

# Shifts the Symbolic Meaning of *Jaran Kepang* Dance Art in Social Science (IPS) Learning at SMP Negeri 03 Sukorejo Kendal

Khumaeroh<sup>1</sup>, Thriwaty Aرسال<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Master's Program in Social Science Education, <sup>2</sup>Sociology and Anthropology Program, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: Khumaeroh

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## ABSTRACT

Local culture is a vital asset in forming national identity and serves as a contextual learning medium. Indonesia, a country rich in culture, encourages education to collaborate with culture and the curriculum to create contextual learning. This study aims to analyze the shift in the symbolic meaning, function, and form of the *jaran kepong* dance art from a communal (traditional) context to a school institution (new creation) context, as well as its relevance as a medium for Social Science (IPS) learning. This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews with the school principal, extracurricular advisors, and students, and document analysis. The results show that the setting shift of *jaran kepong* to the school environment triggers institutional intervention, causing a shift in the symbolic meaning and the dance's form. This shift is divided into three fundamental changes: (1) a functional shift from a spiritual ritual to an aesthetic-educational purpose, where the dance is instrumentalized to pragmatically achieve character education and cultural preservation goals; (2) De-symbolization of magical elements, characterized by the total elimination of trance (possession) and ritual-triggering symbols, changing the ontological

status of the dancer from a passive subject to a willing (active) and rational actor ; and (3) Formalization and structural standardization, which transforms the dance from spontaneous to programmed and instrumental. This is realized through duration reduction (20-30 minutes), standardized choreography, and costume standardization to emphasize the values of discipline and teamwork. Pedagogically, the new creation of *jaran kepong* serves as an effective socio-cultural laboratory for contextualizing abstract IPS curriculum concepts, such as social change, group interaction, and team solidarity, resulting in a more concrete and applicable understanding for students.

**Keywords:** *jaran kepong*, symbolic meaning, Social Science learning, *ritual*

## INTRODUCTION

Local culture is a vital asset in forming national identity and serves as a contextual learning medium (1). Efforts to preserve culture in Indonesia are increasingly strengthened in line with the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, which explicitly targets the formation of the Pancasila Student Profile, emphasizing the dimensions of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), creativity, and global diversity (2). The traditional art of *jaran kepong* dance (*kuda*

*lumping*) stands as a cultural heritage in Central Java, rich in symbolic meaning. Historically, Jaran Kepang in the communal context (village community) primarily functioned as a transcendent spiritual ritual. This practice inherently involves trance (possession), the use of magical symbols (offerings/ *sesajen*, amulets), and spontaneous and flexible performance duration, where its symbolic meaning centers on the relationship between humans and supernatural forces (3).

In line with the demands of modernization and institutional commitment to integrate local wisdom, initiatives have emerged to adopt this art form into the formal education system. *Jaran Kepang* was adopted as an extracurricular activity at SMP Negeri 03 Sukorejo Kendal with the instrumental goal of cultural preservation and character building for students. This shift in context from the sacred communal domain to the rational and structured school institution domain triggers a fundamental conflict in the school environment, which operates under the logic of instrumental rationality and upholds educational ethics that normatively reject magical and unmeasurable spontaneous elements. This phenomenon is called institutional intervention, which is a deliberate effort by institutional actors (the school) to re-engineer a cultural practice to align with rational and standardized pedagogical goals.

This fundamental shift raises a crucial question: how can a dance dominated by magical and trance elements be adapted into an educational environment that upholds rationality and ethics (4). The research results indicate that the school made three coherent fundamental changes: a functional shift from ritual to aesthetic-education, the total de-symbolization of magical elements (elimination of trance and triggering symbols), and structural formalization and standardization (standardized choreography and duration reduction). These changes were made to ensure that the meaning emerging from the dance aligns with the school's vision and learning objectives, particularly in the

Social Science (IPS) subject, which requires authentic media to contextualize abstract concepts.

