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# The Aesthetic Experience of Meron Cultural Tourism in Fostering Creativity Among Early Childhood Learners in Indonesia

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### ARTICLE INFO

### ABSTRACT

#### Keywords:

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Indonesia's rich cultural heritage, exemplified by traditions like Meron in Pati Regency, serves as a valuable educational resource. The Meron tradition commemorates the Prophet Muhammad's birthday through processions, local foods, and artistic displays. Despite the cultural richness of local traditions, such as Meron, early childhood education in Indonesia rarely integrates them effectively. The research aims to analyze aesthetic experiences of early childhood in Sukolilo related to the Meron cultural tradition, assess how culture-based learning enhances these experiences, and identify supporting factors. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study includes Playgroup students aged 4-5 years from Sukolilo, with data collected through surveys, interviews, observations, and document analysis. Results indicate moderate aesthetic experiences with interval range of 15: 20–35 (low category), 36–51 (medium category), 52–67 (high category), and 68–80 (very high category). Children successfully recreating Meron shapes, highlighting the effectiveness of integrating culture and loose parts in promoting creativity. Students expressed enjoyment, emotional connection, and empathy in appreciating their own and their peers' creations. Culture-based learning using the Meron theme effectively enhanced both aesthetic appreciation and creative expression.

## 1. Introduction

Cultural preservation is crucial not only as a nation's identity but also as a means of passing down the nation's richness to future generations, including early childhood learners [1]. Cultural heritage embodies noble values and enduring characteristics, making it essential to integrate cultural preservation efforts into education, particularly for young children, to foster awareness and appreciation [2]. One example of local cultural heritage in Indonesia is the *Meron* tradition, practiced by the people of Sukolilo District, Pati Regency. The *Meron* tradition celebrates the birth of the Prophet Muhammad SAW through a community procession featuring a *gunungan* (mountain-like structure) and *tumpeng* (yellow rice cones). After being blessed by village elders, the *tumpeng* rice is

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distributed to the community, reflecting the values of gratitude, sharing, and cultural identity [3]. This tradition serves as an important example of how local heritage can be preserved and introduced to younger generations through education.

The *Meron* tradition is a cultural celebration that reflects love and reverence for the Prophet Muhammad SAW and commemorates his birthday [4]. This tradition consists of three main activities: 1) the *Meron* crowd, featuring snack exhibitions, local traditions, and a night market; 2) the making of the *Meron*; and 3) the ceremonial procession. The *Meron* crowd is marked by vibrant night market activities and art performances, showcasing cultural elements such as *wayang kulit* (shadow puppetry), *barongan* (traditional dance), *leoang-leong* (lion dance), *dangdut* music, and *rebana* (Islamic percussion) [5]. These performances are intended to entertain and offer moral guidance to the community. The preparation phase for the *Meron* includes assembling the offerings (*uborampe*) at the residence of village officials, accompanied by *melekan* or *tirakatan*—a vigil featuring prayers and reflections. The ceremonial procession begins with the parading of the *Meron*, prepared by the village head, to the grand mosque in Sukolilo sub-district. At the mosque, the event includes an opening, recitation of the Qur'an, a recounting of the history of *Meron*, speeches, communal prayers (*kenduri*), and the distribution of blessings in the form of food. This final act symbolizes almsgiving and strengthens communal ties between village officials and residents [6].

Culture and customs passed down through generations are easier to introduce to children, as they often have direct exposure to these traditions [7]. These experiences can inspire children to be creative, drawing from what they have observed and participated in. When local culture is packaged in an engaging way, it can serve not only as a tool for education but also as a form of cultural tourism, offering communities a way to promote their heritage [8]. Cultural tourism and local culture-based learning are particularly suitable for early childhood education, as they are both enjoyable and provide meaningful, lasting experiences [9, 10]. Aesthetic experiences, which are inherently intertwined with daily life, play a crucial role in personal development. These experiences transcend age, place, and culture, engaging individuals affectively and cognitively through art, emotions, and interactions with their environment [11].

