moral dispositions [2], [3], socio-emotional regulation [4], and value-oriented habits are largely formed through repeated experiences in everyday school life [5], [6]. Rather than being cultivated through moral

instruction alone, character development in early years is strengthened when values become “lived” through routines [7], [8], relationships, and emotionally meaningful participation [9], [10]. In this sense, a holistic character orientation aligns with contemporary perspectives on habit formation [11] and behavior change, emphasizing that stable character outcomes are more likely when values are repeatedly enacted in context, supported by cues, social reinforcement, and consistent modeling [12].

One routine with strong formative potential is the daily morning gathering (morning meeting/assembly) as a structured social ritual that sets the moral-emotional tone of the day [13], [14]. While many school-based character initiatives focus on curriculum infusion, evidence from teacher–student relationship research suggests that the moral and character “work” of schooling often occurs through daily interactions and relational climate [15], how teachers guide, respond, and model expectations in routine moments. Research on teachers’ experiences of classroom relationships underscores how relational quality shapes children’s self-regulation, participation, and moral comportment, making routine communal practices a strategic site for character formation [16].

In culturally rich contexts, character education becomes more meaningful when anchored in local wisdom systems that already organize communal life into coherent moral ecology. In Bali, Tri Hita Karana (THK), harmonious relations with the Divine (Parahyangan), with others (Pawongan), and with nature (Palemahan), offers an integrative moral framework connecting spirituality, social ethics, and ecological responsibility [17], [18]. Recent scholarship on local-wisdom-based character education continues to show that value formation is strengthened when schools translate cultural principles into concrete daily practices, not only as content to be taught but as norms to be enacted and experienced collectively [19], [20].

At the same time, the literature has tended to examine THK primarily through curriculum-level integration or broader school programs, while fewer studies foreground how THK values are “ritualized” within a recurring daily assembly in early childhood settings—where children’s learning is deeply embodied, relational, and affective [21]-[23]. Similarly, work on character education frequently acknowledges teachers as moral agents, yet phenomenological research reminds us that practices gain pedagogical force through teachers’ lived meanings [24]: how educators interpret routines as moral spaces, decide what to emphasize, and translate values into interactional moves children can grasp [25] (e.g., guided prayer, affirmations, reflective talk, and collective caring practices). Evidence from phenomenological studies of teacher role and moral modeling supports viewing teachers not merely as implementers of programs but as meaning-makers who transform routines into moral architecture [26].

Responding to these gaps, this study aims to: (1) examine the structured implementation of a Tri Hita Karana-based Morning Assembly, (2) explore teachers’ meaning construction of Parahyangan, Pawongan, and Palemahan values, (3) analyze the internalization processes of character values among children, and (4) develop a conceptual model of holistic character education grounded in local cultural philosophy. The rationale of this study lies in the need to reconceptualize character education as a relational, experiential, and culturally embedded process rather than a purely instructional one.

This study is significant as it contributes to the field of early childhood education by demonstrating how local philosophical values can be operationalized into structured daily practices that support holistic character formation. It also offers a conceptual model that integrates ritual structure, teacher mediation, internalization processes, and ecosystem context into a coherent framework. By repositioning Morning Assembly as a culturally grounded moral practice, this study provides both theoretical insight and practical relevance for developing meaningful and sustainable character education in early childhood settings.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using an intrinsic case study design. The qualitative orientation was selected because the research seeks to understand and interpret the subjective meanings constructed by teachers regarding the implementation of a Tri Hita Karana-based Morning Assembly as a holistic character education practice in early childhood settings. Rather than measuring outcomes or testing hypotheses, the study focuses on exploring lived experiences, value interpretations, and processes of character internalization that emerge within daily ritual practice. The intrinsic case study design was chosen because the research centers on a particular case that possesses contextual uniqueness. The Morning Assembly program at PAUD HEPI Kids Denpasar was not selected to represent a generalizable model, but because it demonstrates a structured and consistent integration of Tri Hita Karana values within daily institutional practice.

This design allows for an in-depth examination of “meaning-in-context,” capturing how ritual, culture, and pedagogical interaction converge in a specific educational environment. Conceptually, the study is informed by phenomenological sensibilities. It prioritizes the emic perspective of teachers as meaning-makers who interpret Parahyangan, Pawongan, and Palemahan within the lived structure of Morning Assembly. In this regard, the research does not treat Morning Assembly as a procedural routine. It approaches the activity as a socially and culturally embedded practice saturated with spiritual, relational, and ecological values. The analysis

is further supported by the theoretical lens of character education, particularly the dimensions of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action as articulated in the conceptual framework of the study.

