

Utilization of Cirebon Mask Dance Art and Culture in Learning for Elementary School Students in Cirebon City

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Abstract: Traditional art is an important part of national identity, yet the Cirebon Mask Dance faced declining interest among the younger generation. This study aimed to examine how the utilization of the Cirebon Mask Dance in arts and culture learning increased elementary school students' appreciation of traditional art, and to identify the benefits and challenges of integrating it into the formal curriculum. The study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design at a primary school in Cirebon City. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with two key informants, an extracurricular coordinator teacher and an arts teacher who was also a dance practitioner, together with classroom observation and documentation, then analyzed thematically and validated through source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking. The results show that experiential, multisensory learning of the dance increases students' enthusiasm, courage to perform, communication skills, and pride in local culture. The five mask characters convey moral values that support character education, and the dance is integrated across subjects such as fine arts, civics, and Islamic education. The main challenges are limited teacher mastery of the dance, inadequate facilities, a dense curriculum, and gender perceptions among boys. The study concludes that the Cirebon Mask Dance is an effective and meaningful medium for cultural preservation and character building at the primary education level, and recommends its wider adoption across elementary schools in the Cirebon region.

Keyword : Cirebon Mask Dance; traditional art; cultural preservation; arts and culture learning; character education

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Introduction

Indonesia's traditional arts and culture reflect a national identity that is rich in diverse customs, beliefs, and languages. One traditional art form distinctive to the Cirebon region is the Cirebon Mask Dance, which carries cultural, historical, and philosophical values that have been passed down across generations (Kasih et al., 2024). This dance is not merely an entertainment performance; it is part of a ritual and an important symbol in the social life of the Cirebon community, combining elements of dance, music, theater, and visual art as a means of conveying moral messages (Adristi, 2024). Each mask character—Panji, Samba, Rumyang, Tumenggung, and Kelana—carries meanings that depict human character and teachings on ethical living.

Despite its long history and rich values, the Cirebon Mask Dance now faces serious challenges to its preservation, particularly among the younger generation. The advance of technology and globalization has drawn young people toward modern entertainment, causing interest in traditional art to decline significantly (Wijayanto et al., 2025). This declining interest not only reduces the frequency of performances but also disrupts the

regeneration of artists. Sutisna and Sutisna (2024) asserted that traditional art in the digital era requires new preservation strategies to remain relevant, while Karimah et al. (2024) showed that the dominance of digital visual media poses a distinct challenge to the transmission of a dance art that is inherently physical and practice-based.

Amid these conditions, education is viewed as a strategic space for bridging traditional art with the younger generation. Arts education plays an important role in shaping character, cultivating aesthetic sensibility, and instilling an understanding of local identity (Zannatunnisya, 2024). Through dance learning, students do not merely acquire movement techniques but also grasp the symbolic meanings that strengthen their bond with regional culture. This is consistent with the goals of national education, which emphasize the strengthening of character and love for the nation's culture (Pujawati, 2024).

A number of previous studies have examined dance art in education. Viranti and Fadhillah (2023) found that dance art can develop positive character traits such as discipline and empathy, although their study was general in nature and did not specifically address the Cirebon Mask Dance. Riyaningsih (2019) highlighted the importance of integrating local culture into character formation, while Rosala (2016) examined local-wisdom-based arts and culture learning in general terms. Meanwhile, Nurachmy Sahnir et al. (2023) emphasized the use of technology in arts learning but did not link it to the Cirebon Mask Dance. This mapping reveals a gap: few studies have specifically examined the integration of the Cirebon Mask Dance into formal elementary school learning, together with its benefits and challenges.

Building on this gap, the present study offers novelty by focusing on the utilization of the Cirebon Mask Dance as a learning medium in elementary schools in Cirebon City, examined through the direct experiences of teachers and students. This study seeks to answer two questions: (1) how does the utilization of the Cirebon Mask Dance in arts and culture learning increase students' appreciation of traditional art; and (2) what are the benefits and challenges of integrating the Cirebon Mask Dance into the formal school curriculum. The analysis draws on several theories, namely constructivism (Piaget), social learning (Vygotsky), multicultural education (Banks), culture-based learning (Mead), active learning (Dewey), and cultural preservation (Anderson), which together explain how students construct knowledge and cultural values through artistic experience.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the utilization of the Cirebon Mask Dance in arts and culture learning at the elementary school level. The qualitative approach was chosen because the study sought to holistically explore the meanings, experiences, and practices of learning within their natural context, rather than to test cause-and-effect relationships between variables.

