

Jaran Kepang Art as a Means of Character Education in *Paguyuban Rukun Tri Santoso*

Rebeka Sri Minati, Dionisius Heckie Puspoko Jati*, Nani Mediatati

Satya Wacana Christian University, Salatiga, Indonesia

*dionisius.jati@uksw.edu

Abstract

Jaran Kepang is widely recognized as a form of traditional cultural heritage and community entertainment; however, its function as a medium for character education within art communities has not been sufficiently explored. In fact, traditional performance practices contain educational values that contribute to the formation of individual and social character, particularly among young community members. This study aims to examine the presentation of Rukun Tri Santoso and to identify the character education values embedded in its performance and community activities. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed. Data were collected through participatory observation of performances, in-depth interviews with the community leader, the handler, six dancers, four gamelan musicians, and three supporting members, as well as documentation analysis. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and member checking. The findings indicate that the Jaran Kepang performance integrates dance movements, gamelan accompaniment, costumes, properties, and performance procedures that are rich in symbolic meanings. These elements reflect character values such as discipline, responsibility, teamwork, mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), religiosity, respect, and appreciation of local culture. Importantly, these values are not only manifested during public performances but are consistently internalized throughout rehearsal processes, role distribution, and daily social interactions among *paguyuban* members. In conclusion, Jaran Kepang functions as an informal, community-based character education agent through embodied cultural practices. This study demonstrates has strong potential as a local wisdom based medium for character education that can be applied in both formal and non-formal educational contexts, particularly in supporting cultural preservation and youth character development.

Keywords: Jaran Kepang Art; Local Wisdom; Character Education; Art Community; Cultural-Based Education

Abstrak

Kesenian Jaran Kepang selama ini dikenal sebagai warisan budaya dan sarana hiburan masyarakat, namun perannya sebagai wahana pendidikan karakter berbasis komunitas seni (paguyuban) masih relatif kurang dikaji secara mendalam. Padahal, di dalam praktik kesenian tradisional tersimpan nilai-nilai karakter yang berpotensi membentuk sikap dan perilaku anggota komunitas, khususnya generasi muda. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji penyajian kesenian Jaran Kepang oleh Paguyuban Rukun Tri Santoso serta mengidentifikasi nilai-nilai pendidikan karakter yang terinternalisasi dalam proses pementasan dan aktivitas paguyuban. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi partisipatif pada pementasan, wawancara mendalam dengan ketua paguyuban, pawang, enam penari, empat penabuh gamelan, serta tiga anggota pendukung, dan dilengkapi dengan studi dokumentasi. Keabsahan data dijamin melalui triangulasi sumber dan member checking. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penyajian kesenian Jaran Kepang meliputi unsur

gerak tari, iringan gamelan, kostum, properti, serta tata cara pementasan yang sarat dengan makna simbolik. Nilai-nilai karakter yang teridentifikasi meliputi disiplin, tanggung jawab, kerja sama, gotong royong, religiusitas, sikap saling menghormati, dan apresiasi terhadap budaya lokal. Nilai-nilai tersebut tidak hanya tampak saat pementasan berlangsung, tetapi juga terinternalisasi dalam proses latihan, pembagian peran, serta interaksi sosial antaranggota paguyuban. Simpulan penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa kesenian Jaran Kepang berfungsi sebagai agen pendidikan karakter informal berbasis kearifan lokal. Kesenian ini berpotensi dikembangkan sebagai media pendidikan karakter yang relevan dalam konteks pendidikan formal maupun nonformal, sekaligus berkontribusi pada pelestarian budaya dan pembentukan karakter generasi muda.

Kata Kunci: *Kesenian Jaran Kepang; Kearifan Lokal; Pendidikan Karakter; Paguyuban Seni; Pendidikan Berbasis Budaya*

Introduction

Character education constitutes a strategic agenda in national educational development, functioning to cultivate morally grounded, culturally rooted, and socially responsible individuals. Contemporary scholarship confirms that effective character education cannot be divorced from the social and cultural contexts in which learners are embedded (Lickona, 2018; Suyanto and Widodo, 2019). Consequently, pedagogical approaches anchored in local cultural traditions demonstrate superior efficacy in fostering meaningful internalization of character values. The imperative to integrate local wisdom into character education has intensified amid accelerating globalization and cultural homogenization (Zuchdi, 2019).

Local wisdom understood as systems of values, knowledge, and cultural practices evolved within communities provides practical guidelines for communal living Suparno (2020) and aligns substantively with character education objectives including honesty, discipline, responsibility, and mutual cooperation. Traditional performing arts emerge as particularly potent vessels of local wisdom, embedding symbolic, social, and spiritual values that facilitate character formation not through verbal instruction but through repeated aesthetic experiences and embodied social practices (Susanto, 2020; Ryan and Bohlin, 2019; Mayer, 2020).

