

**Internalization of Barongan Art Values in Stimulating Children's
Expression and Creativity**

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Article Info	Abstract
<i>Article History:</i> Received 01 July 2026 Approved 06 July 2026 Published 31 July 2026 Keywords: Internalization of Values, Barongan Art, Children's Expression, Creativity, Traditional Arts	The Barongan traditional dance is not merely a folkloric entertainment spectacle, but rather an educational medium rich in philosophical, aesthetic, and psychomotor values. This study aims to analyze the process of internalizing Barongan artistic values and its impact in stimulating children's emotional expression and creativity. Using a qualitative approach with a case study method, data were collected through participatory observation of children's activities in dance studios, in-depth interviews with art educators, and documentation of children's expressive behavior. The results show that internalization of Barongan artistic values occurs through three main stages: value transformation (recognition of characters and movement patterns), value transactions (interactive practice processes), and transinternalization (characterization). The dynamic, spontaneous, and expressive character of Barongan provides a safe space for children to channel emotions, reduce anxiety, and explore body movements freely. This research makes a significant contribution to the field of early childhood education and arts pedagogy by demonstrating that traditional dance can serve as an integral instrument for psychological stimulation. These findings highlight the practical application of Barongan art in fostering emotional regulation, kinesthetic intelligence, and original and independent thinking in children. Furthermore, this research provides a model for cultural preservation that goes beyond passive conservation, positioning traditional art as a dynamic and relevant tool for holistic child development in the modern era.

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (PAUD) and elementary schools in the modern era face the challenges of global complexity that demand the development of competencies not only in cognitive aspects, but also affective and psychomotor aspects holistically. Amidst the massive flow of digitalization and children's increasing dependence on gadgets, concrete spaces for children to explore their potential, express themselves emotionally, and hone their imagination and creativity are shrinking. This

phenomenon often results in limited social skills, the emergence of emotional anxiety, and the dominance of convergent and less original thinking patterns. Today's children are more accustomed to being passive recipients of digital visual information than active participants in the process of creating meaning through their bodies, movement, and direct interaction with their cultural environment.

In this context, integrative educational media is needed—media that not only transfers knowledge but also serves as a vessel for emotional catharsis, motor stimulation, and a space for imaginative

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exploration. One highly relevant alternative is the use of traditional dance. Traditional dance is not merely an aesthetic representation of ancestral heritage or a static folkloric entertainment spectacle. More than that, traditional art holds a rich set of *values* with philosophical, educational, and psychological dimensions when consciously implemented in children's education. Through movement, rhythm, symbols, and narrative, traditional dance can touch the emotional realm while also training body coordination, discipline, and cooperation—essential components in character building and creativity.

One cultural expression with unique characteristics and highly relevant to child development is the traditional Barongan dance. This art form, which thrives in coastal areas of Central Java, such as Demak, has a strong visual and auditory appeal for children. The large, expressive Barongan mask, dynamic gamelan music, and mythological narrative of the battle between good and evil are not only entertaining but also convey profound moral messages about courage, togetherness, responsibility, and harmony with nature. For children, these elements provide a gateway to understanding the world through metaphor, imagination, and symbolic play—processes essential to their cognitive and emotional development.

However, the educational potential of Barongan art is often overlooked due to a reduction in its meaning in society. Many still view Barongan as merely folk entertainment at celebrations or magical-religious rituals, without considering its inherent pedagogical dimensions. However, when children are actively involved—either as spectators or participants—in the preparation, rehearsal, and performance of Barongan, they experience multidimensional learning. They learn to recognize emotions through masked expressions, hone body coordination through dance movements, practice concentration through musical rhythm, and build empathy and teamwork through collaboration with fellow dancers and musicians.

The expressive, spontaneous, and dynamic nature of the traditional Barongan dance actually provides a safe space for children to project and channel both positive and negative emotions freely and in a directed manner. In developmental psychology, this process is known as emotional

regulation through art. Furthermore, the adaptive and improvisational movement structure of the Barongan dance, coupled with the collective interaction between dancers, directly stimulates children's imagination and their ability to solve visual and auditory problems. This ability is the main foundation for the development of creativity: the ability to see ordinary things from new perspectives, combine different ideas, and create original responses to situations.