Aesthetic experiences can be positive or negative, depending on the individual's perception of what they encounter [12]. They also harmonize sensory information, whether derived from familiar situations or new, imaginative ideas [13]. The benefits of aesthetic experiences are extensive, including improved mood, heightened empathy, reduced stress, enhanced resilience, and even physical health benefits such as lower blood pressure and faster recovery [14, 15]. Additionally, aesthetic experiences positively impact cognition, boosting concentration and fostering creativity [16-18]. These outcomes demonstrate the profound significance of aesthetic experiences, especially for early learners, as they support emotional, cognitive, and creative development.

Creativity is an inherent trait in every individual, offering limitless potential for innovation and problem-solving. However, this potential is not always fully realized. Creativity, as described by Kampouroupoulou *et al.*, [19], involves producing something effective in unexpected and novel ways. Similarly, Yetti and Azizah [20] define it as the ability to generate new compositions and approach problems with innovative perspectives. The development of creativity is influenced by various factors. Internally, it depends on intelligence, knowledge, skills, and self-motivation. Externally, it is shaped by social interactions, educational opportunities, family dynamics, and the school environment [21, 22]. In early childhood education, teachers play a pivotal role in fostering creativity [23]. In the digital era, educators increasingly integrate technology to enhance student creativity. For instance, interactive media-based learning has been shown to boost student creativity by up to 96%. Supporting this, other studies also highlight the positive impact of technology in learning environments [24, 25].

While the use of technology has been shown to positively impact creativity, its negative effects cannot be ignored. Excessive use of technology in children can lead to issues such as diminished social skills, strained relationships, health problems, reduced focus, and exposure to harmful content such as terrorism and pornography [26]. At the same time, early childhood education often lacks culture-based learning approaches. Cultural diversity, or multiculturalism, extends beyond language differences and encompasses various artistic expressions, religious practices, culinary traditions, music, clothing, traditional celebrations, and other distinctive aspects of life [27].

Besides, despite the recognized importance of integrating cultural heritage into early childhood education, there remains a significant gap in empirical studies that explore how specific local cultural traditions—such as the *Meron* celebration—can shape young children's aesthetic experiences and foster creativity. While previous research has highlighted the value of aesthetic learning and the benefits of culture-based pedagogy, little attention has been given to how these elements interact in practice, especially in the context of early childhood learners engaging directly with local festivals through creative play using environmental or recycled materials (loose parts). Loose parts media refer to open-ended, natural, or recycled materials such as stones, bottle caps, shells, and seeds that children can manipulate freely to construct and express creative ideas. This approach encourages sensory exploration, imagination, and independent problem-solving [28]. Furthermore, there is limited exploration of how such activities influence children's emotional and cognitive engagement with their cultural identity. Addressing this gap is critical to developing culturally responsive curricula that are rooted in local wisdom and capable of nurturing creativity from an early age.

Therefore, this study aims to explore and analyze the aesthetic experiences of early childhood learners during the *Meron* cultural tradition and to assess how culture-based learning using loose parts media supports the development of creativity in young children.

## 2. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research. According to Sugiyono [29], mixed methods involve the integration of both research types within a single study to produce comprehensive, valid, reliable, and objective data. This approach allows for a more robust understanding of the research problem than using either method alone. The design adopted for this study is the sequential explanatory design [30], where quantitative data is collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative data to elaborate on the findings.

The population for this study consists of Playgroup students aged 4–5 years in Sukolilo District who have observed the local *Meron* culture during the 2023/2024 academic year, totaling 336 students. A sample of 110 students, aged 4–5 years, was selected using quota sampling. These students were chosen based on their direct exposure to the *Meron* tradition in Sukolilo District. Observations, interviews, and documentation were conducted in five institutions in Sukolilo District. These institutions were selected based on the age of their students, their proximity to the *Meron* cultural center, and their students' familiarity with the *Meron* tradition.