The research was conducted at PAUD HEPI Kids, located at Jl. Waribang No. 30 A, Kesiman Petilan, Denpasar Timur, Bali. The institution operates under Yayasan Widya Kusuma Sari and provides Kindergarten, Playgroup, and Day Care services. It implements the Merdeka Curriculum enriched with a Deep Learning approach emphasizing mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning, aligned with the philosophy of Merdeka Bermain and Merdeka Belajar. The school's vision explicitly integrates Tri Hita Karana values alongside Pancasila and technological adaptability. This integration makes the institution a particularly relevant site for examining how local philosophical principles are operationalized within daily educational routines. Morning Assembly at PAUD HEPI Kids is implemented consistently and structurally as part of its character-building framework.

Data collection was conducted over a two-month period from December 2025 to February 2026, coinciding with the semester transition and an active period of character reinforcement within the school calendar. The timeline included initial orientation and informal observation, document identification, and intensive data collection through participatory engagement. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. In qualitative phenomenological research, informants are chosen based on their direct involvement and capacity to articulate lived experience. The primary participants consisted of teachers directly responsible for facilitating Morning Assembly activities. Supporting participants included the school principal and other educators involved in program design and supervision. Children were included as indirect subjects, not as interview participants, but as observed actors within the ritualized learning environment.

The study utilized multiple qualitative data sources to ensure depth and contextual richness. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and field reflections conducted during Morning Assembly sessions. Interviews focused on teachers' interpretations of Parahyangan, Pawongan, and Palemahan within ritual practice, as well as their reflections on value internalization processes. Participatory observation allowed the researcher to document the sequence of ritual activities, teacher-child interactions, emotional tone, gestures, collective responses, and environmental cues. Continuous field notes were produced to capture not only observable behaviors but also situational atmosphere and interpretive insights developed during prolonged engagement. Documentary sources were also examined to triangulate findings. These included the school curriculum, teaching modules, Morning Assembly standard operating procedures, children's developmental records, teacher reflections, activity photographs, and samples of children's work. These materials provided structural and institutional context for understanding how Tri Hita Karana values are formally embedded and practically enacted. Data collection adhered to qualitative research ethics, including informed consent, respect for participant privacy, and protection of children's identities. Through triangulation of interview narratives, observational evidence, and documentary analysis, the study generated a comprehensive dataset that supports the development of a contextually grounded holistic character education model.

Data were collected through prolonged engagement in the field, combining in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis to capture both the structural and experiential dimensions of the Tri Hita Karana-based Morning Assembly. The collection process was conducted over two months, beginning with orientation and informal observation to understand the institutional rhythm of the school, followed by intensive field immersion during the active implementation phase. This phased engagement allowed the researcher to move from surface familiarity toward interpretive depth. In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers and the school principal as primary meaning-makers of the Morning Assembly program. The interviews were semi-structured, enabling participants to articulate their lived experiences, pedagogical intentions, and philosophical interpretations of Parahyangan, Pawongan, and Palemahan within daily practice. Rather than restricting responses to predefined categories, the interview process encouraged reflective narration. Teachers were invited to describe how they design ritual sequences, how they interpret children's responses, and how they perceive the internalization of character values over time. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to preserve nuance, tone, and contextual meaning.

Participatory observation constituted a central data collection strategy. The researcher was physically present during Morning Assembly sessions, documenting the sequence of activities, the spatial arrangement of participants, gestures, vocal expressions, emotional atmosphere, and patterns of teacher-child interaction. This approach enabled the identification of subtle pedagogical moves, such as the modulation of tone during prayer, the use of affirmations, collective reflection, and environmental cues associated with Palemahan practices. Continuous field notes were produced throughout the process to capture situational dynamics and interpretive reflections that could not be fully represented through interviews alone. Such sustained presence facilitated a contextual understanding of how ritual repetition gradually shapes children's moral engagement.

Document analysis was undertaken to triangulate and contextualize observational and interview data. The researcher examined institutional documents including the curriculum framework, teaching modules, Morning Assembly standard operating procedures, developmental records, teacher reflection notes, activity photographs, and samples of children's work. These documents provided insight into how Tri Hita Karana

values are formally articulated at the institutional level and how they are operationalized in daily routines. The alignment or divergence between documented intentions and enacted practices became a significant analytical point. Throughout the data collection process, ethical considerations were strictly observed. Informed consent was obtained from the school, and confidentiality of participants, particularly children, was maintained. The combination of prolonged engagement, multi-source triangulation, and reflective documentation ensured that the dataset captures not only procedural descriptions of Morning Assembly but also the lived meanings, relational textures, and moral atmospheres that shape holistic character formation.