The process of instilling these values does not occur instantly, but rather through systematic stages of internalization of values: starting from value transformation (initial introduction to the symbols and meaning of Barongan), followed by value transactions (active interaction through practice and performance), until reaching transinternalization (embodying these characters and values in daily behavior). Unfortunately, academic studies that specifically dissect how the structure of internalization of values in Barongan art is able to stimulate psychological aspects, especially emotional expression and originality of children's creativity are still very limited. Most previous studies have focused more on historical aspects, shifts in performance forms, or cultural preservation strategies in general, without linking them in depth to child development theory and art psychology.

Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze how the philosophical and practical values in the traditional Barongan dance art are internalized into children through artistic participation. This study also aims to analyze the psychological implications of this process on the stimulation of their emotional expression abilities and creative originality. Through a comprehensive understanding, the traditional Barongan dance art is expected to be seen not only as a legacy of the past that needs to be preserved in a museum, but as a living, relevant, and applicable character and psychological education instrument for children in the contemporary era.

Therefore, this study argues that the structured internalization of Barongan's core values, which include symbolic recognition, experiential practice, and embodied characterization is a transformative pedagogical process that effectively stimulates children's emotional regulation and creative originality, thus positioning traditional folk art not only as a cultural heritage, but as a vital non-formal educational mechanism to foster children's

holistic development amidst the challenges of digitalization and modernity.

METHODS

This research focuses on the study of the traditional Barongan dance as a form of traditional performing art that has a dual function, namely as a medium for self-expression and a vehicle for developing children's creativity. To understand this phenomenon in depth, this research applies a qualitative approach. In line with Creswell's (1994: 147) view, qualitative research is a type of interpretive research that emphasizes contextual understanding through an interactive relationship between the researcher and the object being studied, with the aim of uncovering the social meanings constructed by the actors in their natural settings. Through this approach, the dynamics of internalization of values in Barongan art can be studied naturally and comprehensively.

The data collection techniques in this study were conducted through three main complementary methods: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation activities were carried out by systematically observing and recording various activities that occurred at the research location. In this regard, Rohidi (2011: 182) explains that in art research, observation aims to obtain data about works of art in the context of activities and situations relevant to the research problem, thereby producing a complete picture of art events, aesthetic behavior in creation and appreciation, and the use of various equipment, media, and techniques in the field. In line with this, Sugiyono (2011: 196) emphasizes that observation is not only limited to human subjects, but also includes relevant non-human objects, such as props, costumes, musical instruments, and other visual elements. In the context of this research, observation was carried out intensively during the preparation process until the implementation of the Barongan Kusumojoyo performance, which included observations of props, musical accompaniment, and the participation and interaction of children in various stages of the art activity.

In addition to observation activities, in-depth interviews are also used as the main data collection technique to dig up more comprehensive

information. According to Ratna (2010: 222), interviews are a method of obtaining data through direct interaction in the form of conversations, both individually and in groups, which aims to dig up in-depth information from sources. Information gathering through interviews in this study is aimed at various related parties who have direct involvement or knowledge of the art practice, including group leaders, members, Barongan Kusumojoyo artists, as well as community leaders and residents of Gebang Village, Bonang District, Demak Regency, Barongan Samin Edan Banaran Community, Unnes Campus, Gunungpati District, Semarang City.

To ensure the validity of data obtained in the field, researchers implemented four main strategies as proposed by Moleong (2008: 327–343). The first strategy is extended participation, where researchers stay long enough in the field until data saturation is reached and no new variations in information are found. The second strategy is observational persistence, realized through efforts to seek consistency of interpretation through repeated observations and ongoing analysis. The third strategy uses triangulation methods that include source triangulation by comparing data from various informants, method triangulation by combining observation, interview, and documentation techniques, and theory triangulation by referring to relevant conceptual frameworks. The final strategy is carried out through peer examination, namely by presenting temporary findings or final research results in academic discussion forums to obtain critical input and objective validation.