Jaran Kepang, a Javanese folk performance art characterized by intricate dance movements, gamelan accompaniment, elaborate costumes, and ritual elements, exemplifies such cultural-pedagogical potential. Recent scholarship documents that traditional performing arts cultivate character values including solidarity, discipline, courage, and collective loyalty manifested not merely in performances but throughout rehearsal processes and organizational dynamics (Rahmawati and Nugroho, 2021; Widodo and Suyanto, 2022). Art communities (*paguyuban*) function as crucial cultural transmission mechanisms, serving as effective social learning spaces for intergenerational character development through modeling, interaction, and collective practice (Putri et al., 2023; Zakaria and Hamzah, 2021). Despite growing evidence that local arts-based character education strengthens cultural identity and prosocial attitudes among youth Sudrajat (2021) and recognition that traditional arts integration supports holistic learning balancing knowledge, attitudes, and skills Schunk (2020); Zimmerman (2020) substantial research gaps persist.

Existing studies predominantly emphasize aesthetic or historical dimensions of traditional arts while insufficiently examining their character education functions within community-based contexts (Yuliana and Pramono, 2021; Wuryandani and Fathurrohman,

2020). This gap manifests acutely in the context of Paguyuban Rukun Tri Santoso, an active Jaran Kepang community facing twin challenges: first, diminishing youth participation in traditional arts amid competing digital entertainment; second, the absence of systematic documentation regarding how character values are actually transmitted and internalized through communal artistic practice. Preliminary observations reveal that while the *paguyuban* maintains regular rehearsals and performances, the pedagogical mechanisms underlying character formation remain implicit and understudied.

Furthermore, contemporary character education discourse in Indonesia has yet to adequately theorize how informal community-based artistic practices complement formal schooling in character development. Given these empirical and theoretical lacunae, this study aims to: (1) comprehensively describe the presentation structure of Jaran Kepang art in *Paguyuban* Rukun Tri Santoso, including dance movements, musical accompaniment, costumes, properties, and performance protocols; (2) identify and analyze character education values embedded within and transmitted through these artistic practices; and (3) examine the mechanisms through which these values are internalized by community members across rehearsal, performance, and social interaction contexts.

This investigation seeks to enrich cultural arts and character education scholarship grounded in local wisdom while providing practical contributions toward developing character education through traditional arts (Lickona et al., 2019; Thomas and Brown, 2020). Research on character education through traditional arts has gained significant attention in recent years, yet studies specifically examining community-based art practices remain limited. Lickona (2018) conducted a comprehensive study demonstrating that character education programs integrating cultural contexts yielded more sustainable outcomes than decontextualized approaches.

This finding was corroborated by Suyanto and Widodo (2019) who examined multiple Indonesian schools implementing local wisdom-based character education, revealing higher student engagement and value internalization rates. In the context of traditional performing arts, Susanto (2020) investigated Javanese ketoprak theater as a character education medium, identifying discipline, teamwork, and cultural appreciation as dominant values transmitted through performance participation. Similarly, Ryan and Bohlin (2019) analyzed drama education programs across Western contexts, concluding that arts-based learning effectively bridges cognitive and affective domains in moral development.

However, these studies focused primarily on formal educational settings rather than community-based informal learning spaces. Rahmawati and Nugroho (2021) specifically examined Reog Ponorogo performances, documenting how rehearsal processes cultivate courage, loyalty, and collective responsibility among performers. Their ethnographic approach revealed that character formation occurred more intensively during practice sessions than actual performances. Widodo and Suyanto (2022) expanded this line of inquiry by comparing character values across three Javanese traditional arts *wayang kulit*, *tayub*, and *kuda lumping* finding common values of togetherness and spirituality while noting context-specific variations.

Recent scholarship has begun exploring art communities (*paguyuban*) as social learning environments. Putri et al., (2023) studied a traditional music community in West Java, demonstrating that intergenerational knowledge transmission within *paguyuban* structures facilitated both technical skill acquisition and character value internalization. Zakaria and Hamzah (2021) corroborated these findings in their Malaysian study of traditional dance communities, emphasizing the role of collective practices in building prosocial behaviors. Regarding Jaran Kepang specifically, existing research remains

sparse and fragmented. Yuliana and Pramono (2021) documented the historical evolution and aesthetic elements of Jaran Kepang in East Java but did not examine its educational dimensions. Wuryandani and Fathurrohman (2020) briefly mentioned Jaran Kepang among other traditional arts with character education potential yet provided no empirical analysis of actual pedagogical processes within performance communities.