Based on the description in the introduction, this research is important to analyze in depth through the lens of Blumer's symbolic interactionism (5). This framework provides a strong basis for examining the re-interpretation and re-symbolization process that occurs how actors (the school) assign new meaning to the symbol (*Jaran Kepang*) through collective interaction (6). This study aims to test the effectiveness of the rationalized dance (new creation *Jaran Kepang*) as an authentic medium for contextualizing IPS curriculum concepts, such as social change, group integration, and social solidarity (7). These findings are expected to make a tangible contribution to the development of a measurable local wisdom-based IPS learning model and provide a critical case study on cultural pragmatism in the formal education system.

## **MATERIALS & METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design chosen to deeply understand the process of the symbolic meaning shift of *Jaran Kepang* dance from a ritual to a pedagogical context within the environment of SMP Negeri 03 Sukorejo, Kendal (8). This location was intrinsically selected (critical case) due to the school's explicit commitment to re-engineering traditional art as a learning tool. Primary data collection was carried out for three months (July–October 2025) to continuously observe the cycle of extracurricular activities.

The determination of research subjects used the purposive sampling technique (8), involving four categories of key informants: policy agents (school principal) to explore policy philosophy, academic agents (IPS teachers) for curriculum implementation, form adaptation agents (advisors/trainers) for technical details of choreography changes and de-symbolization, and supporting informants (active students) for interpretation perspectives.

Data triangulation was applied to achieve credibility, through a combination of semi-structured in-depth interviews focusing on Blumer's Premise I regarding symbol interpretation, participatory observation to record the manifestations of structural formalization in the field, and documentation to validate school policy. Data analysis was conducted inductively and continuously, following the interactive model cycle of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (9) The process begins with data condensation, followed by data display, and concludes with conclusion drawing/verification. The final research conclusion is explicitly linked to Blumer's symbolic interactionism, stating that the actor (the school) acts to change the symbol (*jaran keping*) based on the new meaning attached to it (pedagogical and rational), ensuring empirical findings are consistent with the theoretical foundation.

## RESULT

The shift in the form of *jaran keping* dance from the communal version (community) to the school version (new creation) is a result of institutional intervention triggered by a setting shift. This analysis adheres to the first premise of Blumer's symbolic interactionism: "Humans act towards things based on the meaning that the things have for them". The school institution (actor) in this context acts to change the physical form and symbolic action of *jaran keping* (the thing) so that the resulting meaning aligns with educational goals (rational, disciplinary, aesthetic). This shift leads to three fundamental changes in the dance's structure: a functional shift, magical de-symbolization, and structural formalization.

### 1. Functional Shift: From Ritual to Aesthetic-Education

The most crucial shift occurs in the functional orientation. In the school context, the dance's function has been established as an instrumental tool to achieve clear educational goals, contrary to its primary function in the communal context, which is

transcendent (spiritual ritual) and spontaneous (mass entertainment).

### a. Transformation from Sacred-Communal to Pedagogical-Aesthetic

The main function of *jaran keping* has fundamentally changed from a sacred-communal activity in the village to a pedagogical-aesthetic activity in the school. The primary purpose of having the *jaran keping* dance in school is to showcase music and dance art in Javanese cultural collaboration. The focus is on the artistic and performance aspects, unlike the communal context (village) where it lies in the aspect of spirituality. The performance in school does not show rituals or magical elements, whereas the communal context (village) often still maintains ritual functions or magical elements. In this case, the shift is from spiritual ritual to character education and art, replaced entirely by educational needs, so the focus has shifted from spiritual experience to the mastery of cultural skills. The main purpose of the dance is as a medium for students to practice skills in the art of *jaran keping*. The aesthetic goal of achieving beauty in movement, formation, and neatness of performance becomes the main benchmark, meaning the dance's value is measured by its visible artistic quality, not its spiritual power. The shift from spontaneous mass entertainment to standardized entertainment means the entertainment goal is maintained but transforms into standardized entertainment presented at formal events (farewells, festivals). The demands of formal events directly trigger the formalization of the form (performance duration and standardized choreography) that must comply with school protocols. The *jaran keping* dance movements in school become simpler and are creatively developed towards modern standards for artistic and educational purposes, to maintain the dance's relevance.