The study was conducted in 2025 at an elementary school in Cirebon City, West Java, which had implemented both classroom learning and an extracurricular program in the Cirebon Mask Dance. Interview data were collected in October 2025.

The research subjects consisted of arts and culture teachers and students involved in classroom learning and extracurricular activities related to the Cirebon Mask Dance. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with two key informants: a teacher who also served as the extracurricular coordinator, and an arts teacher who was also an active dance practitioner. Secondary data were drawn from curriculum documents, teaching materials, and observation notes on learning activities.

Data were collected through three complementary techniques: semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were used to explore teachers' experiences, perceptions, and practices; observation was conducted to examine the learning process and students' responses both in class and during rehearsals; and documentation was used to supplement the data with learning materials and records of artistic activities. The instruments used included an interview guide, an observation sheet, and a documentation guide.

Data were analyzed thematically through the stages of data collection, coding, theme identification, and interpretation of meaning. To ensure the validity of the data, the study applied source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking, so that the resulting findings achieved an adequate level of trustworthiness and credibility.

Result and Discussion

1. Finding

The findings showed that the utilization of the Cirebon Mask Dance in arts and culture learning had a positive impact on increasing students' appreciation of traditional art. Teachers noted that students appeared more enthusiastic during lessons, particularly when the topic was introduced through stories, pictures, or actual masks brought into the classroom. The learning atmosphere became livelier and more interactive, and students' curiosity increased significantly compared with when they studied other art materials. Students more frequently asked about the history, the meaning of the characters, and how to perform roles in the Mask Dance, indicating that the local identity embedded in this dance served as an emotional bridge connecting students to the learning material.

Students' interest grew stronger when teachers presented the visual characters of the masks directly. The striking colors, distinctive shapes, and facial expressions of each mask aroused curiosity. Observations showed that students quickly recognized and distinguished the characters of Panji, Samba, Rumyang, Tumenggung, and Kelana, and even developed their own favorite characters. When teachers demonstrated basic movements, students enthusiastically imitated hand positions and followed the rhythm. These practical activities kept the lessons far from monotonous; students who were usually easily bored instead showed high focus, observed one another, and coordinated with peers. Teachers also noted improvements in communication skills and the courage to perform, including among students who were initially shy.

The study gathered findings from two key informants. The first informant, a teacher who also served as the extracurricular coordinator, explained that the success of cultural preservation is determined not only by art experts but also by committed teachers, even when their artistic competence remains at a basic level. According to this informant, the Mask Dance is not taught merely as an aesthetic subject but also touches on symbolic and moral dimensions. The dance was also integrated across several subjects: fine arts (mask-making), civics or Pancasila education (cultural diversity and moral conduct), and the strengthening of national identity. The second informant, an arts teacher who was also a dance practitioner, emphasized the dance's impact on character formation through discipline, patience, courtesy, and courage, and linked it to Islamic education, Indonesian language, and social studies. To help students overcome self-consciousness, teachers applied a gradual habituation approach, moving from simple to more complex movements.

Field findings related to the implementation of the activity and the character values instilled are summarized in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

Table 1. Overview of the Implementation of Cirebon Mask Dance Learning and Extracurricular Activities

Aspect	Field Findings
Extracurricular participants	20 out of 240 students, dominated by lower- to middle-grade students
Training intensity	Once a week, guided by a professional trainer from outside the school
Curriculum integration	Fine arts, civics/Pancasila education, Islamic education, Indonesian language, and social studies
Achievements	Participation in sub-district and city-level competitions, and online competitions during the pandemic
Support	Parents provided costumes and props; the school provided a rehearsal space
Challenges	Limited teacher competence, inadequate facilities, a dense curriculum, costume costs, inconsistent student attendance, and gender perceptions among boys

Table 2. Cirebon Mask Characters and the Values Instilled

Mask Character	Value Instilled
Panji	Purity and inner calm
Samba (Pamindo)	Cheerfulness and honesty
Rumyang	Elegance and personal growth
Tumenggung	Integrity, firmness, and responsibility
Kelana	Self-control and responsibility

Overall, the findings show that the Cirebon Mask Dance has great potential to be integrated into formal education. This dance is not merely entertainment or supplementary material, but a learning medium that strengthens students' social, emotional, and cognitive skills while instilling a love for local culture.