Broader studies on local wisdom and character education have established theoretical frameworks. Suparno (2020) developed a conceptual model integrating local wisdom into formal curricula, while Sudrajat (2021) surveyed teachers' perceptions of culture-based character education across Indonesian schools. However, these macro-level analyses lack micro-level examination of how specific art forms function pedagogically within their communities of practice. International comparative research provides useful context. Tan and Wong (2021) analyzed arts-based character education programs across Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, finding that programs grounded in local cultural practices demonstrated stronger community support and sustainability.

Mayer (2020) synthesized research on experiential learning through arts, arguing for embodied learning approaches that Jaran Kepang exemplifies but which remain understudied empirically. Recent methodological advances emphasize participatory approaches to studying community-based education. Thomas and Brown (2020) advocated for research designs that position researchers as learners within cultural communities rather than external observers. Schunk (2020); and Zimmerman (2020) independently argued for examining social learning processes through extended engagement rather than snapshot observations. Despite this growing body of research, critical gaps persist.

First, no studies have systematically documented the complete presentation structure of Jaran Kepang in relation to character education values. Second, the specific mechanisms through which *paguyuban* environments facilitate character value internalization remain underexplored. Third, existing research tends to examine either performance aesthetics or educational outcomes in isolation, rarely integrating both perspectives. Fourth, most studies focus on formal educational interventions rather than organic community-based practices where traditional arts naturally thrive.

This study addresses these gaps by providing comprehensive documentation of Jaran Kepang presentation elements while simultaneously analyzing embedded character values and transmission mechanisms within *Paguyuban* Rukun Tri Santoso. By examining how character education occurs naturally within an active art community, this research contributes empirical evidence regarding informal cultural education processes that complement formal schooling. The findings will advance understanding of community-based character education while providing practical insights for cultural preservation and youth development initiatives.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design with a socio-cultural approach to examine the presentation of Jaran Kepang art by *Paguyuban* Rukun Tri Santoso and to identify character education values embedded in its practices. The research was conducted from February to July 2025 at the *paguyuban*'s rehearsal venue and various performance locations. Data sources consisted of primary data obtained from observations, interviews, and community activities, as well as secondary data from documents related to performances and organizational records. Informants were determined using purposive sampling, involving 15 active members of the *paguyuban*, including the leader, handler (*pawang*), dancers, gamelan musicians, and supporting members, selected based on their roles and experience in Jaran Kepang performances.

The main research instruments were the researchers themselves, supported by observation guidelines, semi-structured interview guides, field notes, audio recordings, photographs, and video documentation. Data collection techniques included participatory observation of rehearsals, performances, and rituals; in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore experiences, meanings, and perceived character values; and documentation analysis to strengthen contextual understanding. Data analysis was carried out interactively and continuously through data reduction by coding and categorizing performance elements and character values, data display using matrices to identify patterns and relationships, and conclusion drawing with verification to ensure consistency and validity of findings. This methodological procedure enabled a comprehensive and systematic understanding of Jaran Kepang as a community-based medium for character education.

Results & Discussion

The presentation of Jaran Kepang art by “*Paguyuban*” Rukun Tri Santoso functions as a systematic cultural mechanism for character education, where values are integrated directly into the performance structure and organizational dynamics rather than transmitted verbally. Religiosity serves as the fundamental value underpinning this entire artistic process. Observations indicate that every activity invariably begins and ends with a joint prayer, a practice interpreted by the “*pawang*” (handler) not merely as a routine, but as a spiritual necessity to solicit safety and surrender human effort to divine will.

This ritualistic beginning is viewed by members as a profound mark of respect for traditions and ancestors, effectively instilling spiritual consciousness and gratitude within the performers. Closely intertwined with this spiritual foundation is the rigorous cultivation of discipline and responsibility. Field findings confirm that the character building process is enforced through strict rehearsal schedules and a persuasive reprimand mechanism for lateness, fostering a collective awareness of commitment. The leader of the “*Paguyuban*” emphasised that this discipline extends to ethical conduct during performances, where dancers must exercise emotional self-control to avoid excessive trance states.

Consequently, responsibility is manifested through the members’ dedication to their respective technical roles mastering “*wiraga*” (movement) and “*wirama*” (rhythm) to uphold the group’s reputation and preserve their cultural identity. Furthermore, the complexity of the performance necessitates a high degree of cooperation and social inclusivity. The success of a show is contingent upon the cohesiveness between dancers, musicians, and handlers, empirically evidencing the value of “*gotong royong*” (mutual assistance). Musicians must maintain intense concentration to align the tempo with the dancers’ movements, creating a unified artistic expression.