Data collection techniques included questionnaires, interviews, observations, and documentation. Questionnaires were completed by students' parents and cross-checked with activity documentation. Interview informants included students, educators, and school principals. This combination of techniques ensures a comprehensive understanding of the aesthetic experiences of young learners in relation to the *Meron* cultural tradition. Aesthetic experience was measured using a structured questionnaire adapted from established indicators—disinterestedness, empathy and sympathy, psychic distance, and contemplation—on a 20–80 scale. The instrument underwent expert

validation and achieved a Cronbach's Alpha reliability score of 0.861, indicating strong internal consistency.

This research was conducted in accordance with institutional ethical standards for studies involving minors. Ethical approval was granted by the Education Faculty's Research Ethics Committee at Universitas Muria Kudus. Written informed consent was obtained from all parents or legal guardians of participating children. Anonymity, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation were ensured throughout the study.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Quantitative Analysis of Early Childhood Aesthetic Experience of Meron Local Culture

Based on Table 1, the overall aesthetic experience of early childhood with the Meron culture shows an average (mean) score of 51.15, a median of 51, a mode of 51, a minimum score of 20, and a maximum score of 80. When analyzed by indicators, the findings in Table 4.3 are as follows: the "disinterested" indicator has a mean score of 14.64, a median of 15.00, a standard deviation of 3.62, a range of 15, a minimum score of 5, and a maximum score of 20. For the "sympathy and empathy" indicator, the mean score is 15.87, with a median of 17.00, a standard deviation of 3.71, a range of 15, a minimum score of 5, and a maximum score of 20. The "psychic distance" indicator records a mean score of 8.77, a median of 8.00, a standard deviation of 3.81, a range of 15, a minimum score of 5, and a maximum score of 20. Lastly, the "contemplation" indicator shows a mean score of 11.86, a median of 11.00, a standard deviation of 3.75, a range of 15, a minimum score of 5, and a maximum score of 20.

Table 1

Results of descriptive analysis of early childhood aesthetic experience of Meron early childhood aesthetic experience of Meron statistics

N		General	Disinterested	Simp. & Empathy	Jar. Psychic	Contemplation
	Valid	110	110	110	110	110
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		51.15	14.64	15.87	8.77	11.86
Median		51.00	15.00	17.00	8.00	11.00
Mode		51	17	20	5	11
Std. Deviation		12.607	3.71	3.82	3.81	3.75
Variance		158.933	13.775	14.589	14.563	14.064
Range		60	15	15	15	15
Minimum		20	5	5	5	5
Maximum		80	20	20	20	20

The percentage and frequency data of the early childhood aesthetic experience questionnaire data on Meron local culture are shown in Fig. 1. It can be seen that the results of questionnaires 20, 23, 24, 25, 31, 32, 37, 43, 45, 50, 60, 62, 67, 69, 70, 71, 76 each amounted to 1 person (0.9%), 28, 38, 39, 40, 53, 54, 58, 64, 65 each amounted to 2 people by 1.8%, 42, 49, 57, 59, 3 people each at 2.7%, 35, 41, 46, 52 4 people each at 3.6%, 61, 80 5 people each at 4.5%, 47 6 people at 5.5%, 44, 56, 7 people at 6.4%, 51 9 people at 8.2%.

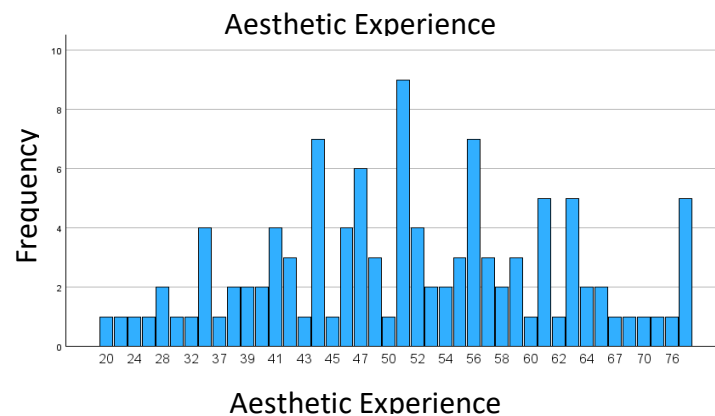


Fig. 1. The percentage and frequency data of the early childhood aesthetic experience questionnaire data on Meron local culture

