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From Cultural Performance to Social Learning: Rethinking Traditional Performing Arts in Contemporary Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Traditional performing arts have commonly been examined as forms of cultural heritage, while their role as social learning environments remains underexplored. This study investigates how Wayang Kulit, Ketoprak, and Ludruk function as mechanisms of social learning and cultural knowledge transmission in contemporary Indonesia. Using a qualitative literature review approach, data were collected from scholarly publications addressing social learning, cultural transmission, community learning, and traditional performing arts. The analysis employed thematic analysis to identify recurring learning processes embedded within performative practices. The findings indicate that traditional performing arts facilitate three complementary forms of learning: observational learning through moral modelling in Wayang Kulit, participatory learning through collective engagement in Ketoprak, and critical learning through social critique in Ludruk. These processes contribute to the transmission of cultural knowledge, the formation of individual and collective identities, and the strengthening of cultural resilience. Based on these findings, the study proposes the Traditional Performing Arts Social Learning Ecosystem (TPSLE) framework, which conceptualizes traditional performances as community-based learning systems that sustain cultural continuity while adapting to social change.

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INTRODUCTION

Learning is commonly associated with formal educational institutions; however, a substantial body of research demonstrates that knowledge acquisition also occurs through social interaction, participation, observation, and engagement within everyday cultural environments. Social learning theory emphasizes that individuals learn not only from direct experience but also by observing others, interpreting social situations, and internalizing collectively shared meanings (Bandura, 1977, 1986). From this perspective, learning is fundamentally embedded within social relationships and cultural contexts rather than being confined to classrooms or formal instructional settings.

This understanding has led scholars to recognize the significance of informal and community-based learning processes. Knowledge is continuously produced and transmitted through participation in communal activities, shared practices, cultural traditions, and collective experiences (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Such learning environments enable individuals to acquire social norms, cultural values, and practical competencies through engagement with members of their communities. Consequently, learning becomes a socially situated process that contributes not only to individual development but also to the maintenance and transformation of collective cultural knowledge.

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In recent decades, increasing attention has been directed toward understanding how cultural practices function as sites of social learning. Cultural activities provide opportunities for communities to negotiate meanings, construct identities, and transmit knowledge across generations (UNESCO, 2021). Unlike formal educational settings, where learning objectives and curricula are often predetermined, community-based learning emerges organically through participation in cultural life. This process is particularly significant in societies where cultural traditions continue to play an important role in shaping social relationships and collective identities.

Within this broader context, traditional performing arts represent a particularly important yet often overlooked domain of social learning. Through storytelling, symbolic representation, music, movement, and audience participation, performances create environments in which knowledge is communicated, interpreted, and reproduced collectively. The educational value of traditional performances extends beyond entertainment because they provide mechanisms through which communities preserve cultural memory, reinforce social norms, and cultivate shared understandings of social reality.

The relationship between cultural performance and learning has attracted increasing scholarly attention across disciplines including anthropology, cultural studies, education, and performance studies. Cultural performances are not merely artistic expressions but also social processes through which communities communicate knowledge, values, and historical experiences. Performance scholars argue that cultural knowledge is frequently embodied and transmitted through performative practices that allow participants to engage directly with inherited traditions while simultaneously reinterpreting them in contemporary contexts (Taylor, 2003).

This perspective aligns with broader understandings of intangible cultural heritage, which emphasize that cultural practices function as living systems of knowledge rather than static historical artifacts. According to the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, performing arts constitute one of the principal domains through which cultural knowledge and social values are transmitted between generations. Their significance lies not only in artistic preservation but also in their capacity to sustain cultural continuity, collective memory, and community identity.

Furthermore, cultural performances facilitate learning through multiple mechanisms. Narratives communicate moral lessons and historical knowledge; symbolic representations provide frameworks for interpreting social realities; and collective participation creates opportunities for dialogue and shared reflection. Through these processes, performances become educational spaces where audiences actively engage with cultural meanings rather than passively receiving information. Learning therefore emerges through interaction, interpretation, and participation, reflecting principles commonly associated with social learning and experiential education.

The educational dimensions of cultural performance are particularly relevant in contemporary societies characterized by rapid social transformation. Globalization, digital communication, urbanization, and changing cultural preferences have altered traditional mechanisms of knowledge transmission. Under such conditions, cultural performances often function as adaptive institutions that connect historical traditions with contemporary social realities. Rather than preserving culture in a static form, they facilitate ongoing processes of cultural negotiation through which communities reinterpret inherited values in response to changing circumstances.

Indonesia possesses a diverse and vibrant tradition of performing arts that have historically functioned as important cultural institutions within local communities. These performances embody accumulated knowledge, social values, religious beliefs, historical narratives, and collective experiences that have developed through long-term cultural interaction. Among the

many forms of traditional performance found throughout the archipelago, Wayang Kulit, Ketoprak, and Ludruk occupy particularly significant positions within Javanese cultural life.