### b. Responding to School Vision and Curriculum Needs

This functional shift is driven by the school principal and advisor as an effort to meet the school's vision: "realizing students who are faithful, devout, honest, innovative, and culturally environmentally aware". This vision is consistent with educational needs, enabling the creation of new, more concrete learning media and tools.

Pragmatic preservation of local wisdom: *jaran kepong* is maintained not because of its mystical elements, but because its cultural value can be utilized and supports the school's vision. The choice of *jaran kepong* is based on the desire to highlight local wisdom that is entertaining and unites the community. The preservation function serves as a means to print the desired graduate profile, as well as a tool for social adaptation that facilitates students' interaction and acceptance in the communal environment that still holds strongly to the tradition. Furthermore, it shapes cultural soft skills and character education.

The most dominant goal is the pedagogical aspect, which is the integration of *jaran kepong* as a tool to instill character education values and soft skills. These values center on the social-rational context: teamwork and cooperation manifested through the demand for movement synchronization in standardized choreography, and the values of discipline and perseverance trained through structured practice processes and adherence to standard music rhythm. These values are the antithesis of old spirituality values (spontaneity, transcendence, ritual), affirming that *jaran kepong* is a measurable educational product.

Contextualization Media for IPS Learning. This role demonstrates the most significant functional shift academically. The new creation of *jaran kepong* becomes a cultural change laboratory used as an authentic tool to teach concepts of social change, cultural change, and institutional adaptation. Students find it easier to understand why culture can change from ritual to art after direct practice, transforming abstract concepts into a hands-on experience.

## **2. De-symbolization of Magical Elements (Elimination of Trance)**

The most radical aspect of the form shift is de-symbolization, which is the total elimination of ritual, magical, or transcendental symbols. This process is a form of deliberate institutional censorship by the school. The school explicitly prohibits magical or ritual elements because they are not compatible with educational needs and ethics.

### **a. Total Elimination of Trance (Possession) and Institutional Justification**

The elimination of the trance (possession) element is the removal of the core ritual meaning. The school has stripped the primary function of the *jaran kepong* dance from a religious medium to a cultural object. Furthermore, normative and ethical educational justification is carried out, where the decision is based on normative and ethical educational reasons. Magical and trance elements are considered contrary to educational norms and ethics and violate the boundaries of rationality. The school operates under the principle of instrumental rationality, demanding that all activities be safe, measurable, and accountable. This elimination serves as an institutional defense mechanism to maintain a rational and hygienic learning environment.

### **b. Elimination of Trigger Symbols and Ontological Shift of Action**

The elimination of trigger symbols is done by removing all elements that function as ritual triggers (amulets, offerings, or special incantations). The physical and verbal removal of these power symbols breaks the ritual chain, ensuring the presented dance is clean of mystical connotations. This naturally triggers an ontological shift of action, where a deep change occurs in the interpretation of action from driven to controlled. Movements previously driven by external (spiritual) forces must now be controlled and articulated as artistic expression or acting. This shift changes the

ontological status of the dancer from a dominated (passive) subject to a willing (active) actor. Subsequently, rationalization of movement is performed, where every movement now has a purely choreographic and aesthetic purpose. The ability to display movements as if in a trance without actually being in a trance is seen as controlled artistic ability, emphasizing the students' discipline, self-control, and artistic skill.

### c. Sociological Implication:

#### Modernization of Local Culture

The de-symbolization of *jaran kepong* reflects the modernization of local culture through the educational institution. The school acts as a rationalization agent that filters out elements of traditional culture deemed irrational. *jaran kepong* is institutionalized into an educational commodity whose primary value shifts from spiritual power to pedagogical marketable value.

### 3. Formalization and Structural Standardization

This technical shift occurs to ensure the new creation *jaran kepong* can be integrated into the strict school schedule, performance format, and time allocation. This process transforms *jaran kepong* from a spontaneous art into a programmed and instrumental art.