In the final stage, data analysis was conducted simultaneously during the data collection process, following the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1992). This analysis process proceeded through three main, interconnected steps. The initial step began with data reduction, which encompassed the selection, focusing, and simplification of raw field data into information relevant to the research focus. The next step was data presentation, which involved organizing the reduced information into narratives, matrices, or diagrams to facilitate the identification of emerging patterns. The final step involved verification and drawing conclusions through interpretation of meaning based on

repeatedly verified findings. The entire analysis process was conducted using an inductive approach, allowing the research findings regarding the internalization of Barongan art values to emerge organically from the field data, rather than based on predetermined hypotheses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Process of Internalizing The Values of Barongan Art in Children

The process of instilling the noble values of Barongan art into a child's cognitive, affective, and personality structures does not occur instantly, but rather through structured sociocultural pedagogical stages. This structured nature was clearly evident during field observations at the Barongan Kusumojoyo studio in Gebang Village, where children progressed through a deliberate, non-linear sequence of learning shaped by direct social interaction and repetitive practice. Initially, novice dancers exhibited visible hesitation, physical awkwardness, and even fear when handling the oversized, heavy Barongan mask, often struggling to coordinate their steps with the dynamic gamelan rhythm. Trainers did not resort to abstract verbal instruction alone; instead, they systematically employed a gradual, stage-by-stage approach. In the earliest sessions, trainers focused exclusively on familiarizing the children with the mask's visual symbolism and the mythological narrative of good versus evil, allowing them to touch, observe, and ask questions about the properties without pressure—an observed strategy that effectively reduced initial anxiety and built curiosity (transformation stage).

In subsequent practice sessions, the learning shifted to intensive, hands-on peer interaction, where senior dancers demonstrated specific movements while younger children were prompted to replicate them; trainers provided immediate, corrective feedback on posture, timing, and jaw-snapping techniques, while simultaneously encouraging mutual correction and assistance among peers. This observed pattern of trial-and-error, coupled with continuous social reinforcement, enabled children to gradually synchronize their individual movements with the group's collective rhythm (transaction stage). Only after consistent, repeated practice over several

weeks did a marked behavioral shift become irreversible. Children began to independently arrange and maintain their dance properties before rehearsals, voluntarily help younger members who struggled with specific steps, and exhibit a notable reduction in stage fright during mock performances. Moreover, they spontaneously reminded one another to maintain proper posture and respect the mask's symbolic meaning—behaviors that were never explicitly demanded by the trainers but emerged organically from the communal practice environment. This observed transformation indicates that values such as courage, discipline, responsibility, and collectivity had moved beyond mere memorization to become embedded in the children's daily conduct and peer interactions (transinternalization stage).

According to Muhaimin (2001), internalization of values is an effort to instill values into a person's soul so that these values are reflected in their daily attitudes and behavior. In the context of traditional arts training for children, this process aligns with Geertz's (1973) theory of cultural acquisition, which states that culture is a historically inherited system of meaning, in which individuals gain an understanding of the world through contextual symbols such as masks and the rhythm of Barongan music. In practice, and as unequivocally confirmed by the empirical evidence from the studio, this process of instilling values consistently progresses through three main stages: value transformation, value transactions, and value transinternalization.



Figure 1. The Process of Appreciation and Expression

The first stage, value transformation, is carried out by art educators through verbal communication and visual demonstrations to introduce the characters in Barongan Kusumojoyo to children. As explained by Sedyawati (2006), introducing symbols and forms in traditional art is the first step in developing children's aesthetic sensitivity and cultural awareness. In this initial stage, children are taught to recognize the philosophical meaning behind the physical form of Barongan, which resembles a lion or tiger with a dominant wooden jaw. According to Soedarsono (2010), the form of the Barongan performance reflects the dualism of life that must be understood from an early age, namely the struggle between good and evil.

The second stage is the value transaction, an interactive phase in which two-way communication occurs between the trainer and the child while demonstrating the dance movements live. Kertajaya (2010) states that effective value transactions involve direct experience (*experiential learning*), which in this case is manifested when the child physically tries to balance the weight of the Barongan mask while following the rhythm of the gamelan. This interaction pattern is reinforced by Jazuli's (2016) opinion that arts education in folk studios relies on sensitivity and group togetherness, not just rigid formal instructions. Children learn to transact values through trial and error, correcting each other's body positions, and synchronizing movements with other dancers.