Based on the data, the researcher categorized the results into four levels using an interval range of 15: 20–35 (low category), 36–51 (medium category), 52–67 (high category), and 68–80 (very high category). The analysis reveals that 12 students fall into the low category, 46 students are in the medium category, 43 students are in the high category, and 9 students are in the very high category. Following this quantitative analysis, the researcher conducted observations of the learning process and interviews with both students and educators to gain deeper insights into the findings.

### 3.2 Qualitative Analysis of Early Childhood Aesthetic Experience of Meron Local Culture in Encouraging Early Childhood Creativity

Collecting information on early childhood aesthetic experiences with *meron* culture-based learning with *loose part* media is collected through interviews with three students while the children are learning, in addition to students, researchers also explore other information from educators and principals in strengthening findings during observation. The same questions were asked to the three learners during the interview, namely IA, YR, YG. The first question "Have you ever gone to watch the meron carnival?" IA answered: "I have".

The answer can be known that IA has witnessed the meron cultural procession directly which is held in Sukolilo sub-district once a year. Furthermore, the researcher asked "Do you know what the meron looks like?" IA answered: "It is big and tall". From this answer, it is known that IA knows the shape of the meron which is tall and large, its shape is like a gunung/cone.

The researcher continued to ask questions to explore children's experiences related to the arrangement of *meron* shapes. "What are the meron shapes that you are making now?". IA answered: "There are shells, stones, bottle caps" while pointing with her right finger.

IA's answer informed me that the meron consists of three stacks. Next, "When you see meron, what are the merons?". IA answered: "Emmm ... Chicken, long ones, and lots of fruit". From the answer, IA wanted to tell that the shape of the *meron* that he saw during the celebration was composed of a crown with a rooster, ampyang and produce on the ancaknya.

The researcher asked the next question "Do you enjoy activities like this, making meron?". IA answered: "Yes, I am happy, there are three". From that answer, IA enjoyed learning activities using *Loose Part* media to make *meron* shapes, she made not only one *meron* shape but three *merons*.



Fig. 2. The work of Playgroup1 learners (Source: Researcher, 2024)

Researcher: *"Have you ever gone to watch the Meron carnival?"*

IA answered: *"I have"*.

The answer can be known that IA has witnessed the Meron cultural procession directly which is held in Sukolilo sub-district once a year. Furthermore, the researcher asked:

Researcher: *"Do you know what the Meron looks like?"*

IA answered: *"It is big and tall"*.

From this answer, it is known that IA knows the shape of the Meron which is tall and large, its shape is like a gunung/cone. The researcher continued to ask questions to explore children's experiences related to the arrangement of *Meron* shapes.

Researcher: *"What are the Meron shapes that you are making now?"*

IA answered: *"There are shells, stones, bottle caps"* while pointing with her right finger.

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Researcher: *"When you see Meron, what are the Merons?"*

IA answered: *"Emmm ... Chicken, long ones, and lots of fruit"*.

From the answer, IA wanted to tell that the shape of the *Meron* that he saw during the celebration was composed of a crown with a rooster, ampyang and produce on the ancaknya. The researcher asked the next question:

Researcher: *"Do you enjoy activities like this, making Meron?"*

IA answered: *"Yes, I am happy, there are three"*.

From that answer, IA enjoyed learning activities using Loose Part media to make Meron shapes, she made not only one *Meron* shape but three *Merons*. The researcher then asked YR:

Researcher: *"What are you making?"*

YR replied: *"this is fruit"*.



From YR's answer, he wanted to tell that he was making fruit according to what was in the Meron, YR was arranging the Meron from the bottom to the top. The next question was:

Researcher: *"When you watched the Meron, did you go with the teacher or with your mother?"*.