In qualitative case study research, the primary instrument is the researcher. This study positioned the researcher as the main human instrument responsible for data collection, interpretation, and reflexive analysis. Given the phenomenological orientation of the inquiry, the researcher engaged in conscious bracketing (*epoché*) to minimize prior assumptions and allow meanings to emerge from participants' lived experiences. Reflexive journaling was conducted throughout the research process to ensure analytical transparency and epistemological consistency. To support the role of the human instrument, four complementary research instruments were developed: (1) a semi-structured in-depth interview guide, (2) a structured participant observation protocol, (3) a document analysis framework, and (4) reflective field notes. All instruments were systematically aligned with the research questions and the conceptual framework integrating Tri Hita Karana (Parahyangan, Pawongan, Palembang), holistic education principles, and Lickona's moral development dimensions (moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action).

In-Depth Interview Guide, The semi-structured interview guide was designed to explore teachers' lived experiences and subjective meanings regarding the implementation of the Morning Assembly program. The interview protocol was organized into four analytical domains: (1) implementation patterns, (2) teachers' meaning-making processes, (3) value internalization mechanisms, and (4) the role of teachers and environmental context. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to describe how Morning Assembly activities were structured and how Tri Hita Karana values were integrated into daily routines. Probing techniques were used to elicit deeper reflections on how teachers interpreted spiritual practices (Parahyangan), social interactions (Pawongan), and environmental care practices (Palemahan) within pedagogical contexts. Additional prompts explored how teachers perceived children's behavioral transformations in relation to moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and subjected to iterative coding following Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis procedures.

Participant Observation Protocol, Participant observation was conducted using a structured observation protocol to capture behavioral manifestations and interactional dynamics during Morning Assembly sessions. Observations focused on three dimensions: (1) procedural stages of the assembly (pre-activity, core activity, closing reflection), (2) value enactment indicators aligned with Tri Hita Karana, and (3) children's observable moral actions. Specific attention was given to children's engagement in prayer and meditation (spiritual dimension), peer interaction and affirmation practices (social dimension), and environmental care routines (ecological dimension). Behavioral indicators included participation intensity, emotional expressions, spontaneous helping behavior, discipline, and collaborative responses. Field notes documented both descriptive accounts and analytical reflections, enabling the identification of patterns that later informed thematic categorization.

Document Analysis Framework, Document analysis was conducted to examine institutional alignment between normative planning and enacted practices. Documents reviewed included the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) of Morning Assembly, the school curriculum (Kurikulum Satuan Pendidikan), teaching modules, and reflective teacher notes. The analysis framework examined explicit references to Tri Hita Karana values, integration with holistic education principles, and alignment with character education objectives. Document data were triangulated with interview and observation findings to enhance credibility and confirm interpretive validity.

Reflexive Field Notes, Reflective field notes were maintained to document contextual nuances, emergent interpretations, and methodological decisions. These notes served both as an audit trail and as an analytical bridge between raw data and thematic abstraction. Reflexive entries were particularly important in ensuring that thematic development remained grounded in participants' experiences rather than researcher preconceptions. Overall, the instruments were deliberately constructed to generate rich qualitative data capable of producing four thematic categories corresponding to the research questions: (1) implementation patterns of Morning Assembly, (2) teachers' meaning-making of Tri Hita Karana values, (3) internalization processes of character values among children, and (4) the mediating role of teachers and environmental context. These categories ultimately informed the development of a conceptual model of holistic character education grounded in local wisdom.

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis as articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019). This approach was selected due to its epistemological compatibility with qualitative case study research and its capacity to generate patterned interpretations across experiential and contextual data. Rather than treating Morning Assembly as a procedural routine, the analysis sought to uncover how teachers constructed meaning

around the practice and how Tri Hita Karana values were internalized within a holistic character education framework. The analytical process was iterative and recursive, moving back and forth between data immersion, coding, theme development, and theoretical interpretation. Interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, and institutional documents were integrated into a unified analytical corpus to enable triangulated interpretation and conceptual coherence. The analysis began with deep familiarization with the data. All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, and observation notes were expanded into detailed descriptive accounts. During this immersion phase, the researcher repeatedly read the data to gain a holistic sense of teachers' lived experiences and the contextual dynamics of the Morning Assembly sessions. Reflexive journaling was conducted throughout this stage to bracket prior assumptions and maintain attentiveness to participants' subjective constructions of meaning. Early analytic memos captured preliminary reflections concerning spiritual enactment, social interaction patterns, environmental care routines, and children's moral behaviors.