This collaborative spirit transcends the stage, as demographic observations reveal an inclusive social space where members of diverse ages and backgrounds interact with high tolerance. Senior members provide mentorship rather than authoritarian command, creating a barrier-free environment for learning. Finally, the internalisation of values is reinforced through participatory leadership and integrity within the organization. Management practices are characterised by “*musyawarah*” (deliberation) rather than authoritarian instruction, ensuring that members feel valued in decision-making processes.

Moreover, honesty is institutionalised through strict financial transparency, where all income and expenditures are publicly communicated to members. This practice fosters deep trust within the group, demonstrating that the character education within “*Paguyuban*” Rukun Tri Santoso encompasses not only artistic proficiency but also accountable and ethical organizational behaviour. The art of Jaran Kepang *Paguyuban*

Rukun Tri Santoso functions not merely as traditional entertainment, but as a medium for transmitting character education values. The findings demonstrate that each element of the performance contains moral messages transmitted across generations. This aligns with scholarly perspectives recognizing traditional art as a vehicle for shaping social character within communities (Widodo, 2019). Performing arts create non-formal learning spaces that are both contextual and meaningful for participants. Religious values emerge prominently in the early stages of performance, particularly through prayer rituals and offerings. These practices reflect spiritual attitudes, gratitude, and reverence toward God and ancestors.

This corresponds with character education frameworks that position religious values as the moral foundation of individuals (Lickona, 2018). Traditional art thereby serves as a culturally embedded means of internalizing religious values beyond formal instruction. Discipline manifests through the regularity of training schedules and members' adherence to association rules. Observations revealed that members are required to arrive punctually and maintain proper conduct during rehearsals. This form of discipline supports the formation of responsible character as emphasized in habit-based character education approaches (Suyanto, 2018).

The findings illustrate harmony between cultural practices and formal educational objectives. Cooperation emerges as a dominant value through interaction patterns between dancers and gamelan musicians. Every movement and rhythm must synchronize for harmonious performance. This condition supports social learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of collaboration in character formation (Bandura, 2018). Traditional performing arts thus function as social laboratories for cooperative learning experiences. Honesty also constitutes a character value arising through the roles of handlers and dancers in observing performance protocols.

Interviews indicate that manipulation or violation of rituals is considered unethical and capable of undermining the sacred value of the performance. This aligns with integrity principles in global character education frameworks. Honesty is practiced concretely, transcending mere normative concepts. Responsibility manifests in members' commitment to maintaining the association's reputation. Each member feels a moral obligation to perform optimally in every staging. This concept is consistent with community-based character education that emphasizes the community's role in shaping individual responsibility (Arthur et al., 2015).

The association functions as an agent of community-based character education. The findings also demonstrate that courage is instilled through dancers' roles in performing before public audiences. This courage is not aggressive but represents moral and mental fortitude. This finding aligns with contemporary character education concepts of moral courage (Nucci et al., 2014). Traditional art serves as a means of strengthening participants' self-confidence. Perseverance can be observed from the repetitive training process requiring patience.

Dancers must master movements and expressions consistently. This supports theoretical frameworks of grit and perseverance in character development (Duckworth and Gross, 2014). Perseverance is trained naturally through artistic practice. Respect for tradition is evident from members' adherence to performance structures. Despite innovations, fundamental values remain preserved. This corresponds with concepts of cultural sustainability in culture-based education (Blake, 2009). Traditional arts play roles in maintaining cultural identity as well as national character. These findings reinforce the view that character education need not occur exclusively in classrooms. Cultural environments provide authentic, contextual learning experiences. This accords with experiential learning approaches in character education (Wibowo, 2017). Experiential

learning has proven more meaningful than abstract instruction. When compared with previous research, these results align with studies on traditional art as a medium for character education in Southeast Asia (Tan and Wong, 2021).

However, this study adds more specific Javanese local context. Thus, the research contribution lies in strengthening empirical evidence from local communities. This enriches the scholarly discourse on culture-based education. The study also demonstrates that leadership values emerge through the chairperson's role in the association. Leadership is conducted participatively and oriented toward exemplary behavior. This aligns with concepts of servant leadership in character education (Kristjánsson, 2017). Culture-based leadership has proven effective in building collective character. Empathy appears through solidarity among members when facing difficulties.

