

Implementation of the Talented Thursday Habituation Program to Encourage Active Participation and Creativity of Elementary School Students

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Abstract. This study examines the implementation of the Talented Thursday Habituation Program at Jatibarang State Elementary School 03 as an effort to increase the active participation and creativity of grade II students. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study describes the process of planning, implementing, and evaluating programs designed to provide a forum for expression through non-academic activities such as art, sports, and drama. Data was collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The results of the study show that since the implementation of the program in 2022, the active participation of students has increased significantly from 45% of students who actively participated in the talented Thursday habituation program has increased and changed to 80% of students who participated in the talented Thursday habituation program within three months, driven by the active role of teachers, principals, and parental support. Despite obstacles such as limited facilities and time, adjustments to activities and coordination with related parties are able to overcome these obstacles. The findings show that the program is effective in boosting students' confidence and creative expression, while also making a positive contribution to the development of character and non-academic skills. The results of this research are expected to be a practical reference for the development of educational innovations at the elementary level.

Keywords: Creativity; Elementary School; Habituation; Participation; Talented Thursday

1. Introduction

Education is a key effort to improve the quality of human life through the development of students' potential (Lestari & Nuryanti, 2022). In the educational process, students are introduced to various disciplines and social values that help shape their character and future competitiveness. Therefore, it is essential to create a learning environment that supports students' holistic development.

At the basic education level, elementary schools play a strategic role in shaping students' interests, character, and creativity from an early age. Encouraging active participation and creativity is critical in fostering critical thinking and positive character development (Iskandar et al., 2024). In this context, Jatibarang State Elementary School 03 has taken the initiative to support national education goals through the implementation of innovative programs.

One such initiative is the Talented Thursday program, a weekly activity held every Thursday that provides students with space to express their talents, interests, and creativity. This program is structured to encourage students' active participation in various extracurricular activities, such as art, sports, and academic enrichment, while also involving collaboration between teachers, students, and parents.

Enhancing student participation is essential for improving learning motivation and influencing students' social and emotional development. Students who actively engage in school activities tend to have stronger interpersonal skills and are better prepared to face future challenges (Apriliani et al., 2024). However, in reality, many students still exhibit low motivation to participate in both classroom and extracurricular learning activities.

Active participation involves students' physical, mental, and emotional engagement in the learning process, including their interactions with learning materials, teachers, and peers. One effective strategy to improve engagement is game-based learning, which leverages games to teach specific concepts while enhancing motivation and understanding (Ningtyas & El-Yunusi, 2024).

In addition to participation, creativity is a vital component of education and modern life. Every student has creative potential characterized by curiosity, imagination, and the willingness to take risks. Factors such as the school environment, teacher support, and parental encouragement significantly influence creativity development (Sari et al., 2023). Therefore, elementary schools need to implement programs that actively stimulate creative thinking, exploration, and innovation.

The Talented Thursday program at Jatibarang State Elementary School 03 is one such effort designed to improve student engagement and creativity through interest-based activities in areas such as art, sports, and technology. Held weekly and open to all students, the program promotes collaboration, healthy competition, and innovation, aiming to build students' confidence and social skills.

1.1. Problem Statement

The core problem addressed in this study lies in the low levels of active participation and creativity among second-grade students at Jatibarang State Elementary School 03, which reflects deeper structural and pedagogical issues in the school environment.

a. Limited Engagement in the Talented Thursday Program

Preliminary observations and data indicate that only around 40% of second-grade students are actively involved in the Talented Thursday habituation program. This low participation rate suggests not merely a motivational issue, but also points to a lack of systematic strategies to involve all students meaningfully. According to constructivist learning theory, active engagement is a crucial component in knowledge construction and personal development, especially at the elementary level. Therefore, persistent low participation raises concerns about the effectiveness of school-initiated creative habituation programs in fulfilling these developmental goals.

b. Unexplored Creativity Due to Lack of Facilitation

Creativity, as theorized by Guilford and Torrance, is not an innate trait that flourishes on its own, but a cognitive and affective potential that requires nurturing conditions. However, in the context of this school, students' creativity has not been fully explored due to the absence of structured extracurricular activities, limited artistic infrastructure (e.g., no art teacher, no access to musical instruments or dance tools), and a lack of regular showcases for creative expression. This structural deficiency not only hinders the development of creative skills but also limits students' opportunities to build confidence and identity through artistic exploration.

c. Monotonous Program and Lack of Stimulating Activities

Although the Talented Thursday program has positive intentions, its implementation often follows a repetitive format with little variation. Weekly activities tend to lack fresh ideas, and teachers are not consistently encouraged to design engaging and dynamic sessions. This lack of variety and stimulation causes students to become bored and less enthusiastic, especially those who already show little interest in extracurricular involvement. As a result, the program becomes less effective in encouraging student participation and fostering enthusiasm for creative expression.

d. Interrelated Nature of the Problems and Scientific Urgency

The three issues involving low participation, limited creativity development, and monotonous program implementation are not separate problems, but are causally interconnected. The lack of engaging and well-facilitated activities limits creative expression, which in turn weakens student motivation and participation. From a practical perspective, this undermines the school's role in supporting holistic education and national goals for character development.

From a theoretical standpoint, this condition reveals a gap in research on habituation-based programs and their ability to activate student potential through non-academic, interest-based learning. There is a need for a systematic analysis of how habituation initiatives such as Talented Thursday can be designed and implemented to effectively improve student engagement and creativity in the context of elementary education.

