

Exploring Local Wisdom: Analysis of Non-Verbal Communication Skills in Cirebon Traditional Mask Dance Audiences

Olyvia Wahyuningsih^{1*}, Irma Nuraeni Salsabila², Adam Hernawan³, Septien Dwi Savandha⁴, Aldo Hermaya Aditiya Nur Karsa⁵

Politeknik Siber Cerdika Internasional, Cirebon, West Java, Indonesia^{1,3}

Institut Prima Bangsa Cirebon, Cirebon, West Java, Indonesia²

Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati, Cirebon, West Java, Indonesia⁴

Universitas Catur Insan Cendekia, Cirebon, West Java, Indonesia⁵

E-mail: olyviawahyuningsih4@gmail.com^{1*}, irmanuraenis84@gmail.com²,

adamhernawan4@gmail.com³, dwisavandha9@gmail.com⁴, aldohermayaaditia@gmail.com⁵

Keywords

Local Wisdom; Non-Verbal Communication Skills; Cirebon Traditional Mask Dance

ABSTRACT

This research delves into the intriguing realm of mask dance and its role as a nonverbal communication medium for audiences in Cirebon. By examining dance skills such as movement, rhythm, expression, level, and floor patterns, the study aims to unravel the profound impact of this art form. A qualitative approach and descriptive research design are adopted to achieve this, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the performance form and the far-reaching effects of mask dance. The research findings promise to provide profound insights into the significance of dance in preserving local culture. By shedding light on the intricate nuances of mask dance, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the art's value and cultural implications. Not only does it enhance our understanding of the art form itself, but it also holds practical implications for researchers and stakeholders in the field. The knowledge gleaned from this research equips researchers and stakeholders with a more profound appreciation and recognition of the richness embedded within the Cirebon mask dance. It serves as a testament to the power of dance as a nonverbal form of communication, capable of transcending language barriers and conveying messages that resonate with audiences on a profound level. This research serves as a valuable resource, providing a foundation upon which future studies and initiatives can build, further enhancing the preservation and promotion of local art and culture.

INTRODUCTION

Cirebon Mask Dance, as an artistic manifestation in the territory of the Cirebon Sultanate, is a cultural heritage that enriches Javanese traditions (Mira & Risladiba, n.d.). With its roots dating back to the Ancient Javanese era in East Java, this dance has spread and penetrated various regions, including Central Java, Cirebon, Banjar, and Kutai. In the Cirebon area, including Subang, Indramayu, Jatibarang, Majalengka, Losari, and Brebes, the Cirebon Mask Dance thrives and reflects the richness of art passed down from one generation to the next (Elvira, 2023; Nurcahyo, 2022). The Cirebon Mask Dance performance is not just a performance but a form of nonverbal communication that is full of meaning (Jaeni, 2023). The dancers, called *dalang*, embody the masked characters that are characteristic of this dance. In silence, this dance's words, movements, and expressions become a living language, taking the audience on a journey of beauty and richness of message at every step.

With a qualitative approach and descriptive design, this research explores nonverbal communication in Cirebon Mask Dance (Miller et al., 2020). As an artistic phenomenon that is

inseparable from cultural heritage, this dance attracts the attention of researchers to understand the unique characteristics of Cirebon. Through the diversity of art and culture, this research promotes, the Cirebon Mask Dance has become a tempting attraction, enriches insight, and supports conservation efforts to keep it alive in changing times.

This study offers new insights and perspectives on nonverbal communication in the context of the Cirebon Mask Dance. It emphasizes the central role of nonverbal communication in this traditional art form, aligning with the views of scholars like (Jaeni, 2023) and Edward T. Hall (2023). Who has recognized the significance of nonverbal communication as a "silent language" and a "hidden dimension" of culture? By focusing on elements such as movement, rhythm, and expression, this study highlights how nonverbal cues in dance serve as powerful channels for meaningful communication experiences.

In terms of its contribution to existing research, this study builds upon the foundations laid by previous scholars by providing a deeper understanding and appreciation of the richness of local culture embedded within the Cirebon Mask Dance. It goes beyond the mere recognition of nonverbal communication in dance to explore the specific context of the Cirebon Mask Dance and its unique cultural significance. By conducting a qualitative analysis of the performance form and the influence of the mask dance, this study aims to provide a comprehensive basis for researchers and stakeholders to understand better, appreciate, and preserve the cultural heritage embodied in the graceful movements of the Cirebon Mask Dance.