YR answered: *"With mamah, on a motorcycle"*.

From YR's answer above, he watched the Meron culture from his parents' initiative, not together with the teacher or principal coordinated by the institution. The next question by the researcher to YR:

Researcher: *"What will your Meron look like?"*.

AI answered: *"fruit here, this is made here, and this stone is made above"* while holding the loose part material shown to the researcher.

Based on YR's answer above, students can tell the shape of Meron which consists of two forms, namely crown, ampyang.

The next question, *"Do you know the materials to make Meron?"*.

YR answered: *"No"*.

From this answer, learners cannot know what materials are used to make the Meron shape during the carnival.

The next question, *"Have you ever eaten fruit or hung long in Meron?"*

YR answered: *"not yet, but I have fruit at home"*.

From this answer, YR has never tasted the ingredients used to make Meron, which consists of fruits, palawijo, and ampyang. The researcher asked the third learner YG, with the question:

Researcher: *"What are you making, is it finished?"*.

YG answered: *"Yes, make Meron, this is good"*.

YG answered: *"Heem, Meron, this, this and this"* while pointing to the loose parts that he arranged, starting from the top of the kerrang, the wani color stone and the bottle cap. From the answer, students form a Meron with a cone shape consisting of loose parts, students arrange the Meron shapes they make with three arrays. The next question:

Researcher: *"Do you know the materials of the Meron that you saw at the carnival?"*.

YG answered: *"I don't know, I carry it high"*.

From the answer, the learner did not know the ingredients to make Meron, he only knew that it was tall and was paraded by many people during the carnival.

The next question: *"Do you like learning with these materials to make Meron?"*.

YG answered: *"yes, this is me... good"*.

From this answer, the learners enjoyed the process of making Meron shapes with loose parts media. In relation to the question about empathy and sympathy for one's own work and the work of friends, the researcher asked the question, *is your Meron good? How about your friend's work?"*. At

different times the three learners answered with more or less the same answer, the answers of the three: *"Good, this...yes that is also good"*. From that answer, it is known that learners can give appreciation to themselves and friends from the work that they and others produce. Based on the results of the interviews of the three learners, it is known that the learners understand the form of *Meron* which consists of 2 structures, namely the crown and ampyang. Learners have seen the celebration of *Meron* culture directly with their parents. Learners have never tasted ampyang, fruit, crops as ingredients for making *Meron*. Learners can appreciate the work of themselves and others with the word *"good"*. Learners enjoy the atmosphere of learning activities to make *Meron* shapes with *loose parts*.

The next question was, *"Do you know what the shape of the tall Meron is?"*. RJ replied: *"Flowers, ropes and people"*. Referring to the answer, it is known that RJ knows the shape of the tall Meron has flower decorations, ampyang which is arranged lengthwise by means of being tied and the ancak which is carried by many people. The researcher continued the question to explore the child's experience related to the arrangement of the *Meron* shape. *"What are the Meron shapes that you are making now?"*. RJ answered: *"this is a chicken, stone, button, bottle cap"*. The description of RJ's answer provides information that he has made a *Meron* shape that he made from stones, buttons and bottle caps. The bottle cap placed at the top is a symbol of the crown consisting of flowers and chickens, the stones arranged downward and curved are ampyang and the lines composed of stones and bottle caps are fruits and crops placed on the bottom of the *Meron* shape. Figure 3 shows the students activity of making Meron.



Fig. 3. Student activity of making Meron

The next question to RJ, *"Yesterday when you saw Meron who did you greet?"* RJ replied: *"With my mom and dad on a motorcycle"*. The explanation of this answer is that RJ when seeing the Meron culture together with his parents using a motorcycle. Next, *"Do you like the activity of making Meron shapes?"*, RJ answered: *"Heem like"* while nodding. Based on this answer, it is known that RJ likes and enjoys making *Meron* shapes with *loose part media*.