#### a. Movement and Choreography: Spontaneity to Rational Control

The choreography structure in the new creation version is shortened to 20 to 30 minutes for time efficiency, which is significantly different from the communal version that lasts for hours. This reduction is accompanied by the creation of choreography that is more structured, planned, and sequential, replacing spontaneity. The standardized structure demands very high movement synchronization. Pedagogically, this synchronization serves as a visual reflection of the values of teamwork and cooperation. Neat and orderly movements are focused on artistic, beautiful, and clean elements,

becoming a concrete manifestation of the values of discipline and obedience.

#### b. Props and Costumes: Aesthetic Standardization

The adjustment of props and costumes emphasizes the aspects of uniformity and visual aesthetics for formal performances. This is done through standardization of props (*kuda lumping*). The *kuda lumping* is used purely as an aesthetic-symbolic prop, not a ritual object. Its use is strictly regulated, must be uniform, and cannot be augmented with mystical accessories. There is also costume adjustment (team uniformity), where costumes are made uniform and standard, avoiding magical accessories. Costumes are adapted for formal performances and festivals, emphasizing visual beauty, team uniformity, and group identity. This standardized costume eliminates the role hierarchy that might exist in the communal ritual version.

#### c. Accompanying Music Instruments: From Trance-Inducer to Tempo-Regulator

The Gamelan instruments undergo functional instrumentalization. The accompanying music experiences duration reduction and standardized music rhythm. The music accompaniment is adjusted in duration to match the shortened dance. The music rhythm is set standard and rigid according to the predetermined choreography. In addition, there is a shift in rhythm function, where the function of the rhythm is diverted from a trance-inducer to a regular and predictive rhythmic marker (tempo-regulator). Music functions to maintain teamwork (synchronization) and the storyline, focusing on creating an entertaining artistic atmosphere, aligning with the educational ethos that prioritizes regularity and control.

This entire process of technical formalization demonstrates that *jaran kepong* in school has transformed into an art optimized for performance and education, where every element is measured and regulated to achieve

instrumental educational goals: discipline and teamwork.

## DISCUSSION

### 1. Symbolic Interactionism and Institutional Intervention

The shift in the symbolic meaning of *jaran kepeng* dance from ritual to aesthetic-education proves Blumer's Premise I of symbolic interactionism: that human action is based on the meaning attached to a thing, and that meaning is negotiated through social interaction (5). The school institution, as a collective actor, interacts with the *jaran kepeng* symbol. The ritual meaning inherent in the dance (trance, spontaneity, spirituality) is rejected because it is considered contrary to the educational ethos that prioritizes instrumental rationality (10).

The school becomes an agent of meaning negotiation, carrying out intervention through the principal's strict prohibition (institutional censorship) and technical formalization to change and modify the meaning (5). The new meaning of *jaran kepeng* in school is a tool for discipline, a medium for collaboration, and curriculum material.

This change confirms that social reality (in this case, the function and form of the dance) is processual, negotiable, and context-dependent. *Jaran kepeng* is no longer viewed as a ritual object but as a cultural object beneficial to the school's vision. The school's actions (changing choreography, eliminating rituals) are based on their new interpretation of the symbol (11).

### 2. Functional Shift: From Transcendent Function to Pedagogical Utility (Second Existence)

The transformation of the *jaran kepeng* function from sacred-communal to pedagogical-aesthetic is the most fundamental shift. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of second existence in traditional dance studies, where art is cut off from its natural communal environment and transformed into a process more centered on the image of the form, the aesthetic final

product, and commercial/educational goals (12). The *jaran kepeng* dance art undergoes cultural instrumentalization. In the school environment, *jaran kepeng* functions as a medium for:

- a. Pragmatic Preservation. The dance is maintained because it can fulfill the school's vision of producing culturally aware graduates. This is a form of utilitarian preservation, where its cultural value is measured by its practical benefits as a soft skill tool and social adaptation, not as a spiritual heritage (13).
- b. Embodied Pedagogy. The integration of the dance as a medium for contextualizing IPS learning demonstrates how traditional dance is transformed into a tangible teaching tool. Students do not just learn the concept of cultural change abstractly but experience it hands-on. By practicing the new creation form, they become the subject and object of cultural change itself, making abstract concepts concrete (14).