Previous studies have demonstrated that Wayang Kulit serves as a medium for transmitting philosophical and ethical teachings rooted in Javanese cosmology and religious traditions (Masroer, 2017; Mibtadin & Masfiah, 2023). Through symbolic narratives and character representations, audiences are introduced to concepts of justice, wisdom, leadership, and moral responsibility. Similarly, Ketoprak has been examined as a cultural medium through which historical consciousness, communal values, and social norms are communicated to audiences (Rahmadhani & Achdiani, 2024; Setyawan, 2019). Meanwhile, Ludruk has frequently been characterized as a popular form of theatre that articulates social criticism, reflects everyday experiences, and provides a platform for public engagement with contemporary social issues (Afarizs & Abdillah, 2019; Saputri et al., 2024).

Although these art forms differ in narrative structure, aesthetic characteristics, and social functions, they share a common feature: each provides a space in which communities engage with cultural meanings through collective participation. Their continued existence across changing historical periods suggests that they fulfill functions extending beyond artistic entertainment alone. They also contribute to the circulation of knowledge, the reinforcement of social values, and the construction of cultural identities within community life.

Existing scholarship has generated valuable insights into the historical development, aesthetic characteristics, cultural significance, and preservation challenges of Indonesian traditional performing arts. Research on Wayang Kulit has primarily focused on philosophical symbolism, religious dimensions, and cultural heritage preservation (Masroer, 2017; Mibtadin & Masfiah, 2023). Studies of Ketoprak have emphasized historical narratives and cultural identity (Rahmadhani & Achdiani, 2024; Setyawan, 2019), while investigations of Ludruk have concentrated on social criticism, popular culture, and community representation (Afarizs & Abdillah, 2019; Saputri et al., 2024).

Despite these contributions, relatively limited attention has been devoted to understanding traditional performing arts through the lens of social learning. Existing studies tend to examine what cultural values are represented within performances rather than how learning processes occur through participation, observation, interpretation, and communal engagement. Consequently, the mechanisms through which traditional performances facilitate knowledge transmission, identity formation, and community learning remain insufficiently theorized.

Addressing this gap is particularly important given contemporary concerns regarding cultural sustainability and intergenerational knowledge transmission. As societies experience rapid social change, understanding how traditional cultural institutions continue to function as learning environments becomes increasingly relevant. Examining traditional performances from a social learning perspective offers opportunities to reconceptualize their role not merely as cultural heritage but as dynamic systems of community-based education.

Accordingly, this study seeks to answer three interrelated questions: (1) How do traditional performing arts function as spaces for social learning? (2) Through what mechanisms is cultural knowledge transmitted within these performances? and (3) How do traditional performances maintain their educational relevance in contemporary society? By addressing these questions, the article proposes a new conceptual understanding of traditional performing arts as social learning ecosystems that contribute to cultural continuity, identity formation, and community resilience.

This study integrates Social Learning Theory, Communities of Practice, and Cultural Transmission Theory to explain how traditional performing arts function as social learning environments. Social Learning Theory argues that learning occurs through observation, modeling, and the interpretation of social experiences rather than solely through direct instruction (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Within cultural performances, characters, narratives, and

symbolic actions serve as models through which audiences acquire moral values, social norms, and cultural meanings. Learning therefore emerges through observation, reflection, and collective interpretation.

While Social Learning Theory explains individual learning processes, Communities of Practice emphasizes the social contexts in which learning takes place. Learning develops through participation in shared cultural activities where knowledge is collectively produced and reproduced (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Traditional performing arts exemplify such communities because performers, musicians, organizers, and audiences collectively sustain cultural knowledge and negotiate its relevance across generations.

The continuity of this knowledge can be further understood through Cultural Transmission Theory, which explains how values, beliefs, and collective memories are communicated and adapted over time (Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman, 1981). Traditional performances transmit cultural knowledge through stories, symbols, language, and performative practices, while simultaneously allowing reinterpretation in response to changing social conditions (Assmann, 2011).

Although originating from different intellectual traditions, these perspectives converge in viewing learning as a socially embedded and culturally mediated process. Building on this synthesis, the present study proposes the Traditional Performing Arts Social Learning Ecosystem (TPSLE) framework. TPSLE conceptualizes traditional performances as interconnected environments in which cultural narratives, collective participation, and social interaction generate learning processes that support knowledge transmission, identity formation, and cultural resilience. Through this framework, traditional performing arts are understood not merely as cultural heritage but as dynamic social learning systems that sustain cultural continuity while adapting to social change.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative literature review to examine traditional performing arts through the perspectives of social learning, community learning, and cultural transmission. Literature reviews are appropriate for synthesizing existing knowledge, identifying recurring patterns, and developing conceptual explanations based on previous studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Snyder, 2019).