Researchers continued observations and interviews with other students, namely AY, the first question *"what are you making?"* AY answered: *"I'm making this, Meron"*. From the answer it was known that AY was making a Meron shape with loose parts, he chose to use stones, grains, buttons and stones. Loose part stones he arranged in a semicircle shape in which there were buttons resembling a series of flowers in Meron and a rooster in the middle, AY arranged the buttons on top of which dry grains were given vertically downwards as if they resembled ampyang on Meron. The



next question was "Who have you ever seen Meron with?", AY answered: "with my father, mother and brother". From AY's answer, we get information that she watches with her family together.

The next question, "have you ever eaten fruit, ampyang from Meron? AY answered: "no". It is known from this description that AY has never tasted the ingredients used in the form of Meron, both the ampyang and the palm fruit. next "Can you tell me the form of Meron that you are making now?" AY answered: "this, then down and this" while pulling his index finger from top to bottom. From this answer, we know that AY provided information on the shape of the Meron with three arrangements of the crown, ampyang and ancak. Next, the researcher asked YR the next question, "What does your Meron look like?". YR answered: "nice and tall", from the answer it is known that YR imagines that his homemade Meron is tall as he sees it and can give appreciation to his own work.

While arranging loose parts the researcher asked "Have you ever eaten fruit or ampyang Meron?" AY answered: "Not yet" paused for a moment while shaking his head. It is known from the answer that AY has never tasted the ingredients used in making Meron shapes. Similar questions were asked to AR by the researcher. From the researcher's observation, the work of AR's Meron form was almost complete. The first question "It's amazing that it's almost finished, what are you doing?" AR answered: "Meron", it is known that AR makes Meron shapes with loose part materials. AR chose to use a variety of loose parts with stones, button bottle caps, seeds and buttons. Furthermore, the researcher asked again "what are your Merons" AR replied: "stones, this ... and below this" from this answer it is known that AR composes a Meron shape with three circular stone arrangements above in which there are grains that are crowns and buttons on top of dried flowers and grains are ampyang and the bottle cap at the bottom is an ancak containing fruit and crops. Another question from the researcher "Do you like making Meron?" AR answered: "I like it" followed by the question "how good is your Meron?" AR answered: "yes good". It is known from the answer that AR likes the shape of his homemade Meron and can give appreciation of the results he made himself.

Besides the three informants, researchers also dug up information from educators and the principal. From the observation during learning, the first question related to "Have you ever gone to watch the Meron carnival?" has been represented by the educator during the opening of the activity, all learners answered: "Ever". From the answers, Playgroup Sekar Tanjung students have witnessed Meron culture. During the activity the researcher made observations and interviewed RJ, "Do you know what a Meron looks like?". RJ answered: "I know, it's tall". The answer shows that RJ knows the shape or form of Meron.

#### **4. Discussion**

##### **4.1 Early Childhood Aesthetic Experience of Meron Local Culture**

The variation in responses, particularly in terms of empathy and contemplation, supports the view that aesthetic development in early childhood is influenced by both exposure and context. Learners who had prior experiences attending the Meron festival with their families tended to exhibit stronger recognition and emotional response to cultural elements. This reinforces the idea that aesthetic experience is socially mediated, as noted by Kang [23], and that cultural traditions serve as fertile ground for shaping early identity and appreciation of beauty and meaning.

Moreover, the use of loose parts media provided a flexible, exploratory learning environment that empowered children to externalize their internal perceptions of culture. As Kampouroupoulou *et al.*, [19] argue, creativity in early childhood is best nurtured through open-ended, imaginative play, which this study validated through children's free-form construction of Meron-inspired forms. The natural and recycled materials used in the activity further enhanced tactile learning, making the aesthetic experience accessible and personalized.

However, the findings also point to disparities in children's exposure to and understanding of cultural elements. Some participants showed limited recognition of Meron components or lacked the vocabulary to articulate their experience. This suggests that while the cultural environment is rich, it may not be equally integrated into the educational context. This observation supports the concern raised by Yetti and Azizah [20] regarding the lack of consistent culture-based learning in early childhood curricula across Indonesia.