1.2. Related Research

Previous studies have extensively explored strategies to enhance student creativity and participation in elementary education through various pedagogical models and media innovations. However, most of these studies focus on academic or subject-specific contexts, rather than school-wide habituation programs aimed at non-academic skill development.

Wati et al. (2024) investigated the application of the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model to enhance students' creativity in drawing educational comics during SBdP (arts) classes. The results indicated improvements in creativity levels, particularly among students initially categorized as underdeveloped. However, the study is limited in scope as it targets subject-specific creativity and does not explore how continuous, school-wide initiatives can foster broader affective and psychomotor development through regular practice.

Similarly, Finaryanti et al. (2023) implemented a combination of the Think-Pair-Share (TPS) model and Tri Nga values (Ngerfi, Ngrasa, Nglakoni) in dance education for first-grade students. The integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor elements successfully improved student engagement and creativity. Despite its strengths, this study primarily focuses on structured classroom learning within a single subject and does not examine the sustainability or long-term habituation of student expression outside academic routines.

Suciati (2020) examined teacher creativity and initiative during online learning in the COVID-19 pandemic through action research. While the study emphasizes the importance of innovation and adaptability in maintaining learning continuity, it centers on teacher behavior and administrative improvements rather than student-led participation or creativity in non-academic contexts. The findings are valuable in a crisis setting but less transferable to the design of habituation-based student programs in physical classrooms.

Dwiana et al. (2021), explored the use of Macromedia Flash-based media to increase student creativity in mathematics lessons. The study highlighted how digital media could engage students visually and enhance understanding. However, its relevance to the current study is limited, as it focuses on conceptual understanding in a core academic subject, rather than character development, talent exploration, or school culture.

In synthesizing these studies, it is evident that while multiple approaches have successfully promoted creativity and participation, most are confined to academic subject areas, one-time interventions, or teacher-centered strategies. They rarely address the integration of regular, inclusive, and interest-based habituation programs as part of the school culture. Furthermore, few studies critically examine how school-wide programs can serve as platforms for identity formation, emotional expression, and collaborative learning beyond cognitive development.

Recent national studies provide additional insights that support the need for such school-wide habituation efforts. For instance, Khoirunnida et al. (2024) demonstrated that character education integrated into daily school routines, including extracurricular activities, can significantly improve students' active participation and moral development. Likewise, Rhomadhoni & Sukartono (2025) emphasized that affective and civic values such as love of country can be fostered through consistent exposure to non-academic and extracurricular engagement embedded in learning experiences.

Putri & Sumardi (2022) underlined the importance of student-centered approaches to improve engagement, especially in cases where traditional instruction fails to involve learners actively. Furthermore, Ramadhan et al. (2020) revealed how structured sports programs in primary schools can function as affective spaces for habit-building, identity development, and

motivational reinforcement through physical activity. These findings align with the theoretical framework of "whole-child" development in non-academic settings.

Finally, Harahap & Isya (2020) proposed a model of value-based education that integrates habituation through both curricular and extracurricular activities to shape character, creativity, and participation. Such evidence strengthens the premise that school culture programs which emphasize routine, interest-based expression may offer sustainable avenues for holistic student development beyond the classroom.

This study fills an important gap by investigating the implementation of a habituation program—*Talented Thursday*—as a routine, student-centered initiative that aims to enhance creativity and active participation through arts, sports, and performance. Unlike previous research, which often lacks longitudinal impact or student agency, this study focuses on how consistent opportunities for self-expression can build motivation, confidence, and social cohesion. By emphasizing a whole-child development framework, this research contributes to both the practical and theoretical discourse on non-academic learning spaces in elementary education.

1.3. Research Objectives

This research is expected to be able to provide the following benefits:

- 1) Describe the stages of planning and implementing the Talented Thursday habituation program at Jatibarang State Elementary School 03.
- 2) Identify the challenges encountered during the implementation of the program.
- 3) Evaluate the impact of the Talented Thursday program on the participation and creativity of second-grade students.

This research is expected to contribute both practically and academically, particularly in the field of elementary education development through creative habituation programs.

- 1) For Teachers

The findings of this study can serve as a reference and source of information regarding the implementation of habituation-based programs such as Talented Thursday, particularly in encouraging participation and creativity among second-grade students. It can also provide practical input to help improve and innovate similar programs.

- 2) For Schools

The results of the study can be utilized by schools as materials for reflection, policy development, and evaluation of habituation programs aimed at student character development. It can also support the planning of extracurricular activities aligned with students' talents and interests.

- 3) For Advanced Researchers

This study may serve as a reference or comparative material for further research in the same field, especially studies focusing on the role of habituation programs in fostering non-academic skills and student engagement in primary education settings.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter discusses the theoretical foundations of the study, including the concepts of habituation, active participation, and creativity in primary education. This study adopts a theoretical model in which habituation stimulates participation, and participation in turn stimulates creativity. This framework guides the structure of the Talented Thursday program implemented in this study. Each element of the model is reviewed in the following sub-sections.

2.1. Concept of Habituation Program in Elementary School

The habituation program consists of a series of activities designed to encourage positive behavior of students through daily activities. Habituation is a method of character education

that instills the values of discipline, responsibility, and active participation. Through habituation measures in schools, students' behavior improves, including improvements in attitudes that were previously less visible, thus strengthening their character positively. This habit not only instills a sense of manners but also builds a sense of togetherness and harmony among students.