Interviews reveal the presence of moral and material support between members. Empathy constitutes an important element in twenty-first century character education. Traditional art functions as a medium for strengthening social empathy. Nationalism is reflected through efforts to preserve local culture as part of national identity. Efforts to preserve Jaran Keping represent a form of love for the homeland. This aligns with policies strengthening national culture-based character education (Suyanto, 2018). Local art becomes a symbol of cultural nationalism.

This discussion confirms that traditional art possesses high relevance to the Pancasila Student Profile framework. Values of mutual cooperation, independence, and noble character are implemented concretely. These findings reinforce previous studies on the integration of local culture and character education (Setiawan, 2020). Traditional art thus remains relevant to national education policy. From an international perspective, these findings align with studies on character education through arts-based learning. Art is recognized as an effective medium in forming moral and social values (Eisner, 2015).

The art of Jaran Keping demonstrates the concrete application of this approach in the Indonesian local context. This illustrates the universality of educational values through art. The study also confirms that character education is holistic in nature. Cognitive, affective, and psychomotor values are integrated in artistic practice. This aligns with holistic education frameworks (Miller, 2019). Traditional art provides multidimensional learning spaces. The theoretical implications of this study strengthen character education paradigms based on local wisdom. Local culture functions not merely as an object of study but as a source of educational values.

This corresponds with culturally responsive education approaches (Gay, 2018). Culture-based education reinforces learning relevance. In practical terms, these findings demonstrate the potential for integrating traditional arts into formal education. Schools can utilize local art as contextual learning resources. This is supported by international research on community-based learning (Banks, 2017). Collaboration between schools and communities constitutes a key to success. From a policy perspective, this study supports strengthening culture-based character education programs.

Local governments can make arts associations educational partners. This aligns with policies on cultural preservation and national character education. Cross-sector synergy is required. This research also provides contributions to educational anthropology scholarship. Traditional art is understood as a living value system. This approach expands character education perspectives that have tended toward normativity. Art becomes a rich source of empirical data. Compared to previous studies, this research emphasizes implementation aspects of character values. Values are not merely identified but analyzed in actual practice. This strengthens the validity of research findings. The qualitative approach provides analytical depth. This discussion also confirms the importance of cultural preservation as an educational strategy. Without preservation,

embedded character values risk being lost. This aligns with the global agenda for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (Blake, 2009). Education and culture must proceed hand in hand. Creativity arises through performance adaptations that do not abandon foundational structures. Creativity becomes an important component in modern character education. This accords with twenty-first century skills frameworks (Setiawan, 2020). Traditional art remains relevant in the modern era. Tolerance can be observed from the association's openness to members' diverse backgrounds. Diversity is accepted as collective strength. Tolerance constitutes a universal value in global character education. Art becomes an inclusive space for value learning.

This discussion demonstrates that traditional arts possess high pedagogical potential often underutilized. This study reinforces the urgency of integrating culture and education. Local art becomes a source of educational innovation. The results are also relevant for developing local wisdom-based curricula. Contextual curricula increase student engagement. This is supported by international studies on culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018). Education becomes more meaningful and contextual. This discussion shows that character education is not instantaneous. The process of internalizing values requires time and consistency. Traditional art provides long-term learning spaces. This accords with concepts of continuing character education (Lovat and Toomey, 2019).

Thus, the art of Jaran Kepang plays a strategic role in culture-based character education. The arts association functions as a non-formal educational agent. These findings enrich discourse on character education in Indonesia. Local culture becomes an educational strength for national education. Overall, this discussion confirms the relevance of traditional arts in strengthening character education. The integration of art, culture, and education becomes an urgent necessity. This research provides an empirical basis for developing culture-based education policies and practices. The art of Jaran Kepang represents a living example of character education.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the Jaran Kepang performance by *Paguyuban Rukun Tri Santoso* serves as an effective medium for character education grounded in local wisdom. Through training processes, performances, and social interactions among community members, character values such as religiosity, discipline, responsibility, teamwork, honesty, tolerance, and nationalism are internalized in a tangible and meaningful manner. This traditional art form functions as a non-formal, contextual, and holistic learning space that aligns with both national and international character education frameworks, highlighting its strategic role beyond cultural preservation. Therefore, strengthening and sustaining Jaran Kepang art is essential not only for maintaining local cultural heritage but also for supporting character education development within communities and educational institutions. The authors gratefully acknowledge the Directorate of Research and Community Service of Satya Wacana Christian University (DRPM UKSW) for funding and facilitating this research through the Institutional Research Scheme under contract number 085/RIK-RPM/07/2025. Appreciation is also extended to *Paguyuban Rukun Tri Santoso* and all parties who contributed support and cooperation throughout the research process.

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