Coding followed an open and flexible procedure that combined inductive sensitivity with theoretical orientation. While allowing meanings to emerge from participants' narratives, the coding process was informed by the conceptual framework underpinning the study, including the Tri Hita Karana dimensions of Parahyangan, Pawongan, and Palemahan, as well as Lickona's moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Segments of text were identified as meaningful units when they revealed teachers' interpretive reflections, described observable behavioral transformations, or illustrated contextual facilitation of values. Codes were continuously refined as new patterns surfaced across interviews and observations. As coding progressed, the researcher examined relationships among codes to identify broader patterns of significance. Data segments describing structured routines, ritual elements, and daily sequencing were examined alongside teachers' reflections about pedagogical intentions and children's responses. Through constant comparison, clusters of related codes gradually coalesced into candidate themes. Particular attention was given to how teachers' meaning-making processes intersected with observable child behavior and how institutional structures supported or mediated value internalization. The process of reviewing and refining themes involved returning to the full dataset to ensure internal coherence and distinctiveness across thematic categories. Each emerging theme was evaluated for conceptual clarity, analytical depth, and alignment with the research questions. Data extracts were revisited to confirm that thematic boundaries accurately reflected participants' experiences rather than researcher-imposed classifications. Some preliminary thematic groupings were collapsed or redefined during this stage to preserve analytical rigor and parsimony.

The final stage of analysis involved articulating clearly defined themes that captured the interpretative essence of the data. Four overarching thematic domains emerged: the patterned implementation of Morning Assembly grounded in Tri Hita Karana; teachers' lived meaning-making of spiritual, social, and ecological values; the processes through which children internalized character values; and the mediating role of teachers and environmental context in sustaining holistic practice. These themes were not treated as discrete categories but as interconnected dimensions of a dynamic pedagogical system. In producing the analytical narrative, the researcher moved beyond thematic description toward conceptual synthesis. The interrelation among structured ritual practice, reflective teacher agency, contextual mediation, and child moral enactment informed the development of a conceptual model of culturally grounded holistic character education. This model illustrates how Morning Assembly operates as a lived educational ecosystem in which spiritual consciousness, social empathy, and ecological responsibility are cultivated through repeated, meaningful engagement.

To ensure analytical trustworthiness, triangulation across data sources was maintained throughout the analysis. Interview data were cross-validated with observational evidence and documentary materials. Member checking was conducted to confirm interpretative accuracy, and an audit trail documenting coding decisions and theme evolution was preserved. Reflexive journaling further enhanced methodological transparency by foregrounding the researcher's positionality within the interpretive process. Through this analytical approach, the study generated an integrated understanding of how a culturally embedded daily ritual can function as a holistic character formation practice in early childhood education.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Structured Pattern of Tri Hita Karana-Based Morning Assembly

The findings indicate that Morning Assembly at HEPI Kids is implemented through a structured yet flexible three-phase sequence: pre-activity, core activity, and closing reflection. Rather than functioning as a ceremonial routine, each phase is intentionally designed to embed the philosophical dimensions of Tri Hita Karana—Parahyangan, Pawongan, and Palemahan—into children's daily lived experiences. This structure enables value integration to occur consistently and progressively, positioning Morning Assembly as a pedagogical space rather than a procedural obligation [27].

During the pre-activity phase, children engage in environmental preparation and spiritual grounding. Activities include cleaning shared spaces, arranging personal belongings, and participating in collective prayer and short meditation. The spiritual recitation "Loka Samastha Sukhino Bhavantu" serves as a reflective anchor

that invites children to cultivate gratitude and universal compassion. In this phase, Parahyangan is not introduced as abstract doctrine but embodied through repetitive practice that connects children to transcendence in a calm and emotionally regulated atmosphere. Simultaneously, simple acts such as tidying the classroom represent Palembang as a lived ecological responsibility.

The core activity phase emphasizes collective interaction and emotional attunement. Through singing, movement-based activities, circle time discussions, and positive affirmations, children are encouraged to greet peers, express appreciation, and participate in shared dialogue. Here, Pawongan becomes central. Social harmony is constructed through structured interaction patterns where teachers model respectful communication, active listening, and empathy. The integration of affirmation statements and short moral narratives allows children to associate positive emotions with ethical concepts, reinforcing the affective dimension of character formation. The closing phase centers on reflection and reinforcement. Teachers guide children to revisit the values practiced during the session, encouraging brief reflective dialogue about gratitude, cooperation, or care for the environment. Appreciation gestures, such as applause or verbal acknowledgment, function as social reinforcement mechanisms. This phase strengthens the internal continuity of the ritual by transforming experience into conscious awareness, thereby linking repeated action with reflective understanding.