Relevant literature was retrieved through systematic searches of Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, and Crossref. These databases were selected to capture publications from education, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, performance studies, and heritage studies. The search used combinations of keywords including *social learning*, *community learning*, *informal learning*, *cultural transmission*, *traditional performing arts*, *cultural performance*, *Wayang Kulit*, *Ketoprak*, *Ludruk*, *community education*, and *cultural heritage*. Additional sources were identified through backward and forward citation tracking.

To ensure consistency, literature selection followed predefined inclusion criteria. Sources were included if they addressed social learning, community learning, cultural transmission, traditional performing arts, identity formation, or heritage sustainability and were published in peer-reviewed journals, scholarly books, conference proceedings, or institutional reports.

Table 1. Inclusion Criteria for Literature Selection

Criteria	Description
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, conference proceedings, and institutional reports
Language	English and Indonesian
Publication period	Primarily 2015–2026, with seminal theoretical works included regardless of publication year

Research focus	Social learning, community learning, cultural transmission, traditional performing arts, cultural heritage
Geographical scope	Global studies on social learning and Indonesian studies on traditional performing arts

Studies focusing solely on technical or artistic aspects without addressing educational, social, cultural, or knowledge-transmission dimensions were excluded.

The selected literature was analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2022). The procedure consisted of four stages. First, all sources were reviewed to identify concepts related to learning, participation, knowledge transmission, identity formation, and cultural continuity. Second, relevant findings were coded according to recurring patterns. Third, related codes were grouped into broader categories. Fourth, relationships among categories were examined to generate an integrated explanation of how traditional performing arts contribute to social learning processes.

Five analytical themes were identified: (1) learning through observation, (2) learning through participation, (3) learning through storytelling, (4) learning through social critique, and (5) learning through cultural continuity. These themes subsequently structured the results and discussion. The analysis focused on identifying common learning mechanisms across Wayang Kulit, Ketoprak, and Ludruk rather than examining each performance form as an isolated cultural tradition. The resulting synthesis informed the development of the Traditional Performing Arts Social Learning Ecosystem (TPSLE) framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Learning Through Observation: Wayang Kulit and Moral Modelling

One of the most fundamental mechanisms of social learning identified in the literature is observational learning. Within traditional cultural settings, individuals frequently acquire knowledge, values, and behavioral norms through observing symbolic models rather than through direct instruction. This mechanism is particularly evident in Wayang Kulit, where narratives and characters function as pedagogical resources that communicate moral and philosophical principles across generations.

The educational significance of Wayang Kulit derives largely from its use of symbolic characters representing ethical ideals and social responsibilities. Figures such as Arjuna, Bima, and Semar embody distinct moral attributes that audiences are encouraged to interpret and emulate. Arjuna is commonly associated with self-control and wisdom, Bima with courage and integrity, while Semar represents humility, social justice, and moral guidance despite his non-elite status (Masroer, 2017; Mibtadin & Masfiah, 2023). These characters serve as cultural models through which audiences encounter desirable forms of behavior and ethical decision-making.

From a social learning perspective, the importance of these characters lies not simply in their narrative roles but in their capacity to facilitate observational learning. Audiences observe how characters respond to conflict, exercise authority, resolve moral dilemmas, and interact with others. Through repeated exposure to these representations, individuals develop understandings of appropriate conduct within broader social and cultural contexts. Learning therefore occurs through symbolic engagement with modeled behavior rather than through explicit instruction.

The learning process is further reinforced by the narrative structure of Wayang performances. Stories typically present tensions between competing moral positions, allowing audiences to reflect upon the consequences of particular actions and choices. Ethical lessons emerge not as abstract principles but as lived experiences embedded within dramatic narratives. This

narrative form encourages interpretive learning, where audiences actively construct meaning from observed events rather than passively receiving information.

Moreover, Wayang Kulit illustrates how observational learning can extend beyond individual morality to encompass broader cultural worldviews. The philosophical dimensions of Javanese cosmology embedded within Wayang narratives communicate ideas concerning harmony, leadership, justice, spirituality, and social responsibility. As a result, learning involves both behavioral modeling and the acquisition of cultural frameworks through which social reality is understood.

Importantly, contemporary developments demonstrate that observational learning within Wayang Kulit remains adaptive rather than static. Recent studies indicate that performers increasingly incorporate themes related to democracy, pluralism, environmental concerns, and corruption into traditional narratives (Mukafi et al., 2024; Mibtadin & Masfiah, 2023). These adaptations allow established cultural models to address contemporary social challenges while preserving their educational function. Consequently, Wayang Kulit continues to operate as a living social learning environment capable of connecting inherited cultural values with present-day concerns.