#### *4.2 Early Childhood Aesthetic Experience of Meron Local Culture in Encouraging Early Childhood Creativity*

The findings of this study affirm that exposure to Meron cultural traditions—when supported by active, hands-on engagement—plays a meaningful role in stimulating creativity among early childhood learners. Through the use of loose parts media, children were able to construct their interpretations of the Meron procession, demonstrating not only aesthetic responsiveness but also creative expression rooted in cultural memory and symbolic understanding. This supports the theoretical framework that creativity in early childhood is closely linked to sensory-rich and culturally relevant experiences [31]. As children observed and later recreated Meron structures, they engaged in symbolic play—an essential developmental milestone for imaginative thinking [19]. The process of arranging materials like bottle caps, stones, and grains into traditional forms (crown, ampyang, and ancak) reflects more than technical assembly; it reveals the internalization and reinterpretation of cultural narratives [32-34].

Moreover, the children's ability to retell elements of the Meron tradition—such as its visual forms and ritual significance—illustrates how aesthetic experiences can serve as a medium for storytelling and cultural expression. This echoes the view of Chatterjee [11], who emphasizes that aesthetic engagement in childhood supports narrative competence and identity development. When learners create from what they observe and feel, they translate tradition into personal meaning, making creativity both a cognitive and emotional process. Another notable aspect was the consistent demonstration of empathy and appreciation—children expressed joy not only in their work but also in recognizing the value of their peers' creations. This aligns with Kang's [35] perspective that aesthetic learning nurtures interpersonal awareness, as children begin to see their work concerning others, building mutual respect and emotional sensitivity, both key aspects of creative collaboration.

However, creativity was not uniform across all participants. Some children displayed more elaborate and imaginative constructions, while others focused on simple, literal forms. This disparity may stem from varying levels of cultural exposure or differences in family support and prior experience. As suggested by Yetti and Azizah [20], the role of the home environment and educator facilitation is crucial in developing creative dispositions. Children who had attended the Meron carnival with their families, for example, tended to produce more detailed representations, indicating that lived cultural experiences enhance imaginative capacity. The use of loose parts media also proved highly effective in this context. Unlike rigid tools or structured tasks, loose parts allow for open-ended exploration, which is essential in fostering creativity [25]. They offer children autonomy, enabling them to innovate and solve problems independently. In this study, children used these materials not only to replicate cultural symbols but also to experiment with color, shape, texture, and spatial arrangement—fundamental aspects of creative development.

Despite these promising outcomes, the study has limitations. The creativity observed was limited to a single session and context. Longer-term studies are needed to understand how sustained exposure to cultural content impacts creative development over time. Additionally, while children's

enjoyment and artistic outcomes were evident, further tools—such as creativity rubrics or portfolio assessments—could enrich the evaluation of creative growth.

## 5. Conclusion

In sum, this study highlights the transformative potential of integrating local cultural heritage into early childhood education. By engaging with the Meron tradition through creative construction using loose parts media, young learners are not only exposed to cultural values but also encouraged to develop aesthetic sensitivity, empathy, and creative expression. The findings affirm that early cultural exposure—when combined with hands-on, child-centered activities—can deepen children's emotional and cognitive engagement with their surroundings. This approach demonstrates a culturally responsive model of early childhood learning that aligns well with the goals of character education, creativity development, and identity formation. Educators can draw on these insights to design immersive learning experiences that connect children with their cultural environment in meaningful ways. The use of loose parts media offers a flexible, low-cost strategy to encourage exploration, imagination, and storytelling. While the study offers valuable insights, it is limited by its focus on a single tradition within a specific region. Future research could explore similar models in other cultural contexts or adopt longitudinal and comparative designs to examine sustained impact. Overall, this research underscores the value of culture-based aesthetic learning as a vital component of holistic early childhood development.

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