### 3. Magical De-symbolization: The Triumph of Rationality

The aspect of de-symbolization, especially the total elimination of trance, is a manifestation of the educational institution's cultural politics. The school operates under the logic of instrumental rationality, normatively restricting what is considered appropriate (hygienic) in the learning environment. Magical and trance elements are viewed as violating the boundaries of rationality and educational ethics. This clearly triggers the ontological shift of action. The elimination of ritual-triggering symbols (offerings, amulets) and the prohibition of trance physically and verbally break the old ritual chain, but result in a deeper change: The Ontological Shift of Action. Previously, the dancer was a passive subject dominated by external forces (driven), but afterward, the dancer is an active actor who wills and displays trance-like movements as controlled artistic expression (controlled).

The ability to act in a trance without actually being in a trance becomes a benchmark for the students' artistic skill, discipline, and self-control. The school institution acts as a rationalization agent that filters and redefines the boundaries of tradition to fit the demands of modernity and bureaucracy (4). *Jaran kepong* is capitalized into a safe and measurable pedagogical asset.

#### 4. Structural Formalization:

##### Correspondence with Bureaucratic Logic

Technical formalization, such as duration reduction, standardized choreography, and the instrumentalization of musical instruments, is an effort to adapt the dance into the school's programmed and strict schedule and performance format. The *jaran kepong* dance art undergoes instrumentalization of control over time and movement. The cutting of the duration from hours to 20-30 minutes and the creation of structured choreography replace communal spontaneity. This standardized structure demands high movement synchronization, which is pedagogically instrumentalized as a visual reflection of the values of teamwork and cooperation social-rational values that are the target of education.

The music as a regulator triggers a shift in rhythm function from trance-inducer to tempo-regulator, clearly showing that the music element has lost its magical function and is integrated as an instrument of performance management. Music now serves to ensure regularity, control, and synchronization of the dance, consistent with the school ethos that prioritizes perseverance and self-control.

The final part is the aesthetics of uniformity. The standardization of props (*kuda lumping*) and costumes emphasizes uniformity and visual beauty. This eliminates the hierarchy of ritual roles and replaces it with group identity and the needs of formal performance, affirming that these elements now only function as aesthetic-symbolic props.

#### CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the shift in the symbolic meaning of the *jaran kepong* dance art is a direct result of institutional intervention triggered by a shift in context from the communal domain to the school education environment. This analysis fundamentally confirms Blumer's first premise of symbolic interactionism, where the school institution (actor) deliberately changes the physical form and symbolic action of the dance so that its meaning aligns with rationality and pedagogical goals. This shift is manifested through three main structural changes in the school version of *jaran kepong* art (new creation).

First, functional shift (from ritual to character education and aesthetic). The primary function of the dance has radically shifted from a transcendent and spontaneous sacred-communal activity to a standardized pedagogical-aesthetic activity. *Jaran kepong* is maintained not because of its mystical elements, but because its cultural value is utilized as a medium to train soft skills (teamwork and discipline) and as an effective contextualization tool in IPS learning regarding social and cultural change.

Second, De-symbolization of magical elements (total elimination of trance). The school acts as a rationalization agent through institutional censorship that totally eliminates ritual, magical, and trance (possession) elements, as well as removing ritual-triggering symbols. This decision is based on ethical-educational reasons that demand safe, measurable activities consistent with the principle of instrumental rationality. This change also triggers an ontological shift of action, where the dance movement changes from being driven by external forces (driven) to being fully controlled as an artistic expression.

Third, formalization and structural standardization. To integrate *jaran kepong* into the school's strict time allocation, the dance undergoes standardization. This includes performance time efficiency (duration reduction), standardized and structured choreography (replacing

spontaneity), standardization of props and costumes for aesthetic uniformity, and the instrumentalization of accompanying music whose function shifts from trance-inducer to tempo-regulator to maintain synchronization and discipline.

### Declaration by Authors

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