Across the three phases, value integration occurs not through explicit moral instruction alone but through patterned interaction and emotional climate. The structured repetition of spiritually grounded, socially interactive, and environmentally conscious practices creates a predictable rhythm that supports children's sense of security and belonging. The structure itself becomes pedagogical, shaping not only behavior but also relational and spiritual orientation. The patterned implementation of Morning Assembly is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Structured Phases and Value Integration in Tri Hita Karana-Based Morning Assembly

Phase	Activity Structure	Embedded THK Values	Character Dimensions Strengthened
Pre-Activity	Environmental preparation, collective prayer, meditation	Parahyangan, Palembang	Spiritual awareness, responsibility, self-regulation
Core Activity	Singing, movement, circle time, affirmations, greetings	Pawongan, Parahyangan	Empathy, cooperation, confidence, emotional expression
Closing Reflection	Reflective dialogue, appreciation, reinforcement	Pawongan, Palembang	Moral awareness, gratitude, social responsibility

These findings demonstrate that the effectiveness of Morning Assembly does not rely on the intensity of individual activities but on the continuity and coherence of its structure. Each phase builds upon the previous one, allowing spiritual awareness, social interaction, and ecological sensitivity to emerge as integrated components of children's daily character experience. The patterned sequence thus operates as a micro-ecosystem of holistic character education grounded in local cultural philosophy.

Teachers' Meaning Construction of Tri Hita Karana in Morning Assembly

Beyond its structured implementation, the findings reveal that Morning Assembly at HEPI Kids is deeply shaped by how teachers interpret and internalize the values of Tri Hita Karana. The activity is not perceived merely as a scheduled routine but as a reflective pedagogical space where spiritual, social, and ecological values are intentionally embodied. Teachers consistently described Morning Assembly as "a foundation for children's daily character orientation," indicating that its meaning extends beyond procedural execution into moral and spiritual intention [28].

In relation to Parahyangan, teachers interpret the spiritual component not as formal religious instruction, but as cultivating inner awareness and gratitude. Collective prayer and short meditation are understood as moments of emotional centering that prepare children to enter learning with calmness and positive intention. Teachers emphasize that spirituality at the early childhood level must be experiential rather than doctrinal [29]. Therefore, prayer is facilitated through simple language, gentle tone, and repetitive structure that allows children to feel spiritual presence rather than cognitively analyze it. For teachers, this dimension represents the cultivation of "spiritual sensitivity" rather than religious compliance [18].

Regarding Pawongan, teachers interpret social interaction during Morning Assembly as an intentional formation of relational ethics. Greeting rituals, affirmation exchanges, and circle time conversations are perceived as foundational exercises in empathy and mutual respect. Teachers view themselves not merely as instructors but as relational models whose gestures, voice modulation, and emotional responsiveness shape children's understanding of social harmony. Several teachers emphasized that the success of Pawongan lies in consistency—children observe how adults resolve minor conflicts, respond to mistakes, and express appreciation. Thus, social harmony is constructed through patterned interaction rather than isolated moral advice.

For Palembang, teachers attach meaning to environmental care as early ecological consciousness. Cleaning routines and caring for classroom materials are framed as acts of respect toward shared space. Teachers interpret these practices as early moral responsibility rather than disciplinary enforcement. Environmental care is introduced as a collective duty that connects children to their immediate surroundings. The physical context of HEPI Kids—surrounded by temples, rice fields, and natural landscapes—further reinforces teachers’ perception that ecological awareness must be nurtured from daily lived experience. In their interpretation, Palembang is not an environmental lesson but a relational stance toward nature.

Importantly, teachers describe the three dimensions as inseparable. They do not treat Parahyangan, Pawongan, and Palembang as segmented values but as interdependent orientations that must appear simultaneously within daily routines. Morning Assembly is therefore understood as a convergence point where spirituality shapes emotional climate, social interaction reinforces empathy, and environmental care strengthens responsibility. This integrative interpretation reflects a holistic pedagogical worldview rather than a fragmented value transmission approach [30], [31]. The interpretative meanings articulated by teachers are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Teachers’ Interpretative Meanings of Tri Hita Karana Values in Morning Assembly

THK Dimension	Teachers’ Meaning Construction	Pedagogical Orientation	Character Implication
Parahyangan	Cultivating gratitude and inner calm through experiential spirituality	Emotional grounding before learning	Spiritual awareness, self-regulation
Pawongan	Building relational harmony through modeled interaction and affirmation	Ethical modeling and guided social participation	Empathy, cooperation, respect
Palembahan	Developing early ecological responsibility through daily care practices	Habitual environmental engagement	Responsibility, environmental sensitivity

These findings indicate that the transformative potential of Morning Assembly lies not solely in its structure, but in the teachers’ conscious mediation of meaning. The ritual becomes pedagogically powerful because teachers interpret it as a lived philosophy rather than a symbolic representation of cultural values. Through this interpretative stance, Tri Hita Karana shifts from abstract doctrine to embodied educational practice.