An educated personality is a person who is religious, disciplined, responsible, tolerant, respectful and polite, loves the homeland, has a national spirit, is honest, and cares about the environment and society (Gantini & Fauziati, 2021). The habituation program in schools has a big impact on exploring students' creativity and encourages them to be more active in participating in activities according to their abilities and interests, including participating in competitions outside of school according to their talents.

The primary goal of the habituation program in elementary schools is to build an educational environment that supports students' moral and social development, improves discipline, and encourages active involvement in various school activities (Muhammad et al., 2023). This program serves to instill values such as ethics, good manners, a sense of responsibility, and the ability to work together in a sustainable manner, both at school and at home.

This can be proven when students participate in this Talented Thursday habituation program such as when they will perform group dances, students learn to be responsible for themselves and their group to memorize the dance movements. In addition, students also learn to have high empathy for their peers because they have to work together for the desired outcome. In the Talented Thursday program, habituation is applied through regular scheduling, teacher modeling, and positive reinforcement, where students are encouraged weekly to explore their non-academic talents in front of their peers. This form of structured routine allows values such as discipline and teamwork to be internalized through experience, not just instruction.

2.2. Active Student Participation

Active participation is an approach in which students play an active role in the learning process through discussion, collaboration, and exploration. According to active participation, it increases student participation and contributes to the development of critical thinking skills (Jodoi et al., 2021). This Talented Thursday habituation program moves students from passive listening to actively participating in activities designed to stimulate creativity (Yunaini et al., 2022). It can be proven that the habituation of Talented Thursday allows activities that involve collaboration between students, creating a deeper and more meaningful learning experience. Gifted Thursday Habituation Activities allow students to try out new ideas and learn from their classmates. The implementation of active learning in this program can have a positive impact on students' academic and non-academic achievement (Mduwile & Goswami, 2024). Teachers before starting the teaching-learning process need to explain to students about the competencies they want to achieve in each learning process, while by teachers, the active participation of each student is required as feedback (Nurohmah et al., 2023). Students who actively participate tend to better understand the material and be able to apply it in real life, in accordance with the principle that hands-on experience deepens the understanding of concepts.

The program can include art, music, and other forms of creative expression that allow students to express their ideas and opinions. Habituation is carried out through a variety of approaches, such as spontaneous habituation (e.g., greetings, polite attitudes), programmed habituation (such as holiday commemoration activities), and habituation by example, in which educators and students give each other examples of positive behavior in daily life (Samal & Ibrahim, 2023).

With this approach, the characters student formed in a sustainable manner so that it can support the formation of a better society in the future. Therefore, character education is very important to be taught from an early age, because character is not easy to form if there is no habituation (Nurohmah et al., 2023). With this habituation, students become more active in participating in non-academic activities such as performing dance, gymnastics, music, and drama at various events in Semarang or surrounding areas. Students can also represent the school in interschool competitions, which is beneficial for both the student and the school's reputation. In practice, participation is observed in the form of student initiative, group

rehearsals, and willingness to perform without coercion. Students who previously hesitated are now seen volunteering to join performances, which reflects the internalization of active learning attitudes.

2.3. Creativity in Education

Creativity is the ability to come up with new and original ideas (Lee & Lee, 2021) explain. that creativity can be developed through a supportive environment and diverse learning experiences. This Talented Thursday habituation gives students the opportunity to express themselves through a variety of activities including art, music, and technology. Help students discover their interests and talents and build confidence. This form of participation includes discussions, presentations, and contributions to group activities (Berti et al., 2023).

Creativity also leads to problem-solving. Students who engage in creative activities are more likely to think critically and find innovative solutions to the challenges they face (Rahman et al., 2022). Therefore, the program not only encourages individual creativity, but also focuses on developing critical thinking skills that are essential in education.

In fact, not all students show themselves to be creative individuals. Therefore, the school environment must be able to provide stimulation to students to develop creative thinking skills. The learning model is the main focus in developing students' creative thinking skills because it is an environment that shapes students' learning experiences (Apsoh et al., 2023). Creativity contributes to an individual's problem-solving abilities and innovative abilities, which play an important role in personal growth and development (Muktadir et al., 2020).

High creativity will create better ideas as well, meaning that the higher a person's creativity, the better the results will be given in writing a descriptive essay. With the ability to think creatively, a person will be able to give birth to thoughts and imagination into descriptive essays (Sidabutar, 2021).

These activities should be engaging and relevant to students' interests to increase their engagement. Teachers play an important role as facilitators and motivators in creative activities. They must be able to create an atmosphere that supports exploration and encourages students to participate actively (Anditasari et al., 2023). Creativity is recognized not only by product (e.g., dance, music) but also by process—such as students collaborating to choreograph, solve problems during practice, or adapt performances with limited resources. This indicates a shift from passive compliance to creative agency among students.

Based on the reviewed theories, this study focuses on examining how a school-based habituation program—Talented Thursday—can systematically foster student participation and creativity. By aligning regular non-academic activities with character-building and creative expression, the program serves as a medium for implementing holistic education at the elementary level. This research contributes to understanding the practical application of habituation theory beyond academics, while also addressing gaps in how creativity and participation are nurtured through sustained school culture.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a single case study design to explore how the *Talented Thursday* habituation program supports the development of active participation and creativity among second-grade students at Jatibarang State Elementary School 03. The case study design was chosen because it enables a detailed and contextualized investigation of a specific program within its real-life setting. Through this approach, the researcher aims to capture the experiences, behaviors, and perspectives of the participants involved—namely, students, teachers, and school leaders.