The final, most crucial stage is the trans-internalization of values, when values such as courage, discipline, humility, and collectivity are no longer merely memorized as instructions, but have become integrated into the child's personality as a whole. Lickona (1991) in his theory of character education asserts that the successful internalization of morality is marked by the emergence of ethical behavior based on moral feelings *and* moral actions . In the practice of the Barongan dance, this is reflected in how children internalize the Barongan character without coercion and demonstrate a responsible attitude in maintaining their dance properties. Koentjaraningrat (2009) suggests that successful internalization of cultural values will shape a stable personality in individuals because these values have functioned as guidelines for action in society.

The process of absorbing these values is strengthened by a supportive social environment within traditional dance studios. Indonesian sociologist Soekanto (2012) states that the process of socializing traditional values is highly dependent on the intensity of interaction within primary groups such as family or close communities. Through regular and continuous practice, children experience what Bandura (1977) calls *social learning theory* , where children internalize the values of dexterity and responsibility by observing (*modeling*) the behavior of senior dancers or mentors around them. This collective influence is also studied by Kartodirdjo (1993) who states that the emotional bond in traditional folk arts is a sense of shared ownership (*sense of community*), which transforms the practice space into a social laboratory that educates children's character to be more concerned with their surroundings.



Figure 2. Passive Appreciation Child

Barongan Art as a Medium for Stimulating Children's Expression

The dynamic, spontaneous, energetic characteristics of Barongan art, along with the use of expressive facial masks, provide a unique psychological space for children to communicate their inner feelings. According to developmental psychologist Sujiono (2012), early childhood and elementary school children need a safe, non-verbal channel of expression to release their emotional tension and anxiety. When a child dances behind the Barongan mask, which appears fierce yet humorous, a process of emotional release occurs, known in Western psychology as the concept of catharsis by Freud (1920). The mask functions as a "psychological shield" that frees children from shame, fear of social judgment, or other emotional

pressures, allowing them to explore body movements freely, boldly, and honestly.

Theatrical movements in Barongan, such as the snapping of the wooden jaw (*barongan*) with a thunderous sound or the dynamic, agile jumping movements, demand intense emotional involvement from the child. Hadi (2007) argues that expression in group dance is the result of sensitivity (*rasa*) synchronized with auditory elements in the form of accompanying music. This freedom of movement is in line with Gardner's (2011) theory of multiple intelligences, specifically *bodily-kinesthetic* intelligence, where children use their entire body coordination to express ideas, narratives, and feelings theatrically. Through dance, children not only move physically, but also project their inner character outward.

Furthermore, children's emotional involvement in traditional arts is supported by the warm and open sociocultural conditioning of the community. Sudarsono (2002) emphasized that the main strength of folk performing arts lies in its inclusive, popular, and communicative nature, so that children do not feel judged or punished when making movement errors in front of an audience. This inclusive atmosphere, according to Rogers' (1961) humanistic theory, creates essential conditions of *psychological safety* and *psychological freedom*, which allow children's authentic expression to develop rapidly without the fear of external destructive criticism.

This phenomenon of expressive release is also reinforced by the aesthetics of folk dance. According to Sumardjo (2006), folk art has a structure that is open to the spontaneous emotional outbursts of its performers, in contrast to palace art which is bound by rigid, standard rules (*pakem*). Freedom of expression in Barongan helps children build a positive self-concept. As stated by Suryabrata (2014), the development of a child's healthy personality is greatly influenced by the availability of environmental media that allows them to explore emotions constructively. Barongan dancing activities become a means of playing and learning (*play and learn*), facilitating children to channel their excess energy into a dynamic aesthetic work.



Figure 3. Children Explore Emotions

Activating Children's Creativity Through the Aesthetic Construction of Barongan

In addition to serving as a catharsis for emotional expression, internalizing the values of Barongan art has been shown to significantly activate children's creativity. According to Munandar (2009), creativity is defined as the ability to create new combinations based on data, information, or pre-existing elements. In the context of Kusumojoyo's Barongan art performance, children's creativity does not arise from a vacuum of imagination, but rather from the process of deconstructing and reconstructing traditional movement patterns learned during practice. When children have to adjust their steps and movements, The mask with variations in the tempo of the drum beats that suddenly change, they are required to carry out instant problem solving (*spontaneous problem-solving*).