Internalization Process: From Ritual to Character Formation

The analysis demonstrates that the impact of Morning Assembly extends beyond observable routines toward a gradual internalization of values. Internalization does not occur instantaneously; rather, it unfolds through repeated exposure, emotional engagement, guided reflection, and behavioral reinforcement. In the context of HEPI Kids, the movement from ritual participation to character formation can be understood as a layered process where structured activity, teacher mediation, and emotional climate interact dynamically.

At the cognitive level, Morning Assembly facilitates what may be described as moral awareness development. Through short narratives, reflective prompts, and value-laden affirmations, children are introduced to concepts such as gratitude, cooperation, and environmental responsibility. However, these values are not transmitted as abstract rules. Instead, they are embedded in familiar routines that allow children to associate meaning with concrete action. Repetition plays a central role; as children encounter the same spiritual phrases, greeting patterns, and environmental practices daily, cognitive recognition gradually stabilizes into understanding.

At the affective level, internalization is strengthened through emotional resonance. Observations indicate that children display visible engagement during collective singing, affirmation exchanges, and shared prayer. The calm atmosphere created during meditation and the warmth of teacher-student interaction contribute to positive emotional association with moral practices. Emotional safety and predictability foster trust, enabling children to connect feelings of belonging with ethical behavior. In this sense, affect becomes the bridge between knowing a value and wanting to enact it.

Behaviorally, internalization becomes visible when children begin to initiate actions without direct instruction [32]. Instances such as voluntarily helping peers, reminding friends to maintain cleanliness, or participating attentively in prayer suggest the emergence of moral agency. These behaviors indicate that values have shifted from externally prompted compliance to internally motivated action. Reinforcement strategies—such as verbal appreciation, applause, or symbolic recognition—support this transition by strengthening the link between action and positive social feedback [17].

Importantly, the findings suggest that reflection serves as a mediating mechanism in the internalization process. The closing phase of Morning Assembly, where teachers briefly revisit the values practiced, functions as a moment of consolidation. Even simple reflective questions—such as asking children how they felt when

helping a friend—appear to deepen awareness. Reflection transforms repeated behavior into conscious experience, allowing children to connect emotion, action, and meaning in a coherent manner. The internalization mechanisms identified in this study are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Internalization Mechanisms in Tri Hita Karana-Based Morning Assembly

Activity Component	Internalization Mechanism	Developmental Dimension	Observed Indicators
Prayer & Meditation	Repetitive spiritual grounding and emotional centering	Spiritual awareness & self-regulation	Calm posture, focused attention, participation in recitation
Greetings & Affirmations	Modeled empathy and positive reinforcement	Social-emotional development	Initiating greetings, expressing appreciation, cooperative play
Environmental Care	Habitual responsibility through daily action	Ecological sensitivity & responsibility	Voluntary tidying, reminding peers about cleanliness
Reflection Session	Guided meaning consolidation	Moral awareness integration	Verbalizing feelings, connecting action with value

These findings indicate that Morning Assembly operates as a cyclical internalization system rather than a linear instructional event. Structure provides stability, teacher meaning provides direction, emotional engagement provides attachment, and reflection provides integration. Over time, this cyclical pattern supports the transformation of repeated ritual into embodied character orientation. The process reveals that character formation in early childhood is less dependent on explicit moral instruction and more reliant on patterned relational experience. Internalization emerges when children repeatedly encounter consistent value expressions within a supportive emotional ecosystem.

The Role of Teachers and the Ecosystem Context in Supporting Holistic Character Practice

The findings reveal that the sustainability of Tri Hita Karana-based Morning Assembly is strongly influenced by the role of teachers and the broader institutional ecosystem. While the structured phases and internalization mechanisms provide the procedural and psychological foundation, the consistency of adult modeling and environmental reinforcement determines whether values remain episodic or become embedded in daily practice. Character formation, therefore, emerges not solely from ritual repetition but from the coherence between instructional design and lived school culture.

Teachers function as primary mediators of value embodiment. Their tone of voice during prayer, responsiveness during peer interaction, and attentiveness to environmental care implicitly communicate normative standards. Observational data indicate that children closely mirror teachers' gestures and emotional regulation patterns. When teachers demonstrate patience, gratitude, and respect in spontaneous situations—such as resolving minor conflicts or acknowledging children's efforts—the values of Parahyangan and Pawongan are reinforced beyond the formal Morning Assembly session. This modeling function extends the moral influence of the ritual into the entire school day.