The qualitative descriptive method is suitable for exploring how the habituation program is implemented and how it influences students' affective and psychomotor development. Since the focus is on a single bounded case, the research design allows for a deep understanding of

the implementation process, challenges, and outcomes of the Talented Thursday initiative in an authentic school environment.

3.2. Participants

This study employed three main data collection techniques: observation, interview, and documentation. These were used to gather rich qualitative data regarding the planning, implementation, and impact of the Talented Thursday habituation program on the active participation and creativity of grade II students.

3.3. Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation during the implementation of the Talented Thursday habituation program over a period of three months (August–October 2024) at Jatibarang State Elementary School 03. The data collection focused on exploring the development of students' active participation and creativity, as well as the challenges and processes involved in the program.

Observations were carried out systematically every Thursday during the program activities, involving all 28 second-grade students (16 boys and 12 girls). These observations focused on student behavior, initiative, collaboration, performance preparation, and level of involvement. The researcher used an observation guide that included indicators such as frequency of participation, role-taking in group work, and creative expressions displayed during performances. Observations were documented using field notes, photos, and videos for later analysis.

In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the school principal, the grade II classroom teacher, and six purposively selected students who represented diverse levels of engagement (high, moderate, and low participation). The interview sessions aimed to explore the participants' perceptions of the program, motivational factors, obstacles faced, and the impact of the habituation activities on student behavior and creativity. The interviews were guided by a set of open-ended questions and recorded using a voice recorder, then transcribed and coded thematically.

To support data credibility, documentation in the form of photographs, student performance records, and informal notes from teachers and parents were also collected. These materials provided contextual support and helped triangulate the findings from observation and interview data.

The researcher served as the primary research instrument, supported by structured interview and observation guidelines that were designed to align with the research objectives. All data were gathered in natural school settings to ensure the authenticity and depth of the findings.

Throughout the process, the researcher acted as the main instrument (Mekarisce, 2020), using tools such as observation and interview guides to ensure the data aligned with the study objectives.

3.4. Data Analysis

This study employed the data analysis model proposed by Miles & Huberman (1984), which consists of three interconnected stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Kumala, 2022). This model was chosen because it enables a systematic and iterative process of analyzing qualitative data to produce meaningful findings.

Data reduction was carried out by selecting, simplifying, and organizing raw data obtained from observations, interviews with the principal and selected grade II students, as well as documentation during the Talented Thursday habituation program. The researcher focused only on data related to student creativity, participation patterns, and the role of the program, while removing irrelevant or redundant information.

In the data display stage, the reduced data were organized into thematic categories such as "forms of student participation," "creativity indicators," and "implementation challenges." The findings were presented narratively and supported with tables summarizing the progression of

student participation and creativity over a three-month period. This helped to clearly illustrate the patterns emerging from the field.

The final stage, conclusion drawing and verification, involved interpreting the data to identify key insights and determining the impact of the Talented Thursday program. The researcher continuously cross-checked data from different sources (interviews, observations, and documentation) to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the conclusions.

This entire process was carried out manually without the use of qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo. The researcher acted as the main instrument, supported by observation sheets and interview guides designed prior to fieldwork.

3.5. Validity and Reliability

To ensure the credibility of the data, this study used source triangulation as the main technique. Triangulation is a multi-method approach that involves verifying data from different perspectives to enhance validity. Specifically, interview data from grade II students were compared with observational findings made by the researcher during the Talented Thursday program, and further confirmed through interviews with the principal. For example, if students stated that they enjoyed dance activities but did not actively participate, the researcher checked this with classroom observations and the teacher's feedback in week 2 of the program (Pantan & Benyamin, 2020).

Triangulation of sources allows the researcher to cross-check the same data across multiple informants (Yumnah et al., 2023). In this case, the perspectives of students and the school principal were compared to build an accurate understanding of the implementation and impact of the habituation program.

In addition to triangulation, this research also applied the technique of member checking, where data summaries and preliminary findings were returned to participants—including the principal and selected students—for confirmation. This step was essential to ensure that the information recorded matched their actual experiences. If any discrepancy was found, clarification was sought immediately during the follow-up interview (Hasan et al., 2022; Pantan & Benyamin, 2020).

The researcher also applied principles of dependability and confirmability by maintaining detailed field notes, voice recordings, and documentation to create an audit trail of the research process (Sasmita, 2020). Peer debriefing with supervisors was conducted to reflect on possible researcher bias and strengthen the interpretation of findings.

Finally, to address transferability, thick descriptions were used to provide contextual details about the school environment, student characteristics, and the design of the Talented Thursday program, allowing readers to determine the applicability of the findings to similar educational contexts.

4. Findings

4.1. Development of Active Participation and Creativity of Students

The implementation of the Talented Thursday habituation program at Jatibarang State Elementary School 03 has brought significant changes in the active participation and creativity of grade II students. Data obtained through triangulation of observations, interviews with principals, teachers, and students show that, at the beginning of the program, only about 40% of students were actively involved. Many students appeared passive, hesitant to express themselves, and felt that they lacked talent.

A grade II student admitted:

"At first, I was too shy to join because I was afraid of being laughed at. I thought I wasn't good at anything." (Interview, Student N, 2024)

However, after three months of consistent implementation, participation increased to more than 80%. Students began to show greater initiative and enthusiasm toward participating in group performances. According to a grade II teacher:

"Now every Wednesday they already ask, 'Miss, what are we going to perform tomorrow?' They've become enthusiastic and even start practicing on their own."
(Interview, Grade II Teacher, 2024)

This change was also accompanied by a noticeable development in students' creativity. They started exploring different interests such as singing, dancing, and drama. Some students even initiated the creation of simple props and dance routines independently. The principal emphasized:

"The children who used to lack confidence are now the ones asking to perform. Some even create their own moves for their group dance." (Interview, Principal, 2024)

The transformation was not only seen in the number of participants but also in the quality of engagement. Students began working together in small groups, dividing roles, encouraging peers, and practicing voluntarily outside of class. This collaborative spirit helped foster their empathy, communication, and social skills.