The evidence therefore suggests that Wayang Kulit functions as more than a medium of cultural preservation. Through symbolic modeling, narrative engagement, and philosophical reflection, it creates conditions under which audiences acquire moral knowledge and cultural understanding. In terms of the proposed TPSLE framework, Wayang Kulit demonstrates how cultural narratives can generate observational learning processes that contribute to the transmission of ethical values and collective cultural knowledge.

Learning Through Participation: Ketoprak and Community Learning

While Wayang Kulit primarily demonstrates how learning occurs through observation and symbolic modelling, Ketoprak reveals a different dimension of social learning rooted in participation and collective engagement. Rather than emphasizing cosmological narratives and archetypal characters, Ketoprak presents stories closely connected to historical events, social relationships, and everyday community experiences. This proximity to social reality creates opportunities for audiences to engage actively with cultural meanings and collectively interpret lessons embedded within the performance.

From the perspective of Communities of Practice, learning emerges through participation in shared social activities where meanings are negotiated and reproduced collectively (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Ketoprak exemplifies such a process because its performances are embedded within community contexts and frequently involve interactions among performers, organizers, and audiences. The educational significance of Ketoprak therefore extends beyond the content of its narratives to include the social relationships that develop around the performance itself.

A distinctive feature of Ketoprak is its emphasis on historical consciousness. Many performances draw upon local histories, royal chronicles, folklore, and collective memories that connect contemporary audiences with broader cultural experiences (Rahmadhani & Achdiani, 2024; Setyawan, 2019). Through these narratives, audiences encounter interpretations of leadership, loyalty, justice, conflict, and social responsibility that have shaped communal life across generations. Learning thus occurs through engagement with historical experiences that remain socially meaningful in the present.

Importantly, historical narratives in Ketoprak are not transmitted as fixed accounts of the past. Instead, they are continuously reinterpreted in relation to contemporary concerns. Performances frequently emphasize themes that resonate with current social conditions, enabling audiences to draw connections between historical experiences and present

challenges. This interpretive process transforms history from a body of information into a resource for collective reflection and social learning.

Participation also occurs through emotional and social engagement with the performance. Unlike formal educational settings, where knowledge is often transmitted through structured instruction, Ketoprak encourages audiences to learn through identification with characters and immersion in dramatic situations. The struggles, decisions, and conflicts represented on stage invite audiences to evaluate social relationships and moral choices from multiple perspectives. Such engagement facilitates the development of empathy, social awareness, and communal understanding.

Furthermore, Ketoprak functions as a site of community interaction where cultural meanings are collectively reinforced. Performances are commonly associated with local celebrations, communal gatherings, and cultural events that bring diverse groups together. In these settings, learning extends beyond the stage itself and becomes embedded within broader processes of social participation. The performance serves as a catalyst for discussion, reflection, and collective interpretation, strengthening social bonds while simultaneously transmitting cultural knowledge.

This participatory dimension is particularly important in understanding how cultural continuity is maintained. Communities do not preserve traditions merely by observing them; they sustain them through active involvement. The continued relevance of Ketoprak therefore depends on its ability to facilitate meaningful participation across generations. Through repeated engagement with performances, individuals gradually acquire familiarity with cultural narratives, social values, and collective memories that contribute to community identity.

At the same time, contemporary Ketoprak demonstrates considerable adaptability in responding to social change. Scholars have noted the incorporation of modern language, contemporary themes, and new performance techniques designed to engage younger audiences (Rahmadhani & Achdiani, 2024). These adaptations do not necessarily weaken cultural traditions; rather, they illustrate how participatory learning environments evolve to maintain relevance within changing social contexts. By accommodating contemporary concerns while preserving core cultural functions, Ketoprak continues to serve as an effective medium of community-based learning.

Viewed through the TPSLE framework, Ketoprak illustrates how social learning is generated through participation in shared cultural practices. Learning emerges not primarily from observing exemplary characters, as in Wayang Kulit, but from engaging with collective narratives, historical memories, and communal interactions. Consequently, Ketoprak demonstrates the role of participatory learning in strengthening cultural continuity, reinforcing social cohesion, and fostering community-based knowledge transmission.

Learning Through Social Critique: Ludruk and Critical Awareness

If Wayang Kulit emphasizes observational learning and Ketoprak facilitates participatory learning, Ludruk introduces a third mechanism of social learning: critical learning through social critique. This form of learning emerges when audiences are encouraged not merely to absorb cultural values or participate in communal traditions but also to question, evaluate, and reflect upon existing social realities. Through humor, satire, and direct engagement with everyday issues, Ludruk creates opportunities for communities to develop critical awareness regarding social, economic, and political conditions.

Traditional studies frequently describe Ludruk as the theatre of ordinary people because its narratives are closely connected to the lived experiences of lower and middle social groups (Afarizs & Abdillah, 2019; Saputri et al., 2024). Unlike performances centered on heroic figures or historical elites, Ludruk often presents characters facing practical challenges such as

poverty, inequality, corruption, labor struggles, and social injustice. These themes position Ludruk as a cultural medium through which marginalized experiences become visible and publicly discussed.