Moreover, teachers operate as reflective facilitators rather than authoritative enforcers. Instead of correcting behavior through punitive control, they frequently employ guiding questions and affirmation-based feedback. This approach supports children's autonomy while maintaining value consistency. The dialogical interaction style observed during circle time and closing reflection allows children to articulate feelings and recognize the relational impact of their actions. Through this mediation, teachers bridge structure and internalization, ensuring that Tri Hita Karana remains a lived orientation rather than symbolic reference.

The physical and socio-cultural context of HEPI Kids further strengthens the character formation process. The school's proximity to temples, rice fields, and natural landscapes provides tangible ecological and spiritual references. Environmental awareness is therefore not confined to classroom instruction but reinforced through daily visual and sensory exposure. Children observe rituals, natural cycles, and communal practices within their broader community, which amplifies the authenticity of Palembang and Parahyangan dimensions. The cultural embeddedness of the school setting supports the continuity between institutional values and community worldview.

Institutional coherence also plays a critical role. The alignment between the school's vision, curriculum structure, Standard Operating Procedures, and Morning Assembly implementation creates systemic reinforcement. Values introduced during Morning Assembly are echoed in classroom routines, communication patterns, and parental engagement. This consistency reduces fragmentation and prevents value dissonance between ritual and practice. In such a coherent ecosystem, children encounter repeated value cues across multiple contexts, strengthening internal consolidation. The ecosystem factors identified in this study are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Ecosystem Factors Supporting Holistic Character Formation

Supporting Factor	Functional Role	THK Dimension Reinforced	Character Impact
Teacher Modeling	Demonstrating lived values through daily interaction	Parahyangan, Pawongan	Emotional regulation, empathy, moral imitation
Reflective Facilitation	Guiding children to articulate meaning	Pawongan	Moral awareness, autonomy development
Physical Environment	Providing tangible ecological and spiritual context	Palemahan, Parahyangan	Environmental sensitivity, spiritual familiarity
Institutional Consistency	Aligning ritual, curriculum, and school culture	Integrated THK dimensions	Stability, value coherence

The findings suggest that Morning Assembly functions effectively because it operates within a value-consistent ecosystem. Teachers, environment, and institutional alignment collectively sustain the moral climate necessary for character internalization. In the absence of such coherence, ritual practices risk becoming symbolic performances rather than transformative educational experiences [33]-[38]. This ecosystem perspective highlights that holistic character education cannot rely on isolated activities. Instead, it requires structural continuity, adult embodiment, and contextual reinforcement. Through this integrated system, Tri Hita Karana is not merely introduced to children but continuously enacted within their daily relational and ecological experiences.

Conceptual Model: A Holistic Character Education Model through Tri Hita Karana-Based Morning Assembly

The integration of structured ritual, teacher meaning construction, internalization mechanisms, and ecosystem reinforcement culminates in a conceptual model of holistic character education grounded in Tri Hita Karana. The findings indicate that Morning Assembly at HEPI Kids does not function as a linear instructional strategy but as an interconnected system in which ritual structure, pedagogical mediation, and contextual coherence operate simultaneously.

At the foundational level, the structured phases of Morning Assembly (pre-activity, core interaction, and closing reflection) provide a predictable rhythm that supports emotional security and value exposure. This structural layer ensures that spiritual grounding, relational interaction, and ecological care are encountered daily. However, structure alone does not generate transformation. The second layer—teachers’ interpretative mediation—infuses the ritual with lived meaning. Teachers’ conscious embodiment of Parahyangan, Pawongan, and Palemahan transforms procedural activity into value-oriented experience. The third layer consists of internalization mechanisms operating across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Repetition builds familiarity, emotional engagement fosters attachment, and reflective dialogue consolidates awareness. Over time, externally guided participation gradually shifts toward internally motivated action. Character formation emerges as a cyclical process rather than a discrete outcome [39]-[43]. The fourth layer involves ecosystem reinforcement. Institutional coherence, cultural embeddedness, and consistent adult modeling extend the influence of Morning Assembly beyond the designated time slot. When values introduced in the ritual are echoed in classroom practice, environmental interaction, and community context, children experience continuity between symbolic meaning and lived reality [44]-[47]. This continuity stabilizes moral orientation and prevents fragmentation between instruction and practice.

The interaction among these four layers generates what may be termed a Holistic Value Integration Cycle. Within this cycle, Tri Hita Karana operates not as thematic content but as a relational framework that connects spirituality (Parahyangan), social harmony (Pawongan), and ecological responsibility (Palemahan). The outcome of this integrative cycle is the gradual emergence of holistic character orientation—where children demonstrate spiritual awareness, empathy, responsibility, and environmental sensitivity in consistent behavioral patterns. The proposed conceptual model is illustrated in Figure 1.