One of the students shared his feelings:

"I used to just watch, but now I join the drama every week. It feels great to be able to perform." (Interview, Student A, 2024)

Based on the data, it can be concluded that the Talented Thursday program has succeeded in activating the affective and psychomotor potential of grade II students. It has encouraged a shift from passive behavior to active and creative participation through fun, inclusive, and student-centered activities that align with their talents and interests.

4.2. The Impact of the Habituation Program on Students

The implementation of the Talented Thursday habituation program has had a significant impact on the personal, social, and emotional development of second-grade students at Jatibarang State Elementary School 03. Through creative activities such as dance, drama, music, and sports, students are given the opportunity to express themselves more freely and develop various non-academic potentials.

Based on triangulation of data from observations, interviews with principals and teachers, and student testimonies, the most prominent impacts include increased confidence, social collaboration, and students' motivation to grow. Many students who were previously passive or hesitant have begun to actively participate in weekly performances.

A second-grade student shared:

"I used to just watch, but now I join the drama every week. It feels great to be able to perform." (Interview, Student, 2024)

Another student admitted that he used to be afraid of being laughed at:

"At first I was embarrassed to participate, afraid of being laughed at. I thought I couldn't do anything." (Interview, Student, 2024)

These quotes reflect a shift in self-perception and emotional resilience as students gained experience and support in the program. Teachers and principals also observed increased initiative among students. According to the principal:

"Children who used to lack confidence are now asking to perform. Some even create their own dance moves for their group performance." (Interview, Principal, 2024)

From the teacher's perspective, the program does not only develop talents, but also helps uncover hidden potential:

"There are students who seem passive in class, but when they perform, they shine. This proves that children's talents must be given space." (Interview, Grade II Teacher, 2024)

In addition, the program fosters meaningful collaboration. Students independently formed practice groups, divided roles, and prepared properties together. These interactions help build empathy, cooperation, and a sense of belonging.

Although formal interviews were not conducted with parents, informal feedback reported by teachers indicates growing family involvement. One parent, through a teacher's account, stated:

"My child became more enthusiastic about school. Usually it's hard to wake him up early, now every Thursday he wakes me up—afraid of being late for practice." (Informal Interview via Teacher, 2024)

In summary, the Talented Thursday habituation program does not merely function as a stage for performance but as a developmental platform. It enhances student confidence, provides space for non-academic talents, and encourages values of collaboration and empathy. These outcomes contribute to whole-child development and reflect the relevance of habituation-based learning beyond cognitive achievement.

4.3. Obstacles and Solutions Faced

The implementation of the Talented Thursday program at Jatibarang State Elementary School 03 did not run without challenges. Through triangulation of data from observations, interviews with school principals, grade II teachers, and students, several recurring obstacles were identified—along with the strategies adopted to overcome them.

One of the main issues was limited facilities and infrastructure, especially the lack of proper art spaces and musical instruments. The principal stated:

"We still have limited instruments—there are only a few musical tools, and the room is also limited. But we try to maximize what we have and propose cooperation with the school committee and community." (Principal, Interview, 2024)

This limitation affected student performance preparation, especially for music and dance groups. However, the students' high enthusiasm encouraged creative solutions. For example, some students created costumes using materials from home and practiced with minimal equipment.

Another challenge involved tight academic schedules, which left little room for rehearsal. The teacher explained:

"Sometimes it's hard to find practice time. The lesson schedule is full, so we often rehearse before class starts or after school. But the kids remain enthusiastic." (Grade II Teacher, Interview, 2024)

Despite time constraints, students often took initiative to meet outside school hours. They organized rehearsals independently at friends' houses, creating a sense of ownership and camaraderie. One student said:

"I like training at a friend's house, so I can play and practice at the same time. We sometimes gather two or three times a week. It's fun." (Student R, Interview, 2024)

Observation data confirmed these practices, showing spontaneous teamwork in costume design, memorization of dialogue, and peer-led coaching.

In response, the school implemented weekly schedule adjustments and included time for performance preparation within the Thursday habituation slot. The principal also began involving parents through WhatsApp groups and informal meetings:

"We can't do this alone. We involve parents so that children are accompanied at home. Many parents are enthusiastic because they want their kids to gain confidence through positive activities." (Principal, Interview, 2024)

The involvement of parents and the school committee proved to be a strategic solution, helping provide logistical support and motivation. In some cases, parents even assisted in transporting students or providing practice spaces at home.

These solutions demonstrate that although resource limitations and scheduling issues existed, they were addressed through collaboration, student initiative, and adaptive school leadership. Importantly, these obstacles stimulated creativity, mutual support, and student resilience—further strengthening the program's educational value.

4.4. Evaluation of the Talented Thursday Habituation Program

The evaluation of the Talented Thursday habituation program was conducted regularly by the principal and grade II teachers to monitor student development and ensure the program's effectiveness. This evaluation process focused on three key aspects: student participation, program continuity, and identification of constraints. Data were obtained through direct observation, interviews with teachers, students, and the principal, and informal input from parents.