This aesthetic adaptation process is highly relevant to Torrance's (1974) theory of creativity, which measures creativity from four main aspects: fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration. The Barongan child dancers demonstrate great flexibility as they modify their steps to maintain balance while carrying the weight of the Barongan jaw mask. Djelantik (1999) describes this complex aesthetic experience as a harmonious blend of three artistic elements: form (visual form), content (philosophical content or meaning), and presentation (how to perform on stage). Children's creativity is actively stimulated as they attempt to translate the "weight" of the Barongan mythological story into the "form" of their own body movements without losing its original aesthetics.



Figure 4. Creative Process and Active and passive aesthetic imagination

This stimulation of creativity is also strengthened by the collective and communal dimensions of the performance. According to Murgiyanto (2004), creativity in traditional arts is communal-adaptive, meaning that individual creativity is always tested and aligned with the harmony of the group as a whole. Children must work together to condition the stage space so that the dance formations are not chaotic. Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism theory is very appropriate to explain this phenomenon through the concept of *the Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD). In the Barongan studio, children who are not yet proficient interact intensively with coaches or peers who have higher competence (*More Knowledgeable Others*). Through gradual guidance (*scaffolding*), children are encouraged to move out of their movement comfort zones and begin to create new aesthetic variations independently.

The importance of creative freedom that is deeply rooted in local cultural values is in line with the basic principles of education from Indonesian national figure, Ki Hadjar Dewantara (2013), through the Three-N concept, namely *Niteni* (observing carefully), *Nirokke* (imitating the process), and *Nambahi* (modifying or developing creatively). Children first observe the Barongan performance from seniors (*niteni*), then imitate the basic movements taught by the trainer (*nirokke*), until finally they are able to add improvisational movements, facial expressions, or unique humorous interactions according to their own wild imagination (*nambahi*).

Process of modifying or *adding to the dance* demonstrates children's independent thinking. As Sanjaya (2013) emphasized, learning that stimulates creativity must provide space for children to generate original ideas. Barongan art, with its movement nature accommodating to improvisation, provides this flexibility. This aligns with Soemardjan's (1964) view of sociocultural change, where the creativity of the younger generation in adopting traditional art will determine the future sustainability of that culture. When children are given the freedom to explore Barongan movements, they are not simply preserving ancient culture but are revitalizing it into a medium of expression relevant to the spirit of their time.

Moelyono (2017) in his study of community arts, the development of collective imagination can build children's critical awareness of the reality around them. They learn to communicate, negotiate, determine roles, and resolve internal conflicts in dance groups independently. Similarly, Supriadi (1994) stated that environments rich in cultural stimulation and providing psychological freedom have been shown to produce children with a much higher level of creativity than restrictive environments. Thus, the internalization of Barongan artistic values has proven successful as a powerful catalyst for the birth of original ideas, mental resilience, and independence of expression in children, making it a highly applicable and relevant instrument of local wisdom-based character education in the modern era.



Figure 5. Stimulating Children's Creativity

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussion, it can be concluded that the internalization of the values of the Barongan Kusumojoyo traditional art in children occurs through a structured sociocultural process in stages, starting from the transformation of values through the introduction of symbols, value transactions through interaction of exercises based on direct experience (*experiential learning*), to the transinternalization stage where noble values such as courage and collectivity are integrated into the child's personality.

The dynamic and expressive characteristics of Barongan art have been proven to be effective in functioning as a safe psychological catharsis medium through the use of masks as a psychological shield that reduces social anxiety and frees children to channel emotions and explore body-kinesthetic intelligence honestly. In addition, the aesthetic construction of the Barongan performance significantly activates children's creativity.

The demands of adapting movements to sudden changes in musical rhythm stimulate spontaneous problem-solving abilities, while the flexibility of improvisational space in this folk art provides children with the independence to apply the principle of *adding* (modifying) without disrupting the communal harmony of the group. Thus, the process of internalizing values in Barongan art is not merely a passive effort to preserve traditional culture, but has successfully transformed into an instrument of psychological and pedagogical stimulation of local wisdom that is highly relevant to supporting children's independence of expression, mental health, and the originality of creative ideas amidst the challenges of the modern era.

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