The study's focus on preservation efforts reflects a commitment to ensuring this cultural heritage's longevity and meaningful legacy. By recognizing the importance of the Cirebon Mask Dance as a source of inspiration and profound meaning for future generations, this research aligns with broader efforts to safeguard and promote local art and cultural traditions. Through its insights and findings, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on nonverbal communication and its role in preserving cultural heritage, providing valuable guidance for researchers and stakeholders alike.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach to gain a deeper understanding of the role of dance in preserving local culture, especially in the context of the Cirebon Mask Dance (Kartika et al., 2022). By focusing on the uniqueness and richness of local art and culture, this research aims to significantly contribute to preservation efforts and a deeper understanding of the art of Cirebon Mask Dance in the face of changing times. The qualitative method used in this research allows researchers to explore deeper dimensions of dance art, especially the Cirebon Mask Dance (Pramadanti et al., n.d.). Through interviews, observations, and descriptive analysis, this research seeks to reveal the meaning and artistic value of every movement and expression in this dance.

This research also seeks to understand how Cirebon Mask Dance can be crucial in maintaining local cultural identity amidst globalization (Cohen, 2019). The diversity of art and culture reflected in this dance is the focus of research, providing a basis for investigating how dance art can represent local wealth that remains relevant and valuable in modern times. By detailing the elements of nonverbal communication in the Cirebon Mask Dance, this research seeks to understand more deeply the messages conveyed through movement, rhythm, and expression in the context of dance. As an inseparable part of cultural heritage, this dance art can continue to play an essential role in maintaining local uniqueness and richness amidst social and cultural change dynamics. With the contribution of this research, stakeholders and researchers can better understand the artistic and cultural values contained in the Cirebon Mask Dance. The results of this research will likely provide direction and inspiration for conservation efforts and increase appreciation for traditional dance as an integral part of cultural heritage that should be preserved and protected.

RESULTS

According to Javanese tradition, mask performances were created by Sunan Kalijaga, a son of the Regent of Tuban who had extraordinary artistic talent. He then became a guardian who spread Islam on the island of Java. When the government centre moved from East Java to Central Java and the kings converted to Islam, mask performances left the palace. They were taken over by commoners who had not completely abandoned their original faith. "Seeing this reality, Sunan Kalijaga utilized mask performances *and wayang kulit*, which were popular with the people, as a tool to provide information and spread the religion of Islam to many people." (Majid, 2020)

Cirebon Mask Dance is more focused on preserving traditional Indonesian art and culture. Types of mask dances such as Panji, Pamindo, Rummyang, Tumenggung, and Klana can be used as promotional tools to promote the city of Cirebon (Yuniarto & Sahidin, 2023). Indonesian artists consider the Cirebon Mask to have the potential to promote the city of Cirebon and simultaneously introduce Indonesia to its unique traditional culture not shared by other nations. The success of Cirebon Mask has spread overseas, including America, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, France, Canada, New Zealand, Japan and several other countries (Orenstein & Cusack, 2023). Cirebon Mask Dance has striking characteristics (Rochman et al., 2023). Every performance of the Cirebon Mask Dance involves nonverbal communication between the dancers and the audience, forming a unique relationship during the performance.

When interacting with fellow humans, we focus not only on verbal language but also on non-verbal language, which is reflected in behaviour. This means that not only the words concern us but also how the message is conveyed through body expressions, faces, and the like. The phrase "it's not what he says, it's how he says it" reflects the importance of nonverbal messages. By paying attention to nonverbal behavior, we can sense the emotional nuances that are being felt, such as happiness, confusion, or sadness. First impressions of a person are often influenced by nonverbal behaviour, prompting us to understand them better.

Nonverbal messages include all signals that are not expressed through words. Nonverbal communication involves all stimuli, except verbal, in a communication context, which originate from the individual and the use of the environment and have potential message value for the sender or recipient. Therefore, this definition includes intentional or unintentional behavior as an integral part of the overall communication event. Often, we unknowingly send nonverbal messages that can have significant meaning to others (Mulyana & Zubair, 2015). (Decker, 2021) illustrates that dancers who use masks require special skills in managing body balance, especially when covering their beauty. This illustration illustrates that dancing with masks will not be performed without a specific purpose to be conveyed to the audience. This principle shows that dance is an artistic expression and a means of communication that communicates meaning and messages from the dance creator to the audience through symbols in every performance aspect.