2. Discussion

The findings confirm that the Cirebon Mask Dance can serve as a strategic educational medium for preserving local culture while improving the quality of arts learning in elementary schools. From the perspective of art appreciation, integrating this dance allows students to come to know traditional art not merely from books but through direct experience. The learning-by-doing approach proved effective in cultivating a sense of ownership of local culture, as students experienced culture multisensorially. This finding is consistent with Dewey's active learning theory and

Piaget's constructivism, both of which emphasize that knowledge is constructed through authentic experience, as also found by Viranti and Fadhilah (2023), who showed that dance art strengthens students' affective engagement.

Learning the Mask Dance also contributed to character formation. The philosophy embedded in each mask carries a moral message relevant to character education at the elementary level: Panji teaches calmness and purity of heart, Samba teaches cheerfulness and honesty, while Kelana teaches responsibility and self-control. These values align with the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile and support the findings of Rianingsih (2019) and Rosala (2016) that local-wisdom-based arts learning effectively builds students' character. During group rehearsals, students practiced cooperation, took turns performing roles, and received feedback from peers, which fostered empathy, communication, and solidarity. This process reinforces Vygotsky's social learning theory, in which social interaction and guidance serve as important means of student development.

Strengthening cultural identity emerged as another important impact. Amid the tide of globalization, children are easily exposed to foreign popular culture; integrating the Mask Dance helps balance this influence by cultivating pride in local regional culture. Students who learned the Mask Dance were able to recognize the distinctiveness of their regional art and differentiate it from other regional dance traditions, an indicator of authentic cultural understanding. This finding supports Banks' notion of multicultural education and Anderson's cultural preservation theory, both of which position schools as strategic spaces for instilling collective identity. It is also consistent with Purnamasari and Wahyudi (2025) regarding the importance of introducing Cirebon-based culture learning from an early age.

The teacher's role as facilitator was decisive for the success of learning. Teachers not only taught movement techniques but also instilled philosophical meaning, motivated self-conscious students, designed age-appropriate creative strategies, and bridged the school with the local arts community. Collaboration with artists and dance studios made learning more authentic while also compensating for teachers' limited competence. This finding reinforces the study by Kamal et al. (2025), which found that a contextual, local-wisdom-based approach requires teachers to play an active role as cultural mediators.

Nevertheless, the integration of the Mask Dance faces several challenges. The limited number of teachers with in-depth mastery of the dance, the scarcity of facilities such as musical instruments and masks, and a dense curriculum were the main obstacles, consistent with Tantri et al. (2024), who reported similar limitations in learning facilities and infrastructure. In addition, gender perceptions that regard dance as less masculine were still found among some male students. These challenges can be addressed through creative adaptation: using recorded music, making mask replicas as part of fine arts learning, small-group learning, simplifying movements, and utilizing extracurricular activities and digital technology. Accordingly, the success of this integration does not depend on lavish facilities but on teachers' creativity and commitment as well as the support of the school environment, consistent with the technology-based approaches proposed by Nurachmy Sahnir et al. (2023) and Dewi et al. (2022).

Conclusion

The utilization of the Cirebon Mask Dance in arts and culture learning proves to be an effective, meaningful, and relevant medium for elementary school students, as the

multisensory, hands-on learning experience it offers increases students' appreciation of traditional art, strengthens social and emotional skills such as cooperation, communication, empathy, and self-confidence, and instills the character values embodied in the Panji, Samba, Rummyang, Tumenggung, and Kelana characters, while also reinforcing students' local cultural identity; although its integration into the formal curriculum faces challenges such as limited teacher competence, inadequate facilities, a dense curriculum, and gender perceptions among some students, the resulting benefits far outweigh these challenges, so that the Cirebon Mask Dance deserves continued development as an important part of formal education in shaping a generation with strong character, a robust cultural identity, and the capacity to appreciate the diversity of Indonesian art. Future studies are recommended to expand the scope to multiple schools and incorporate students' and parents' perspectives in order to strengthen the generalizability of these findings.

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