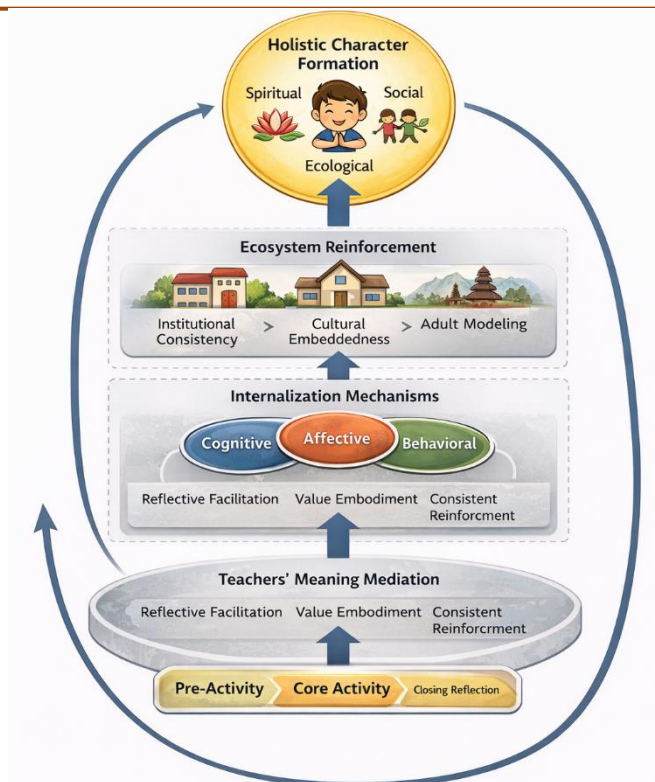


Figure 1. Holistic Character Education Model through Tri Hita Karana-Based Morning Assembly

This model contributes theoretically by demonstrating that character education in early childhood can be conceptualized as a culturally grounded, system-based process rather than a set of isolated moral lessons. Unlike approaches that rely primarily on explicit moral instruction, the Tri Hita Karana-based Morning Assembly model emphasizes patterned relational experience, teacher embodiment, and ecological embeddedness as primary drivers of value internalization. Furthermore, the model extends the discourse on holistic-integrative early childhood education by showing how local philosophical frameworks can function as operational pedagogical systems. In this case, Tri Hita Karana provides not only ethical content but also structural coherence that aligns spiritual, social, and ecological dimensions within daily practice. The findings therefore suggest that effective character education in early childhood settings requires the integration of ritual structure, reflective pedagogy, internalization pathways, and ecosystem consistency. When these elements operate cohesively, character formation becomes a lived process embedded in children's daily experiences rather than a supplementary curricular objective [48]-[50].

Despite offering a culturally grounded conceptual model of holistic character education, this study is subject to several limitations. The research was conducted within a single early childhood institution characterized by strong philosophical alignment with Tri Hita Karana and institutional coherence, which may limit the transferability of findings to schools operating in different cultural or structural contexts. In addition, the qualitative case study design prioritizes depth of meaning over breadth of generalization, and the findings rely primarily on teacher perspectives and observed behavioral indicators rather than longitudinal developmental measurement. Future studies may expand the scope by incorporating comparative multi-site designs, longitudinal tracking of character outcomes, or mixed-method approaches to further validate and refine the proposed model across diverse educational environments.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that a Tri Hita Karana-based Morning Assembly functions not merely as a daily routine but as a culturally grounded system of holistic character education in early childhood settings. The findings show that character formation emerges through the integration of structured ritual phases, teacher meaning mediation, internalization processes, and ecosystem reinforcement, where values are continuously enacted within children's lived experiences. Beyond addressing the research objectives, this study proposes a Holistic Character Education Model that conceptualizes character development as a relational, cyclical, and ecosystem-based process. This model extends existing perspectives on character education by repositioning it from discrete moral instruction toward a dynamic system in which cultural values are embodied through daily practices, social interactions, and environmental coherence. The implications of this study suggest that effective

character education in early childhood requires not only structured activities but also the alignment of teacher embodiment, institutional culture, and meaningful routines that sustain value internalization. By demonstrating how local philosophical frameworks such as Tri Hita Karana can be operationalized into pedagogical practice, this study offers both a conceptual contribution to the field and practical guidance for educators seeking to design culturally responsive and holistic learning environments.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author was solely responsible for the conceptualization and design of the study, data collection, implementation of the narrative counseling intervention, data analysis, and interpretation of the results. The author also prepared the original draft of the manuscript, revised the content critically, and approved the final version for publication.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author(s) declare no conflict of interest.

USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the generation, analysis, or writing of this manuscript. All aspects of the research, including data collection, interpretation, and manuscript preparation, were carried out entirely by the authors without the assistance of AI-based technologies.

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