Levi, as quoted in (Akas & Egenti, 2016) stated that choreographers use symbolism as a tool to communicate with the audience by having a certain story or idea that they want to convey. This is called "intent" in the world of dance. (Hadi, 2005) also emphasizes that dance art not only contains special symbols but also embodies the creative imagination of the dance creator. For example, Sunan Gunung Djati and Sunan Kalijaga initially used the Cirebon mask dance to convey Islamic messages to the people of Cirebon (Hajam, 2021). Thus, Cirebon mask dance, as part of the performing arts, not only presents body movements in harmony with the rhythm of the music but also carries meaning conveyed to the audience through symbolism. Dance is an effective means of communication that expresses the messages and values that the dance creator wants to convey to the audience (Georgios, 2018).

The meaning of the Cirebon Panji Mask Movement

The meaning of the movements and music in the Cirebon Panji Mask Dance can be explained as follows (Pramadanti et al., n.d.). Every movement shown in this performance is not just a series of dance steps coordinated with the rhythm of the music but also holds a deep meaning. Each movement has

aesthetic value and is a means of conveying messages, stories, and cultural values you want to express. The music accompanying the Cirebon Panji Mask Dance not only functions as a background but also plays an important role in shaping the overall feel of the performance (Syafiq Faliq, 2015). The selection of rhythm, melody, and musical harmony is done carefully to create an atmosphere that suits the theme of the performance and reflects the essence of each dance movement.

In this context, the Cirebon Panji Mask Dance is considered an artistic performance and a form of communication involving body movements and musical elements. Both work together to convey messages, values, and stories to the audience. Apart from being an artistic expression, movement and music are mediums that depict the rich culture and traditional heritage of Cirebon. Thus, the Cirebon Panji Mask Dance can be interpreted as a form of art that is more than just dance and music. He creates an immersive experience, inviting the audience to absorb the beauty, meaning, and local wisdom manifested in every performance aspect. This is an effort to understand and preserve the rich culture of Cirebon through beautiful and evocative artistic language. In ordinary people's perception, the Panji Mask is often considered less attractive because its movements tend to be static, silent, and not very energetic. The limitations of Topeng Panji's movements are in accordance with their characteristics, which emphasize patience and the virtues of character. Its presence in the dance creates minimal movement patterns, which suits its artistic purpose.

The characteristics of the Panji Mask are reflected in the white colour of its mask, which reflects the character of a pious person, soft speech, and smooth movements. In the context of the Cirebon Mask, this characteristic is manifested in a dance featuring the character Arjuna, a story in a wayang performance. This dance depicts individuals who have noble character, extraordinary patience, and resistance to various temptations. This was stated by Sumardjo (2002:13)(Karman et al., 2023). The movement of lying face down or bending over while sitting, with a mask box placed in front of him as a storage place, reflects humans in a condition before birth, such as in their mother's womb. Rasinah, a Cirebon mask puppeteer, explained that at this stage, the masked puppeteer begins to recite or chant mantras, linking it to the Panji Mask Dance as a representation of humans who have just been born into the world. In other words, this dance depicts the presence of a baby who was born pure and free from sin.

Slowly, the masked puppeteer demonstrated the movement of putting on a mask at the beginning of the performance, covering his face with a mask and slightly covering it with a scarf. This scene is interpreted as a symbol of the birth of a human baby into the mortal world. Ki Dalang, who holds a secret (a musical instrument in Cirebon mask dance performances), delivers a monologue. In Cirebon culture, the habit of ringing objects such as plates, pans, pans, or baskets when a newborn is intended to startle the baby so that it is expected to have a strong heart. This tradition has become a vital part of Cirebon society, passed down from generation to generation, and is considered a cultural heritage that needs to be preserved. The overlapping movement of the rope, which joins the scarf together, is interpreted as a representation of life that is not always full of joy but also faces sadness and deprivation. This message invites you to accept all trials sincerely and surrender to the destiny of Allah SWT, with the belief that accepting it sincerely will bring happiness in the future. This attitude of surrender is accompanied by prayer as an inseparable element because efforts without prayer are said to be in vain.

The hook gesture, which connects the right index finger to the left index finger, illustrates the importance of friendship and relationships between individuals. Cantel, which means "to hook from one object to another," is reminiscent of the bonds of friendship in children's lives. In children's play, the cantel movement restates friendship after a dispute. Linking little fingers to the fingers of previously hostile friends has become a symbol of peace in children's play lives.