One of the defining characteristics of Ludruk is its use of humor as a pedagogical strategy. Humor enables performers to address sensitive issues without generating direct confrontation, making social criticism more accessible to diverse audiences. Through comedic situations and satirical dialogue, complex social problems are translated into forms that encourage reflection while maintaining audience engagement. Learning therefore occurs through critical interpretation rather than moral instruction alone.

This process resonates strongly with the concept of critical consciousness developed by Paulo Freire (1970). Freire argues that education should enable individuals to recognize structural conditions affecting their lives and develop the capacity to reflect critically upon social realities. Although Ludruk does not function as formal education, its performative structure often creates similar opportunities for critical reflection. Audiences are invited to recognize contradictions, question power relations, and consider alternative perspectives on social issues represented in the performance.

The effectiveness of Ludruk as a learning environment derives partly from its use of familiar language and culturally recognizable situations. Because performances draw heavily upon everyday experiences, audiences can easily connect dramatic narratives with realities encountered in their own communities. This proximity between performance and lived experience strengthens the educational impact of social critique, allowing learning to emerge through recognition and reflection.

Moreover, Ludruk demonstrates that cultural performances can contribute to civic learning. Discussions concerning fairness, authority, responsibility, and public accountability frequently appear within performances, exposing audiences to issues central to democratic life. Rather than presenting fixed solutions, Ludruk encourages critical engagement with social problems and stimulates public conversation. In this sense, learning becomes a collective process of questioning and interpretation rather than the passive acceptance of established norms.

Another important aspect of Ludruk is its responsiveness to changing social conditions. Contemporary performances increasingly incorporate issues such as democratization, migration, social inequality, technological change, and cultural transformation (Saputri et al., 2024). These developments illustrate that critical learning within traditional performances is not confined to historical concerns but continues to address emerging challenges faced by contemporary communities. Such adaptability contributes significantly to the continued relevance of Ludruk as a social learning environment.

From the perspective of the TPSLE framework, Ludruk represents the critical dimension of social learning ecosystems. Whereas Wayang Kulit transmits ethical models and Ketoprak reinforces communal participation, Ludruk cultivates critical awareness through reflection on social realities. The learning outcomes generated through this process include increased social sensitivity, civic awareness, and the capacity to evaluate dominant narratives and power structures. Consequently, Ludruk demonstrates that traditional performing arts can function not only as mechanisms of cultural continuity but also as spaces for social critique and transformative learning.

Comparative Analysis: Diverse Pathways of Social Learning in Traditional Performing Arts

The preceding analysis demonstrates that Wayang Kulit, Ketoprak, and Ludruk facilitate social learning through distinct yet complementary mechanisms. Although all three forms contribute to cultural transmission and community education, they differ in the primary pathways through which knowledge is constructed, interpreted, and shared. These differences reflect the

diverse social functions of traditional performing arts and reveal the multidimensional nature of learning embedded within cultural practices.

Wayang Kulit primarily operates through observational learning. Its educational effectiveness derives from symbolic characters, moral exemplars, and philosophical narratives that encourage audiences to reflect upon ethical conduct and social responsibility. Learning occurs through the observation of modeled behavior and the interpretation of symbolic meanings embedded within dramatic narratives. Consequently, the transmission of knowledge is oriented toward moral reasoning, ethical reflection, and cultural worldview formation.

In contrast, Ketoprak emphasizes participatory learning. Rather than relying predominantly on symbolic models, Ketoprak encourages audiences to engage with historical experiences, collective memories, and communal values. Learning emerges through participation in shared cultural narratives that connect past experiences with contemporary realities. As a result, Ketoprak contributes to the development of historical consciousness, social solidarity, and collective identity.

Ludruk introduces a more critical dimension of learning. Through satire, humor, and social commentary, performances encourage audiences to examine existing social structures and question dominant assumptions. The educational outcome extends beyond cultural continuity toward the cultivation of critical awareness and civic engagement. Learning therefore becomes a process of reflection on social realities rather than merely the acquisition of inherited values.

These distinctions suggest that traditional performing arts support multiple forms of learning simultaneously. While each performance type possesses a dominant learning orientation, none operates exclusively within a single educational domain. Wayang can stimulate critical reflection, Ketoprak can communicate moral lessons, and Ludruk can reinforce communal values. Nevertheless, their dominant tendencies reveal important differences in how cultural knowledge is organized and transmitted.

Table 2. Comparative Dimensions of Social Learning in Traditional Performing Arts

Dimension	**Wayang Kulit**	**Ketoprak**	**Ludruk**
Dominant Learning Mechanism	Observational Learning	Participatory Learning	Critical Learning
Primary Medium	Symbolic Narratives	Historical Narratives	Social Critique and Satire
Learning Orientation	Moral and Philosophical	Historical and Communal	Social and Civic
Knowledge Transmission	Role Modeling	Collective Participation	Critical Reflection
Main Educational Outcome	Ethical Understanding	Community Cohesion	Critical Awareness
Cultural Function	Moral Guidance	Collective Memory	Social Commentary

The comparison also reveals that traditional performances cannot be adequately understood through a single educational framework. Their learning functions emerge through the interaction of narratives, participation, performance, and social interpretation. Consequently, social learning within traditional performing arts should be viewed as a multidimensional process that encompasses moral development, community engagement, and critical consciousness simultaneously.

More importantly, the findings indicate that learning is inseparable from cultural participation. Knowledge is not transmitted as isolated information but is embedded within social experiences that connect individuals to broader cultural communities. Through repeated engagement with performances, audiences acquire cultural competencies that contribute to identity formation and social integration. This process demonstrates how cultural practices function as educational resources that extend beyond the boundaries of formal schooling.

The comparative analysis therefore provides a foundation for reconceptualizing traditional performing arts as integrated learning environments. Rather than treating Wayang Kulit, Ketoprak, and Ludruk as separate artistic traditions, they can be understood as different manifestations of a broader social learning process through which communities preserve, negotiate, and reproduce cultural knowledge. This perspective forms the basis for the conceptual synthesis presented in the following section.

From Cultural Performance to Social Learning: Reinterpreting Traditional Performing Arts

The findings presented above indicate that traditional performing arts perform functions that extend considerably beyond artistic expression and cultural preservation. Across different narrative structures, performance styles, and social contexts, Wayang Kulit, Ketoprak, and Ludruk consistently create environments where learning occurs through observation, participation, interpretation, and reflection. This pattern suggests that traditional performances should be understood not merely as cultural products but as active learning environments embedded within community life.

Existing studies have largely approached traditional performing arts through frameworks of heritage preservation, cultural identity, aesthetic expression, or social representation. While these perspectives have generated valuable insights, they often position learning as a secondary outcome rather than a central analytical concern. The present study proposes an alternative interpretation by placing learning processes at the center of analysis.

Viewed from a social learning perspective, cultural performances function as mechanisms through which communities continuously produce and reproduce knowledge. Narratives communicate cultural meanings, participation facilitates engagement, and social interaction enables collective interpretation. Learning emerges from the convergence of these processes rather than from formal instruction or institutionalized curricula. Consequently, the educational significance of traditional performances lies in their capacity to sustain ongoing cycles of cultural knowledge production and transmission.

This interpretation aligns with broader understandings of learning as a socially situated process. Bandura's emphasis on observational learning explains how audiences acquire knowledge through symbolic models; Communities of Practice illuminate how learning emerges through participation in shared cultural activities; and Cultural Transmission Theory demonstrates how knowledge is reproduced across generations. Together, these perspectives reveal that traditional performances operate as interconnected systems in which learning is embedded within cultural practice.

A notable finding of this study is that the three performing arts represent complementary dimensions of social learning. Wayang Kulit contributes primarily to ethical and philosophical learning, Ketoprak facilitates communal and historical learning, and Ludruk encourages critical and civic learning. Rather than competing educational functions, these dimensions collectively form a broader ecosystem through which communities cultivate cultural competence and social understanding.

The concept of social learning is therefore particularly useful because it captures the dynamic relationship between continuity and change. Traditional performances preserve inherited knowledge while simultaneously enabling reinterpretation in response to contemporary challenges. Learning does not occur through the passive repetition of tradition but through active engagement with evolving cultural meanings. This capacity for adaptation explains why many traditional performances remain relevant despite significant social transformation.

Furthermore, understanding traditional performances as social learning environments highlights their contribution to cultural sustainability. Communities maintain cultural continuity not simply by preserving artifacts or documenting traditions, but by creating

opportunities for learning and participation. As long as cultural knowledge continues to be experienced, interpreted, and transmitted through performance, traditions remain socially meaningful and capable of adaptation.

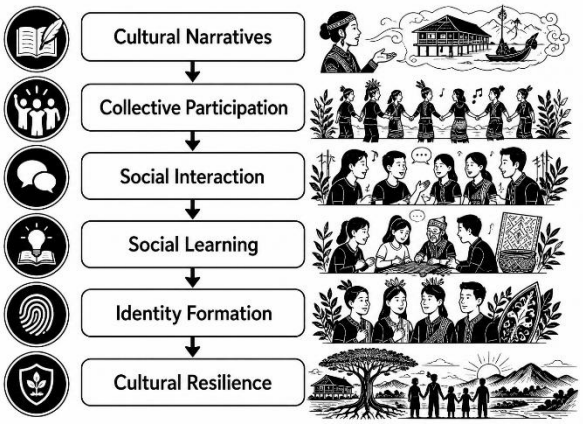
Accordingly, the findings support a conceptual shift from viewing traditional performing arts as cultural heritage objects toward understanding them as social learning ecosystems. This shift provides a more comprehensive explanation of how cultural performances contribute simultaneously to knowledge transmission, identity formation, social cohesion, and cultural resilience. It also creates a foundation for developing a more integrated framework capable of explaining the educational significance of traditional performing arts in contemporary society.

Traditional Performing Arts Social Learning Ecosystem (TPSLE): A Proposed Framework

Building upon the theoretical and empirical synthesis developed throughout this study, a conceptual framework termed the Traditional Performing Arts Social Learning Ecosystem (TPSLE) is proposed. The framework explains how traditional performing arts facilitate social learning processes that contribute to cultural knowledge transmission, identity formation, and cultural resilience. Rather than treating learning as a secondary outcome of performance, TPSLE positions learning as a central mechanism through which traditional performances maintain their social and cultural relevance.

The framework consists of six interconnected components: (1) cultural narratives, which provide historical experiences, moral values, and collective memories; (2) collective participation, involving performers, audiences, and communities in shared cultural activities; (3) social interaction, through dialogue, observation, and interpretation; (4) social learning, where participants acquire cultural knowledge and social understanding; (5) identity formation, resulting from repeated engagement with shared cultural meanings; and (6) cultural resilience, reflecting the capacity of communities to sustain and adapt cultural knowledge across generations.

Figure 1. Traditional Performing Arts Social Learning Ecosystem (TPSLE).



The framework illustrates the sequential relationship between cultural narratives, participation, interaction, learning, identity formation, and cultural resilience within traditional performing arts. Cultural narratives serve as the primary source of knowledge, while collective participation and social interaction create opportunities for learning. These processes contribute to the development of individual and collective identities, which subsequently strengthen cultural resilience by enabling communities to preserve and adapt cultural knowledge in response to social change.

The significance of TPSLE lies in its integration of Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986), Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), and Cultural Transmission Theory (Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman, 1981; Assmann, 2011) within a single

explanatory framework. The model suggests that traditional performing arts function not only as cultural heritage but also as community-based learning systems through which knowledge is continuously produced, shared, and reproduced. Consequently, traditional performances should be recognized as educational resources that support cultural continuity, community learning, and long-term social resilience.

Implications for Social Learning

The findings of this study indicate that traditional performing arts possess substantial educational value that extends beyond cultural preservation. As demonstrated through Wayang Kulit, Ketoprak, and Ludruk, learning frequently occurs through observation, participation, dialogue, and reflection rather than through formal instruction alone. This finding reinforces contemporary perspectives that view learning as a socially situated process embedded within cultural practices and community interactions.

For educational institutions, traditional performing arts offer opportunities to enrich learning experiences through culturally relevant pedagogical approaches. Contemporary education increasingly emphasizes contextual learning, experiential learning, and learner engagement. In this regard, traditional performances provide authentic cultural contexts through which learners can explore ethical dilemmas, historical experiences, and social realities. Rather than treating culture as supplementary content, educational practices may utilize cultural performances as learning resources capable of fostering critical thinking, empathy, and cultural literacy.

The educational significance of traditional performing arts is particularly evident in character formation. The moral narratives embedded in Wayang Kulit, the communal values represented in Ketoprak, and the critical perspectives developed through Ludruk collectively support the development of ethical awareness and social responsibility. These dimensions correspond closely with contemporary educational goals that emphasize holistic development alongside cognitive achievement.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that cultural learning should not be understood solely as the transmission of historical information. Traditional performances demonstrate that cultural knowledge becomes meaningful when learners actively engage with narratives, symbols, and social experiences. Consequently, educational strategies that integrate participatory cultural practices may strengthen both learning outcomes and cultural understanding.

Beyond formal education, the study highlights the continuing relevance of traditional performing arts within community-based learning environments. Communities have historically functioned as important sites of knowledge production and transmission, particularly in contexts where cultural practices remain embedded within everyday life. The findings indicate that traditional performances continue to facilitate such processes by creating spaces where individuals collectively negotiate meanings, values, and identities.

Community learning is especially significant because it enables intergenerational interaction. Older generations contribute cultural knowledge and historical experience, while younger generations reinterpret inherited traditions within contemporary contexts. This reciprocal process supports both cultural continuity and cultural adaptation. Traditional performances therefore serve as bridges connecting past experiences with present realities.

The findings also reveal that community learning occurs through multiple forms of participation. Individuals may learn as performers, organizers, musicians, audience members, or cultural practitioners. These diverse forms of engagement contribute to the democratization of cultural knowledge by allowing learning opportunities to emerge across different social roles. Consequently, traditional performances support inclusive learning environments that extend beyond institutional educational structures.

Moreover, the participatory character of traditional performing arts strengthens social cohesion. Shared cultural experiences create opportunities for dialogue, mutual understanding, and collective reflection. Such processes are particularly valuable in increasingly diverse societies where cultural interaction plays an important role in maintaining social solidarity. Traditional performances thus contribute not only to learning outcomes but also to the development of social capital within communities.

The reinterpretation of traditional performing arts as social learning ecosystems has important implications for cultural policy. Cultural policies have frequently focused on preservation through documentation, inventory development, and institutional protection. While these measures remain important, the present findings suggest that sustainability depends equally upon maintaining opportunities for participation and learning.

The long-term vitality of intangible cultural heritage cannot be guaranteed solely through conservation efforts. Cultural traditions remain meaningful when they continue to function within social life and provide value for contemporary communities. Therefore, policies supporting traditional performing arts should prioritize mechanisms that encourage active participation, community engagement, and intergenerational transmission.

This perspective also implies that cultural practitioners should be recognized as educators and knowledge bearers. Their role extends beyond artistic production to include the facilitation of learning processes through which cultural values and knowledge are communicated. Supporting traditional performers therefore contributes simultaneously to cultural preservation and community education.

In addition, cultural policy should encourage collaboration among cultural institutions, educational organizations, local governments, and community groups. Such partnerships can create broader opportunities for cultural learning while strengthening the social foundations necessary for sustaining traditional performances. By recognizing the educational dimensions of cultural heritage, policy frameworks may adopt more integrated approaches that connect culture, education, and community development.

The contemporary digital environment presents both challenges and opportunities for traditional performing arts. On one hand, changing media consumption patterns and increasing competition from digital entertainment have altered audience engagement with traditional performances. Younger generations often encounter cultural content through digital platforms rather than through direct participation in community events.

On the other hand, digital technologies provide new possibilities for expanding access to cultural learning. Online performances, digital archives, social media platforms, and audiovisual documentation can increase the visibility of traditional arts and facilitate engagement among broader audiences. These technologies may strengthen rather than diminish cultural transmission when used strategically to support participation and learning.

The findings suggest that digital adaptation should not be understood merely as technological modernization. More importantly, digital initiatives should preserve the participatory and dialogical qualities that characterize social learning processes. The educational value of traditional performances derives not only from cultural content but also from opportunities for interaction, interpretation, and collective meaning-making. Consequently, successful digital adaptation requires maintaining these learning dimensions within new technological environments.

Viewed from the TPSLE framework, digital technologies represent additional channels through which cultural narratives, participation, and learning can occur. Rather than replacing traditional performances, digital platforms may complement existing cultural practices by extending opportunities for knowledge transmission and community engagement. This approach supports cultural resilience by enabling traditional arts to remain relevant within rapidly changing social and technological contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined traditional performing arts through the lens of social learning and proposes a conceptual shift from understanding cultural performances primarily as heritage expressions toward viewing them as dynamic social learning ecosystems. Drawing upon literature concerning Wayang Kulit, Ketoprak, and Ludruk, the findings demonstrate that traditional performances facilitate multiple forms of learning that contribute to cultural transmission, identity formation, and community resilience.

The analysis reveals three dominant pathways of social learning. Wayang Kulit primarily facilitates observational learning through symbolic characters and moral narratives that encourage ethical reflection and philosophical understanding. Ketoprak emphasizes participatory learning by engaging communities in the interpretation of historical experiences and collective memories, thereby strengthening social cohesion and communal identity. Ludruk contributes to critical learning through humor, satire, and social commentary that stimulate critical awareness of contemporary social realities. Although each performance exhibits a distinctive learning orientation, together they constitute complementary mechanisms through which cultural knowledge is produced and reproduced within society.

A key contribution of this study is the development of the Traditional Performing Arts Social Learning Ecosystem (TPSLE) framework. The framework conceptualizes traditional performances as interconnected environments where cultural narratives, collective participation, social interaction, and learning processes converge to support identity formation and cultural resilience. By integrating insights from Social Learning Theory, Communities of Practice, and Cultural Transmission Theory, TPSLE provides a more comprehensive explanation of how traditional performances sustain cultural continuity while simultaneously adapting to changing social conditions.

The findings further suggest that the significance of traditional performing arts extends beyond artistic preservation. Their educational functions position them as valuable resources for community learning, cultural sustainability, and social development. Consequently, policies and programs aimed at safeguarding cultural heritage should prioritize participation, intergenerational engagement, and learning opportunities alongside documentation and preservation efforts.

Ultimately, traditional performing arts remain relevant because they continue to create spaces where communities learn, reflect, negotiate meanings, and construct shared identities. Their enduring vitality demonstrates that culture is not simply inherited from the past but continuously recreated through collective learning processes. Understanding this relationship between performance and learning offers a productive foundation for future research on cultural sustainability, informal education, and community-based knowledge systems in contemporary societies.

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