Teachers conducted informal but continuous assessments every week. Rather than relying on formal tests, they observed changes in students' behavior, initiative, and communication skills inside and outside the classroom. One teacher noted:

"I evaluate not only on Thursday, but also observe their behavior during regular classes. Some children who used to be passive now volunteer to speak up or ask to perform." (Grade II Teacher, Interview, 2024)

In this process, teachers identified students who had not yet shown interest or confidence to perform. Some students admitted feelings of inadequacy or fear of being compared:

"I'm embarrassed because I can't do anything. My friends can sing or dance, but I can't." (Student A, Interview, 2024)

To address this, teachers applied a non-judgmental approach, encouraging students to explore different non-academic areas without pressure to excel immediately. They also linked students' interests at home (e.g., storytelling, playing instruments, using TikTok) with performance opportunities, making the activities feel more personal and accessible.

The principal carried out weekly strategic evaluations by discussing progress with the teachers and directly observing Thursday performances:

"Every Thursday I take time to monitor. I also ask the teachers: who has improved? Who still needs support? Then we map out the talents and needs of each student." (Principal, Interview, 2024)

This mapping strategy helped the school plan follow-up support, such as pairing shy students with more confident peers or rotating performance types to give all students a chance to succeed.

In addition, the principal maintained active communication with parents via WhatsApp groups. These informal evaluations provided valuable insights from home. Some parents expressed pride in their children's growth:

"My child used to be shy, but now she even practices singing at home. She wakes up early every Thursday because she doesn't want to miss practice." (Informal Interview, conveyed by teacher, 2024)

Member checking was also applied in this process. The researcher shared findings and observations with the teachers and principal to verify accuracy and gather feedback. For example, preliminary conclusions about increased participation were discussed with school stakeholders before finalizing them in the study.

This cyclical evaluation mechanism—classroom observations, reflective discussions, parental feedback, and member checking—allowed the school to adapt the program dynamically to student needs. Importantly, evaluation was not only summative but also formative, serving as

a tool for strengthening individual growth, enhancing collaboration, and sustaining the program over time.

5. Discussion

5.1. Increased Student Participation and Creativity

The implementation of the Talented Thursday program demonstrated a notable increase in student participation and creativity among second-grade students at Jatibarang State Elementary School 03. In the initial stage, most students were passive and hesitant to engage in non-academic activities such as dance, drama, and gymnastics. This initial hesitation aligns with Erikson's psychosocial development theory, particularly the initiative vs. guilt stage, in which children begin to explore and take initiative but still need support to overcome feelings of fear or failure (Erikson, 1968).

By the second month, student participation had begun to increase progressively. Their enthusiasm was fostered through repeated exposure to various activities and consistent support from teachers and peers. Notably, allowing students to choose activities aligned with their interests proved to be an effective strategy.

Sulistiyono et al. (2025), in their study on interest-based digital learning programs in elementary schools, found that the use of media tailored to students' preferences significantly boosted their active participation in learning processes.

By the third month, students' creativity became more visible as they began taking initiative in creating performances and artistic projects. Instead of simply following teacher instructions, they explored their own ideas. This development indicated increased confidence in expressing ideas independently within a creative learning environment.

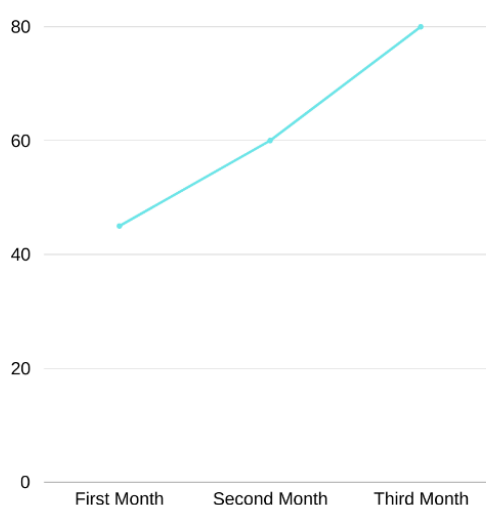


Figure 1. Percentage Increase Graph Percentage of Student Active and Creative Participation

Compared to traditional extracurricular models that are often isolated from the main learning process, the structured and habitual nature of the Talented Thursday program provides continuous exposure and emotional safety. This gradual habituation appears more effective in building participation than one-time talent events, as it aligns with young learners' developmental needs for consistency and support. The habitual rhythm of the program encourages students to internalize engagement as part of their learning culture, rather than viewing it as a special or competitive event.

However, not all students exhibited equal levels of growth in participation or creativity. Some remained disengaged or showed limited interest. These variations could be influenced by negative self-perceptions, limited exposure to similar activities at home, or a lack of

confidence. Simorangkir et al. (2024) observed that participation in interest-based literacy programs was significantly shaped by external factors such as family involvement, availability of resources, and the role of facilitators.

These findings suggest that the effectiveness of interest-based programs is highly dependent on inclusive, context-sensitive implementation. Without differentiated support for shy or socially reserved students, such programs may disproportionately benefit more naturally expressive individuals. Thus, it is necessary to establish reflective and personalized feedback mechanisms to ensure equitable engagement.

Furthermore, the importance of social support—particularly from teachers and peers—was evident throughout the program. When teachers functioned as facilitators rather than authoritative figures, students felt freer to experiment and express themselves creatively. This aligns with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Profil Pelajar Pancasila, particularly in cultivating creativity, independence, and collaboration.

Nevertheless, the data used in this study were primarily observational and based on teacher reports and informal student interviews. Consequently, interpretations of success should be made cautiously. The short duration of the intervention also limits the ability to assess long-term behavioral and cognitive impacts. Future studies should consider using standardized instruments and longitudinal tracking to provide a more robust understanding of the program's effectiveness.

In conclusion, the Talented Thursday program contributed to enhanced student participation and creativity through a structured interest-based approach. However, its success relies heavily on social support systems, flexible curriculum design, and sensitivity to individual learner characteristics. Future development of this program should focus on stronger differentiation strategies and more inclusive reflection practices to ensure all students benefit, regardless of their personality or initial confidence level.

5.2. The Role of Principals and Teachers

The *Talented Thursday* program was developed through collaborative mapping of student interests, talents, and needs involving school principals and classroom teachers. The principal's leadership plays a central role not only in initiating and legitimizing the program's policies, but also in ensuring its alignment with school-wide development goals. As highlighted by Johnsen (2025), school leaders in the era of gifted education must foster spaces for exploration and reinforce teacher involvement in student-centered interest-based programs to ensure optimal learner development.

Throughout the program's implementation, the principal regularly monitors its progress through direct communication and reflective meetings with classroom teachers. This approach aligns with the model of instructional leadership embedded in performance-based coaching, in which school leaders systematically support teacher innovation and learning culture development. Similar findings were reported by Rumasukun et al. (2024), who emphasized that principals' ability to integrate the independent learning vision into school routines contributes to a sustainable environment for talent development.

Teachers, meanwhile, serve as key facilitators who assist students in exploring their interests and expressing their potential across artistic, athletic, and social domains. They not only manage the technical aspects of activities but also cultivate social interaction and student agency. According to Johnsen (2025), the success of interest-based programs is largely determined by teachers' capacity to balance flexible instruction with personalized feedback, guided by continuous observation of student engagement.

To ensure readiness, teachers at Jatibarang State Elementary School 03 received targeted training on instructional differentiation and managing non-academic projects. This effort reinforces the evolving role of teachers as partners in student growth—coaches rather than mere knowledge transmitters. This aligns with the conclusion of Jannati et al. (2023), who found that schools with empowered “teacher-leaders” are more effective in implementing interest-based activities aligned with the Profil Pelajar Pancasila framework.

Moreover, the leadership style adopted by the principal emphasizes open collaboration not only with teachers but also with parents, school committees, and external partners. These collaborations aim to secure sustainable resources—both policy and infrastructure—that support the continuity of the program. As affirmed by (Susanto & Wiharto, 2024), when principals apply coaching-based leadership that includes all stakeholders, the implementation of talent-based initiatives becomes more institutionalized rather than incidental.

However, challenges remain. Not all teachers initially possessed adequate skills to guide non-academic activities effectively, especially in the domains of performing arts and creative movement. This is consistent with findings by Alhabsyi et al. (2023), who argued that school-based leadership must invest in ongoing teacher development to prevent marginalization of non-academic learning in academically oriented school cultures.

In practical terms, the Talented Thursday initiative offers a replicable model for other schools seeking to embed student-centered interest programs. Its effectiveness depends not only on innovative design but also on the principal's capacity to coordinate diverse actors, promote pedagogical freedom, and institutionalize support structures. While the program at Jatibarang State Elementary School 03 has benefited from strong school leadership and teacher dedication, similar programs in less resourceful schools may require support from education offices and community partnerships.

Thus, the role of school leaders and teachers in this context is both strategic and transformative. They not only enable the program to run but shape its success through shared vision, professional growth, and sustained collaboration. The lesson from this program reinforces that nurturing student talents should be embedded in school culture and leadership, not treated as auxiliary.

5.3. Challenges and Adaptations

The implementation of the Talented Thursday program at Jatibarang State Elementary School 03 encountered a number of practical challenges that influenced its effectiveness and sustainability. Among the most pressing were limited time allocation due to an academically tight schedule, insufficient facilities (such as art rooms and musical instruments), and the low self-confidence of some students who believed they lacked talent. These findings echo research by Putri et al. (2024), who emphasized that despite the progressive ideals of the Merdeka Curriculum, field implementation is still hindered by infrastructural shortages and the prevailing teacher orientation toward academic achievements.

To address these obstacles, the school adopted several adaptive strategies. First, it revised the school schedule to allow more flexible time slots for interest-based activities. Second, it rotated the use of existing classrooms to function as temporary art or drama spaces. Third, it allowed students to choose activities that aligned with their personal interests and comfort zones. According to internal evaluations conducted over three months, these adjustments led to a significant increase in student participation—from 45% in the first month to 80% by the third month. This rise indicates the effectiveness of structural flexibility in promoting affective engagement. As also noted by Izzah (2023), active involvement in student-centered activities enhances emotional security and self-confidence.

Despite these efforts, systemic constraints remained—particularly in the form of limited access to tools such as musical instruments, creative materials, and physical spaces dedicated to artistic expression. Another critical barrier was the uneven skill level among teachers, some of whom lacked technical competence or prior experience in guiding non-academic talents. This issue is consistent with the conclusions of Ngaini et al. (2024), who argued that teacher competence and the availability of ongoing training are decisive factors in ensuring that extracurricular programs are not marginalized by dominant academic demands.

From a pedagogical perspective, the program was designed based on project-based learning and learning by doing, both of which proved effective in developing students' social, collaborative, and creative skills. Observation notes and questionnaire results indicated that 85% of students reported increased self-confidence after engaging in these activities. Moreover, students gradually demonstrated more willingness to perform in front of peers,

present original work, and accept peer feedback—highlighting the growth of intrinsic motivation and expressive courage. These field observations are aligned with the findings of Puspitasari et al. (2025), who demonstrated that differentiated learning environments in Merdeka Curriculum contexts can cultivate active and responsible learners.