The elbow movement describes extending both hands from the elbow to the wrist, followed by a downward movement to interlock or tightly join the fingers of the left and right hands. The symbolism

of this movement reflects a person's firm attitude in upholding the principles of truth. This individual is not afraid to face threats or pressure from other humans who may oppose his views or truths. The importance of siding with the truth amid bluffing and human pressure becomes the focus, noting that the struggle for truth must be accompanied by conscience and feelings, not just reason alone.

Placing both hands next to the ears, known as the *jamming* paste movement, is interpreted as a posture resembling a person performing prayer, starting with the *takbiratul ihram* movement. The symbolism of this movement reminds Muslims to perform the five daily prayers consistently. The main point of this movement is the importance of obedience in carrying out prayers as a form of obedience to religion, which is a reminder that Muslims always carry out their obligations to worship.

The significance of the clothing in the Panji Mask Dance as a supporting part

Meanwhile, supporting elements in the Cirebon Mask Dance performance can also be found in the clothing aspect, apart from the dance movements and music that complement it. To discuss the costumes of the Cirebon Mask Dance, such as Panji, Pamindo, Rummyang, Tumenggung, and Klana, the equipment in this dance is the same as that of other dances. Even though the types of dances are different, the costumes or clothing used remain consistent.

There is no difference in the use of clothing, even though the type of dance performed is different. Thus, all the costumes in the Cirebon Mask Dance are used to display the beauty of the art contained therein. This costume consists of a *sobrah*, scarf, and cloth covering the body. According to Field (Jaelani, 2020), "Cirebon Mask Dance clothing is used to cover the private parts and at the same time prioritizes elements of beauty as a form of creativity to attract the audience's interest".

Research regarding the *sobrah* worn by Cirebon mask dance masterminds during performances is interesting because it has deep meaning. *Sobrah*, which resembles the crown often worn by royal kings or queens, carries symbolism in mask dance, especially by nobles or individuals with high social status. More than just a representation of status, *sobrah* also has meaning as a symbol of individual patience and fortitude in facing a life full of challenges.

Made from hair and black, the tassels on the right and left sides of the *sobrah* symbolize life, which is complex and requires fortitude to get through each phase. This meaning is confirmed in the origin of the word "*sobrah*," which comes from the word "*sober*" in the language of the Koran, which means patience. In the context of mask performances, especially the Panji mask dance, the audience is invited to be patient, not give up easily, and remain optimistic even when faced with difficulties. (Esti, 2021). Thus, every movement and clothing element in the Cirebon Mask Dance forms a whole that depicts the richness of art and meaning in this cultural heritage.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that Cirebon Mask Dance is a fantastic art form and carries profound messages through its nonverbal communication elements. With historical roots stretching from East Java to various regions in Indonesia, this dance is not just entertainment but also an integral part of Cirebon's cultural heritage. In its performance, the Cirebon Mask Dance relies on movement and music and introduces distinctive clothing elements, such as the *sobrah*, which has a symbolic meaning. *Sobrah* is not only a representation of status but also a symbol of patience and fortitude in facing the complexities of life. This research reveals that nonverbal communication in the Cirebon Mask Dance is not just physical movements but a living language, expressing beauty and profound messages at every step. With a qualitative approach and descriptive design, this research provides in-depth insight into the richness of local art and culture, especially in the context of Cirebon Mask Dance. The importance of preserving this art becomes clear as part of Cirebon's cultural identity and to convey local wisdom values to future generations. Through this research, awareness of the importance of the Cirebon Mask Dance will increase, and efforts to preserve it can continue to be made so that this cultural wealth remains alive and relevant in changing times. Thus, the Cirebon Mask Dance is not only a valuable relic

from the past but also a vehicle that enriches the meaning of life and illuminates the direction of the future.