Additionally, the program supported the development of character values embedded in the Pancasila Student Profile. Activities within Talented Thursday reflected the core values of collaboration, independence, creativity, and critical thinking through real-world, contextual tasks. Students learned not only as performers but as decision-makers, facing challenges and adapting through reflective dialogue and group coordination. This dual focus on skill and character formation validates the holistic intent of the independent learning paradigm.

Nonetheless, critical reflection is needed regarding sustainability. The short duration of observation (three months) limits conclusions about long-term behavioral transformation. Moreover, results relied heavily on internal teacher assessments and student self-reports, both of which are subject to bias. For instance, students may overreport satisfaction due to social desirability, and teacher enthusiasm might color evaluations. As such, more rigorous, long-term, and triangulated data collection is necessary to fully validate the program's impact.

In conclusion, the Talented Thursday program has shown considerable potential in fostering student participation, creativity, and confidence. These promising outcomes, however, are not without challenges. The long-term success and scalability of the program rely heavily on the school's ability to continuously adapt to structural limitations and contextual realities. To strengthen the program's effectiveness and sustainability, future development should prioritize several interconnected strategies. First, there is a need to diversify the range of activities offered so that students with various interests and abilities can engage meaningfully. Second, schools must invest in enhancing both the quality and availability of facilities, equipment, and teacher resources to support the diverse nature of non-academic learning. Finally, establishing long-term collaborations with art communities, cultural institutions, and non-formal education providers is essential to enrich program content and reduce overreliance on internal school resources. These steps, if implemented strategically, can help institutionalize talent development programs as an integral component of holistic education in Indonesian primary schools.

6. Conclusion

The implementation of the Talented Thursday program at Jatibarang State Elementary School 03 has shown a meaningful impact on enhancing student participation, creativity, and confidence in non-academic learning contexts. Over three months of implementation, a clear shift was observed in student behavior—from initial passivity to increasingly active engagement and original idea expression. This progression reflects the core values of differentiated learning within the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes student agency and the importance of accommodating diverse interests and learning modalities. Additionally, the program has served as an effective platform for embodying the values of the Pancasila Student Profile, particularly independence, mutual cooperation, creativity, and critical thinking, through real and contextual learning experiences. The increased student participation—from 45% to 80%—was achieved through a collaborative and strategic effort involving school leadership, teacher facilitation, and community engagement. The principal's role as a policy driver, combined with teachers' flexibility and mentoring capacity, provided the foundation for a supportive environment where students could explore their potential without fear. These achievements, however, were not without constraints. The program faced notable challenges such as limited infrastructure for creative activities, varied levels of teacher readiness, and tight academic scheduling, which at times restricted program flexibility. These issues highlight the structural conditions that must be addressed to ensure broader accessibility and sustainability. Ultimately, the Talented Thursday program demonstrates that interest-based and character-oriented education must be institutionalized as a core part of the school culture, rather than treated as supplementary. Ensuring the program's long-term impact will require continuous refinement through the diversification of activity options, enhancement of teaching facilities, sustained

professional development for teachers, and the establishment of meaningful partnerships with external educational and cultural communities. When these components are systematically strengthened, schools will be better positioned to implement holistic, student-centered education that nurtures both competence and character in line with national curriculum reforms.

Limitation

The limitations of the research conducted by the author to get maximum research results are the process of implementing the Talented Thursday Habituation program for grade II students of Jatibarang State Elementary School 03 and anyone involved in its implementation, analyzing the Talented Thursday Habituation program for grade II students can encourage active participation and creativity of grade II students at Jatibarang State Elementary School 03, Obstacles and solutions faced during the implementation of this effectiveness improvement program.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and implementation challenges of the Talented Thursday program, several targeted recommendations are proposed to strengthen its sustainability and impact. Schools and teachers are encouraged to address key barriers such as limited creative infrastructure and rigid academic scheduling by providing dedicated art spaces, musical instruments, performance tools, and student exhibition areas. Flexible timetabling—such as rotating classroom use or embedding interest-based learning into project weeks—can help integrate the program without compromising core subjects. Additionally, regular and context-specific teacher training should focus on facilitating non-academic learning, applying project-based and differentiated instruction, and equipping teachers with strategies to engage students with varied interests and confidence levels. Expanding the types of activities beyond the arts, including public speaking, crafts, and STEM-infused creative challenges, will ensure inclusivity for students with diverse talents.

For future research, this study serves as a foundational model that should be explored across different education levels, school environments, and regional settings to evaluate its transferability. Researchers are encouraged to apply both qualitative and quantitative methods, particularly in assessing long-term outcomes on student confidence, collaboration, and character growth. Comparative studies can contrast similar programs with different facilitation models or cultural settings. Furthermore, integrating technology—such as digital storytelling, multimedia art, or virtual collaboration platforms—can enrich activity formats and extend student expression. Collaborative partnerships with arts organizations, cultural institutions, and local communities also hold potential to scale and deepen the program's relevance, making it a dynamic part of holistic education under the Merdeka Curriculum framework.

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Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflict of interest in conducting research and publication of articles.

Declaration of Generative AI-assisted Technologies

This manuscript was prepared with the assistance of the Generative AI tool ChatGPT. The AI was used to support the process of language refinement, specifically in translating content into

English. All intellectual contributions, critical analyses, and final revisions were conducted by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the content presented in this work.

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