REFERENCES

- Akas, N. C., & Egenti, M. C. (2016). Semiotics in indigenous dance performances: Ekeleke dance of Ekwe people of Nigeria as paradigm. *OGIRISI: A New Journal of African Studies*, 12, 214–235.
- Cohen, M. I. (2019). Wayang in jaman now: Reflexive traditionalization and local, national and global networks of javanese shadow puppet theatre. *Theatre Research International*, 44(1), 40–57.
- Decker, A. L. (2021). *Desire and Dangdut Koplo: Women's Aspirations and Mobility in Indonesia's Most Popular Music*. University of California, Riverside.
- Elvira, N. A. (2023). *Analisis Kebudayaan Jawa Dalam Film Sultan Agung Karya Hanung Bramantyo Dan Relevansinya Terhadap Pendidikan Islam*. UIN Prof. K. h. Saifuddin Zuhri.
- Esti, I. (2021). *Javanese Local Wisdom In Wedhatama*. Gombang Buku Budaya.
- Georgios, L. (2018). The Transformation of Traditional Dance from Its First to Its Second Existence: The Effectiveness of Music-Movement Education and Creative Dance in The Preservation of Our Cultural Heritage. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 6(1), 104–112.
- Hadi, Y. S. (2005). *Sosiologi tari: sebuah pengenalan awal*. Pustaka.
- Hajam, H. (2021). Sufferance within a Cultural Framework as the Preaching Strategy of Sunan Gunungjati in Forming a Civil Society. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, 12(4), 257–285.
- Jaelani, A. (2020). Sustainable Event and Festival in Cirebon, Indonesia: In Islamic Marketing Perspective. *Indonesia: In Islamic Marketing Perspective (December 17, 2020)*.
- Jaeni, J. (2023). Arts Communication Model: The Development of Performing Arts through Empowering Cultural Art-Based Tourism. *Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research and Education*, 23(2), 318–332.
- Karman, A., Supratno, H., & Suyatno, S. (2023). The Subject of Irony in the Poetry Collection of A. Mustofa Bisri. *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*, 10(7), 679–694.
- Kartika, N., Dienaputra, R., Machdalena, S., & Nugraha, A. (2022). Cultural-Based Tourism In Cirebon: A Study Of Commodification In Cultural Tourism. *Sosiohumaniora*, 24(3).
- Leki, R. S., & Kulich, S. J. (2023). Conceptualization of Culture for Intercultural Communication Training: A Classic Interview with Edward T. Hall. *Journal of Intercultural Communication & Interactions Research*, 2(1), 101–118.
- Majid, A. (2020). *Eksistensi, Bentuk Penyajian dan Fungsi Kesenian Tradisional Orek-orek*. Darmawan Aji.
- Miller, F. A., Young, S. B., Dobrow, M., & Shojania, K. G. (2020). Vulnerability of the medical product supply chain: the wake-up call of COVID-19. *BMJ Quality & Safety*.
- Mira, D. A. A., & Risladiba, M. (n.d.). *Interpretasi Petatah Petitih Sunan Gunung Djati "Ingsun Titip Tajug Lan Fakir Miskin" (Studi Analisis Hermeneutik Gadamer)*.
- Mulyana, D., & Zubair, A. (2015). Intercultural communication competence developed by Chinese in communicating with Malays in Bangka Island, Indonesia. *Sino-US English Teaching*, 12(4), 299–309.
- Nurchahyo, H. (2022). *Memahami Budaya Panji*. Komunitas Seni Budaya BranGWetaN.
- Orenstein, C., & Cusack, T. (2023). *Puppet and Spirit: Ritual, Religion, and Performing Objects: Volume I Sacred Roots: Material Entities, Consecrating Acts, Priestly Puppeteers*. Taylor & Francis.
- Pramadanti, T., Malarsih, M., & Hartono, H. (n.d.). Performance of the Gegesik Style Cirebon Mask Kalana Dance in the Context of Coastal Culture as a Source of Local Wisdom. *Gondang: Jurnal Seni Dan Budaya*, 7(1), 46–57.
- Rochman, G. P., Agustina, I. H., Fardani, I., & Astari, W. Y. (2023). Exploration of Social Networks on Cultural Resilience in the Cirebon City. *MIMBAR: Jurnal Sosial Dan Pembangunan*, 124–131.

Syafiq Faliq, A. (2015). *Wayang Topeng Pedalangan: Body movements of selected characters in Jatipitutu Pitutujati/Syafiq Faliq Alfan*. University of Malaya.

Yuniarto, B., & Sahidin, F. F. (2023). The Meaning of Bandopati Losari Mask dance as a Symbol of Cultural Expression. *Formosa Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 2(7), 1233–1248.

Copyright holder:

Olyvia Wahyuningsih, Irma Nuraeni Salsabila, Adam Hernawan, Septien Dwi Savandha, Aldo Hermaya Aditiya Nur Karsa (2024)

First publication rights:

International Journal of Social Service and Research (IJSSR)

This article is licensed under:

