

The Existence of Wayang Kulit Performances and Their Meaning for Adolescents in Grobogan Regency

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the existence of *Wayang Kulit* (Traditional Javanese shadow puppet) performances in Grobogan Regency, to identify the social values reflected in these performances, and to investigate how adolescents perceive *Wayang Kulit*. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed. The result indicated that *Wayang Kulit* performances continue to exist and remain well preserved, not only in the Grobogan Regency town square (Alun-alun) but also in communities throughout the regency. The performances reflect various social values, including honesty, responsibility, justice, loyalty, education, mutual cooperation, social solidarity, compassion, politeness, and manners. The adolescents in this study perceived *Wayang Kulit* as a traditional performing art that conveys moral values and contributes to character education.

Keywords: Wayang Kulit; Social Values; Adolescents

INTRODUCTION

Traditional art is a part of cultural identities which represents a local community and are inherited from one generation to another (Prabandari & Kurniawan, 2023). The Wali Songo played an important role in utilizing

arts as a medium for Islamic dissemination throughout the Indonesian archipelago, particularly in Java. One of the traditional arts used as a medium of religious dissemination was *Wayang Kulit* (Irawan, 2023). Sunan Kalijaga used *Wayang Kulit* performances as a means of spreading Islam. Through performances that were enthusiastically attended by local communities, audiences were required to perform ablution (wudhu) and recite the declaration of faith (*syahadat*) before watching the performance, which symbolized their acceptance of Islam (Hidayat et al., 2022).

Wayang Kulit is an indigenous cultural heritage of the Indonesian archipelago that incorporates narratives from the Indian epics, *the Mahabharata and Ramayana* (Wardani & Saripudin, 2021). The selection of these stories by Sunan Kalijaga, also known as Raden Said, was intended to accommodate the cultural background of communities that had previously practiced Hinduism. However, the epic narratives presented in *wayang kulit* performances were adapted and transformed in accordance with Islamic teachings and the philosophical values of the Qur'an (Ismail et al., 2024). Today, *wayang kulit* functions not only as a form of entertainment but also as a medium that provides moral guidance. The social values conveyed through *wayang kulit* have

become one of the foundations of Javanese society and remain relevant in responding to the challenges posed by modernization and globalization.

The social values interpreted by adolescents are expected to contribute to the development of ethical awareness among young people in social and civic life. However, in reality, *wayang kulit* is often perceived as an outdated form of art, difficult to understand due to the use of traditional language, and less attractive because of its lengthy performance duration. These perceptions have contributed to the declining interest in *wayang kulit* among younger generations. The development of globalization has affected various aspects of life, including culture. Globalization has accelerated modernization, which has resulted in the weakening of traditional cultural practices as they become increasingly influenced and overshadowed by modern culture (Diaz et al., 2021).

The Government of Grobogan Regency, through the Department of Youth, Sports, Culture, and Tourism (Dinas Pemuda, Olahraga, Kebudayaan, dan Pariwisata/Disporabudpar), has actively organized *wayang kulit* performances at the Grobogan Regency Hall (Pendopo Kabupaten Grobogan) and Grobogan Town Square (Alun-alun Grobogan) since 2014. This initiative aims to introduce *wayang kulit* as a traditional art form to younger generations. Many adolescents attend these performances and remain present in an orderly manner until the end of the shows (Interview with Dwi Suryandari, S.Sn., June 7, 2026). These preservation efforts are supported by innovations and modernization efforts introduced by *dalang* (puppet masters). The inclusion of engaging entertainment segments, such as *Limbukan* and *Goro-Goro*, also contributes to attracting audience interest. For example, *dalang* have adapted their performances by using easy language and inviting popular guest performers to increase audience engagement (Interview with Ki Didik Sudrajat, S.Sn., June 18, 2026).

The strategies implemented by Disporabudpar Grobogan are complemented by the inclusion of cultural preservation materials in formal education. Formal education serves as a platform for cultivating character values and as a medium for cultural transmission through subjects related to Social Sciences, including History, Sociology, and Anthropology. In addition, Arts and Culture education also plays an important role in developing students' artistic skills. Social Sciences (Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial/IPS) is characterized as a dynamic field of study because its content addresses social phenomena that develop in accordance with changing times and social realities. Therefore, Social Sciences is continuously evolving and cannot be viewed as a fixed discipline.

The learning materials provided in schools are designed based on social contexts, contemporary developments, and realities within society. At the junior high school level, Social Sciences materials include discussions on the strategic role of young generations in transmitting values and preserving traditional culture, either explicitly or implicitly (Wiwit et al., 2025). The contribution of Social Sciences to the preservation of *wayang kulit* is reflected in the topic of "Cultural Diversity." *Wayang kulit* itself has been recognized by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage since 2003. Through this topic, teachers can introduce various forms of Indonesian *wayang* traditions, allowing students' understanding of *wayang* to extend beyond *wayang kulit*, which is particularly dominant in Central Java, including Grobogan Regency (Jannah, 2025).

Retna, a Social Sciences teacher at SMP Negeri 1 Kradenan, Grobogan, explained that *wayang kulit* is discussed during Social Sciences lessons as an example of cultural acculturation and as a cultural heritage that should be preserved by adolescents. Similarly, Bety, another Social Sciences teacher at the same school, stated that students were assigned to draw *wayang kulit*

figures as part of learning about cultural acculturation, with the aim of introducing students to various *wayang kulit* characters (Interview, May 18, 2026). At the senior high school level, cultural preservation efforts are integrated into Sociology, Anthropology, and History subjects. In Sociology, cultural preservation is discussed through the perspective of strengthening national identity, where *wayang kulit* as a traditional art form is positioned as an important element in the construction of cultural identity.

Anthropology complements this effort by introducing students to cultural studies, particularly the importance of cultural preservation, strategies for maintaining cultural heritage, and the consequences that may arise when cultural heritage is no longer transmitted to future generations. Sociology and Anthropology, when combined, encourage students to understand their role in preserving ancestral cultural heritage. In practical terms, these subjects are related to *wayang kulit* as they can be used as educational media to discuss gender equality through the representation of characters such as Dewi Amba and Dewi Srikanthi (Diaz et al., 2021).

History education plays an important role in constructing students' historical awareness as a foundation of national identity, in which culture constitutes an integral element. The long historical process of national cultural formation has produced diverse forms of local arts across different regions. This historical process is expected to develop students' collective memory and awareness of the importance of preserving cultural heritage as a sustainable cultural identity (Diantara, 2026)

The younger generation plays a vital role in maintaining cultural sustainability. Adolescents serve as the next generation responsible for transmitting traditional local cultural values so that they can remain preserved in the future. Generation Alpha needs to learn and internalize cultural values as a foundation for transmitting them to the following generation, namely Generation

Beta (Riswan, 2025). Without the involvement of younger generations in cultural preservation, traditional values, local wisdom, regional arts, and cultural heritage are at risk of being disconnected due to the loss of knowledge transmission from previous generations (Juliansyah et al., 2024).

Wayang kulit is not merely a form of entertainment but also a cultural performance that provides moral guidance and conveys social values and life lessons as examples for society. This phenomenon indicates that adolescents' interpretations of *wayang kulit* are shaped through learning processes in schools, particularly through educational materials related to cultural preservation, as well as through direct interaction when attending *wayang kulit* performances. This perspective aligns with Symbolic Interactionism Theory, which emphasizes that meaning is constructed through human interactions with their environment and with other individuals. Based on this explanation, this study examines the existence of *wayang kulit* performances and adolescents' interpretations of them in Grobogan Regency.

MATERIALS & METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research method to explore hidden phenomena that cannot be directly observed through the senses. This approach is consistent with Hamdi and Bahrudin's view that qualitative research aims to explain and analyse phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, and individual or group perceptions toward particular issues. The focus of this study was the sustainability of *wayang kulit* performances in Grobogan Regency, the social values embedded in these performances, and adolescents' interpretations of *wayang kulit* performances in the region. Data were collected through observation, literature review, interviews, and documentation. The data sources in this study consisted of

members of Disporabudpar Grobogan Regency, *wayang kulit* artists and practitioners in Grobogan Regency, and adolescents residing in the region. To ensure data validity, the researchers conducted several validation procedures, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability tests. Furthermore, the data analysis process followed the stages proposed by Miles and Huberman, namely data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Creswell, 2016).

RESULT & DISCUSSION

The Existence of Wayang Kulit Performances in Grobogan Regency

A local *dalang* from Grobogan Regency, Ki Hardono, S.Sn., has developed a new *gagrak* (performance style) within *wayang kulit* by creating *Wayang Sadat* as a medium for Islamic dissemination. This form of *wayang* was adapted by Ki Hardono, S.Sn., and performed in *wayang kulit* events organized by Islamic boarding schools in Grobogan Regency. One of the stories (*lakon*) performed was *Ajisaka*. However, most *wayang kulit* performances throughout Grobogan Regency still use the Surakarta *gagrak* style (Interview with Ki Didik Sudrajat, S.Sn., June 18, 2026).

In 2009, *wayang kulit* in Grobogan Regency experienced a significant decline and was considered nearly extinct due to decreasing interest among local communities. The condition began to change when Marwoto, S.H., served as the Head of the Department of Youth, Sports, Culture, and Tourism (Disporabudpar). His appreciation for *wayang kulit* encouraged him to initiate preservation efforts through Disporabudpar by organizing *wayang kulit* performances at the Grobogan Regency Pavilion and Town Square (Pendopo Alun-alun Kabupaten Grobogan) starting in 2014. These performances involved local *dalang* from different areas of Grobogan Regency who presented various *lakon* to revitalize *wayang kulit* and introduce it to younger generations. Furthermore, every celebration

of Grobogan Regency Anniversary and World *Wayang* Day, the Grobogan Regency Government through Disporabudpar organizes *wayang kulit* performances at the Grobogan Town Square featuring *dalang* from outside the region (Interview with Dwi Suryandari, June 7, 2026).

The Grobogan Regency Government regularly organizes *wayang kulit* performances twice a year, in addition to routine performances held every Jumat Kliwon (Friday Kliwon according to the Javanese calendar). These efforts have contributed to the revitalization of *wayang kulit* and increased its recognition among younger generations. Several factors contributed to the decline of *wayang kulit* in Grobogan Regency, including the considerable costs required to organize performances and the difficulty of understanding the traditional language used during performances. As the central figure in *wayang kulit* performances, *dalang* have introduced various innovations while still maintaining the traditional principles (*pakem*) of the art form. Through the combined efforts of the government and *dalang*, *wayang kulit* has continued to survive and regain appreciation among young people in Grobogan Regency (Interview with Dwi Suryandari, S.Sn., June 7, 2026).

Regular *wayang kulit* performances were traditionally held on *Jumat Kliwon* evenings at the Grobogan Regency Pavilion and Town Square (*Pendopo Alun-alun*). However, these routine performances have been suspended over the past two years due to regional budget (APBD) efficiency measures. Currently, *wayang kulit* performances are organized only two or three times annually, primarily to commemorate the anniversary of Grobogan Regency and World *Wayang* Day within the scope of programs conducted by the Grobogan Regency Government. In addition, *dalang* have introduced various forms of modernization while maintaining adherence to the traditional *pakem* of *wayang kulit* in order to attract audiences.

These efforts have generated positive responses from the community, particularly among young people, and have encouraged greater interest in learning about and preserving *wayang kulit*. This is reflected in the presence of community organizations such as the Ikatan Pecinta Wayang Sejati (IPWS; Association of Genuine Wayang Enthusiasts) and the participation of local residents in Persatuan Pedalangan Indonesia (PEPADI; Indonesian Puppeteers Association).

The community demonstrates strong enthusiasm for *wayang kulit* performances, particularly among adolescents, many of whom attend the performances until the end for various reasons. These include learning the art of *dalang*, studying the musical accompaniment of the *gamelan* orchestra, and expressing their appreciation for *wayang kulit* as a traditional performing art. This growing interest is also reflected in the increasing number of adolescents from Grobogan Regency who pursue formal education in puppetry, either by enrolling in the Puppetry Program at SMK Negeri 8 Surakarta or by continuing their studies in the Puppetry Study Program at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts (Institut Seni Indonesia/ISI) Surakarta. The active involvement of young puppeteers (*dalang cilik* and *dalang muda*) further demonstrates the continuity of *wayang kulit* in Grobogan Regency. They regularly perform during the morning, afternoon, and early evening sessions of *wayang kulit* performances held to commemorate the anniversary of Grobogan Regency and World Wayang Day before the evening performance by invited *dalang* from outside the region (Interview with Dwi Suryandari, S.Sn., June 7, 2026).

Wayang kulit performances in Grobogan Regency are not organized around predetermined themes. Instead, the *lakon* performed by the *dalang* is selected by Disporabudpar, as the organizing institution, based on the social conditions and needs of the local community. For example, following the regional head election (*Pilkada*) in Grobogan Regency, tensions

remained among community members due to political differences. To promote reconciliation and restore social harmony, the organizers selected the *Wahyu Katentreman*, it is The *Lakon* which conveys the values of peace and harmony, as a symbolic message encouraging the community to reunite. As the organizing institution, Disporabudpar, with support from members of the Indonesian Puppeteers Association (*Persatuan Pedalangan Indonesia/PEPADI*), also takes preventive measures before each performance to ensure that the dialogue does not contain hate speech or provocative remarks that could potentially intensify social tensions (Interview with Dwi Suryandari, S.Sn., June 7, 2026).

Sambongbangi Village, Kradenan District, Grobogan Regency, annually stages a *wayang kulit* performance as part of the *Sedekah Bumi* (Earth Thanksgiving) ceremony, which is held during the month of *Apit* according to the Javanese calendar. The organization of this traditional performance emphasizes the value of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), which also serves as the central theme of the event. Accordingly, the *lakon* is selected to reflect this theme, such as *Babad Wanamarta*, which conveys the spirit of collective cooperation. The performance is attended by the residents of Sambongbangi Village, village officials, and members of neighboring communities (Interview with Suwigi, May 30, 2026).

The frequency of *wayang kulit* performances in Sambongbangi Village reaches its peak during the month of *Apit*, when the community celebrates the annual *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony. More broadly, in the eastern part of Grobogan Regency, *wayang kulit* performances are also held outside the months of *Apit* and *Suro* to commemorate private celebrations, such as weddings and thanksgiving ceremonies. These performances are generally organized by individual families and financed through personal funds, resulting in only one or two performances for each occasion (Interview

with Suwigi, May 30, 2026). Overall, in the eastern region of Grobogan Regency, *wayang kulit* continues to be performed primarily as part of *Sedekah Bumi* ceremonies, while some members of the community also maintain the tradition of staging *wayang kulit* performances as entertainment during wedding thanksgiving celebrations.

In Kenteng Village, Toroh District, Grobogan Regency, no *wayang kulit* performances have been recorded during the past fifteen years. In contrast, the neighboring villages of Boloh and Katong continue to preserve this tradition and regularly organize *wayang kulit* performances for thanksgiving ceremonies, weddings, and circumcision celebrations, except during the month of Ramadan. The *lakon* performed is selected according to the nature of the event. For example, performances held as part of wedding celebrations typically present stories centered on the marriage of *wayang kulit* characters. Similarly, *wayang kulit* performances continue to be held in Bandungharjo Village, Toroh District. The continuity of this tradition is further reflected in the younger generation's involvement, as one of the children of a village official is currently pursuing formal education in puppetry (Interview with Suwoto, June 19, 2026).

Several villages in Toroh District and other areas in the southern part of Grobogan Regency continue to preserve the tradition of *wayang kulit* through performances organized by individual community members rather than by village administrations. *Wayang kulit* performances held as part of *Sedekah Bumi* or *Bersih Desa* (village cleansing ceremonies) are generally financed through village funds and community contributions. In contrast, performances organized for private occasions are fully funded by the host or the family organizing the event.

Kandangan Urban Village exhibits a pattern similar to that of Kenteng Village. During the past sixteen years, only one *wayang kulit*

performance has been organized by local residents as part of a wedding celebration. However, the village's proximity to the Grobogan Regency Town Square provides residents with easier access to public *wayang kulit* performances organized by the local government. Consequently, many residents regularly attend performances held at the town square, including the routine *wayang kulit* performances that were previously staged on Friday *Kliwon* at the Grobogan Regency Pavilion (Interview with Rekno Wulan, June 20, 2026).

A *dalang* from Grobogan Regency explained that *wayang kulit* performances held to commemorate the Grobogan Regency Anniversary and World *Wayang* Day, particularly those featuring renowned *dalang* from outside the region, attract audiences from various segments of the community. Audience attendance is consistently high, with seating capacity often fully occupied and many spectators willing to sit on the ground throughout the performance until its conclusion. This reflects the strong public enthusiasm for *wayang kulit* on such occasions (Interview with Ki Didik Sudrajat, S.Sn., June 18, 2026). In contrast, the routine *wayang kulit* performances previously held on Friday *Kliwon* were attended predominantly by older adults. Based on Ki Didik Sudrajat's observations as one of the *dalang* who regularly performed at these events, public appreciation of *wayang kulit* extends beyond performances organized by the Grobogan Regency Government. Several communities across the regency continue to maintain a close cultural connection with **wayang kulit**, reflecting its continuing significance within local cultural life.

Historically, *wayang kulit* performances were regularly staged in Wirosari District and other parts of eastern Grobogan Regency, particularly as part of wedding celebrations. However, the high cost of organizing *wayang kulit* performances has become the primary reason many families now prefer more affordable and less elaborate forms of entertainment.

Consequently, only a few villages in eastern Grobogan Regency continue to organize *wayang kulit* performances once or twice a year, primarily through private community initiatives. The highest frequency of performances occurs during the month of *Apit* in conjunction with the annual *Sedekah Bumi* ceremony (Interview with Ki Didik Sudrajat, S.Sn., June 18, 2026).

A different pattern can be observed in Gubug and Tegowanu Districts in the western part of Grobogan Regency, where *wayang kulit* remains well preserved and is regularly performed for a variety of community events. During the month of *Apit*, almost every village stages *wayang kulit* performances as part of the *Sedekah Bumi* tradition, while many families also organize performances for weddings and circumcision celebrations by inviting renowned *dalang* from outside the region. For example, on June 5, 2026, a private family organized a *wayang kulit* performance to celebrate a wedding, featuring Ki Anom Dwijo Kangko, S.Sn. Earlier, on April 19, 2026, another performance by the same *dalang* was held as part of the *Perti Bumi* tradition (Interview with Nyi Dyah Ayu Niken Larasati, S.Sn., June 22, 2026).

Field observations indicate that audiences remain highly enthusiastic about *wayang kulit* performances held at the Grobogan Regency Town Square, with many spectators attending from the beginning until the end of the performance. To attract broader audiences, particularly younger generations, *dalang* have adopted the principle of “*anut lakune jaman* (following the spirit of the times) by incorporating contemporary elements into their performances while preserving the essential characteristics of traditional *wayang kulit* (Interview with Ki Didik Sudrajat, S.Sn., June 18, 2026). Similarly, *waranggono* (female singers) or *sinden* contribute to this process of cultural adaptation by performing contemporary songs and presenting more dynamic stage performances during the *goro-goro* and *limbukan* segments

(Interview with Nyi Dyah Ayu Niken Larasati, S.Sn., June 22, 2026).

Based on the findings and interview data, this study concludes that *wayang kulit* remains a sustainable and vibrant cultural tradition in Grobogan Regency. Although *tayub* has long been recognized as the region's traditional cultural identity, *wayang kulit* has gained increasing prominence, particularly among younger generations. This development has been supported by the active involvement of the Department of Youth, Sports, Culture, and Tourism (*Disporabudpar*) and by innovations introduced by *dalang*, who have modernized performance elements while preserving the traditional *pakem*. The sustainability of *wayang kulit* is evident not only in government-sponsored performances but also in community-based initiatives across different parts of the regency. In western Grobogan, particularly in Gubug and Tegowanu Districts, *wayang kulit* is regularly performed during traditional ceremonies and private celebrations. In eastern Grobogan, performances reach their highest frequency during the month of *Apit* as part of *Sedekah Bumi* ceremonies, while additional performances are occasionally held for wedding thanksgiving celebrations. In the southern part of the regency, especially in Boloh and Katong Villages, *wayang kulit* performances continue to be organized by local residents for personal and family celebrations.

Social Values Embedded in Wayang Kulit Performances in Grobogan Regency

According to Raven, social values refer to a set of individual attitudes that guide human behavior toward what is considered right and appropriate (Wahab et al., n.d.). Social values are widely perceived by communities as fundamental guidelines for human life, particularly in determining attitudes, making decisions, and establishing social interactions. These values are not simply inherited from parents through direct instruction but are gradually developed through social experiences and interactions

within society (Susilawati et al., 2024). In general, social values function as behavioral guidelines that complement individuals' beliefs and moral principles. Zubaedi categorizes social values into three main dimensions: affection, responsibility, and harmony in life.

1. Affection, which refers to human feelings of care and appreciation toward all elements of life, including other humans, animals, plants, customs, and culture. This value is manifested through behavioral expressions of compassion and can be categorized into devotion, mutual assistance, and concern for others.
2. Responsibility, which refers to the ability to carry out duties sincerely and to fulfil obligations properly. This dimension includes a sense of ownership, discipline, and empathy.
3. Harmony in life, which provides guidance for society to build harmonious relationships through mutual respect and care. This dimension includes justice, tolerance, and democracy (Muzaqi & Wibowo, 2023).

In *wayang kulit* performances, the *lakon* presented by the *dalang* serves as a medium for conveying moral values to society, particularly younger generations. Each story contains educational messages, while the characters represented by *wayang* figures symbolize moral examples and ideal behaviors. This explains the concept of *wayang kulit* as both *tontonan* (entertainment) and *tuntunan* (guidance), functioning as a medium for character education (Yunianti et al., 2023).

Moral messages conveyed through *wayang kulit* reflect social values. For example, in the *lakon* of *Semar Mbangun Kayangan*, the story does not merely portray Semar's intention to build a heavenly realm but rather represents a deeper message regarding leaders' responsibility and concern for ordinary people. The social value reflected in this story is responsibility, emphasizing that leaders must pay attention to marginalized communities and sincerely

fulfill their duties. These social values are delivered by the *dalang* through the storyline, character interactions, and dialogues between *wayang* figures (Interview with Dwi Suryandari, S.Sn., June 7, 2026).

Ki Didik Sudrajat, S.Sn., a local *dalang* in Grobogan Regency, explained that the delivery of moral messages and social values is adapted to the context of each performance. Based on field findings, the social values embedded in *wayang kulit* performances in Grobogan Regency include honesty, responsibility, justice, loyalty, education, social harmony, mutual cooperation, social relationships, mutual affection, politeness, and cultural etiquette.

The values of honesty and responsibility are reflected in the preparation and organization of **wayang kulit** performances. The organizing committee, consisting of members of Disporabudpar and supported by members of the Grobogan branch of the Indonesian Puppeteers Association (*Persatuan Pedalangan Indonesia/PEPADI*), demonstrates responsibility by preparing the event as effectively as possible and providing appropriate compensation for committee members. These efforts aim to prevent potential problems, ensure the successful implementation of the performance, and avoid financial mismanagement. Furthermore, social values and moral messages are conveyed by the *dalang* through the storyline, *suluk* (traditional poetic chants), and dialogues between characters. The value of honesty, including the consequences of dishonest behavior, is illustrated through clear narratives within the performance (Interview with Dwi Suryandari, S.Sn., June 7, 2026).

The characters of the *Pandawa*, who represent the principles of *dharma* and uphold honesty, demonstrate that righteous actions ultimately lead to victory. Through these characters, the *dalang* frequently introduces discussions regarding youth roles and social responsibility among adolescents. Contemporary issues faced by young people

are connected with the behavior and dialogues of *wayang* characters, as illustrated in the *lakon* of *Gatotkaca Winisuda**, where the *Punakawan* characters convey reflections on current youth conditions to Raden Gatotkaca (Interview with Dwi Suryandari, S.Sn., June 7, 2026).

The value of justice in *wayang kulit* performances in Grobogan Regency can be observed through the inclusive nature of the performances. There are no social boundaries between the local government, community members, adolescents, and children. Everyone has equal access to attend performances held at the Pavilion and Town Square where seating arrangements are provided without discrimination.

The concept of justice is also represented through the narratives delivered by the *dalang*. The *Punakawan* characters often express the aspirations and struggles of ordinary people, while the character Kumbakarna symbolizes justice through his loyalty and decision to fight for his nation rather than simply supporting Prabu Dasamuka. Justice is portrayed through the storyline and dialogues, emphasizing that good actions lead to positive consequences, while immoral actions eventually result in defeat or negative outcomes (Interview with Dwi Suryandari, S.Sn., June 7, 2026).

Overall, *wayang kulit* narratives commonly represent the principle of cause and effect, where every action receives corresponding consequences. The beginning of each story introduces conflicts caused by certain behaviors, while the ending provides moral lessons for audiences to become more careful in their actions and decisions (Interview with Dwi Suryandari, S.Sn., June 7, 2026).

The value of loyalty is reflected in the continued existence of *wayang kulit* performances in Grobogan Regency as a manifestation of commitment to preserving traditional arts and cultural heritage. Government efforts through Disporabudpar have contributed to revitalizing *wayang kulit*, which previously experienced decline,

allowing it to regain popularity among adolescents. Public enthusiasm in attending performances until the end also demonstrates community loyalty toward traditional cultural practices.

The organization of *wayang kulit* performances during village cleansing ceremonies and Earth Thanksgiving traditions in Sambongbangi Village, eastern Grobogan Regency, reflects community commitment to preserving local customs and *wayang kulit* traditions. Similarly, the continuity of performances in Katong and Boloh Villages during thanksgiving and wedding celebrations represents the loyalty of southern Grobogan communities toward this traditional art form. Meanwhile, the frequent performances in Gubug and Tegowanu Districts in western Grobogan demonstrate sustained community appreciation for *wayang kulit*.

The implementation of *wayang kulit* performances during traditional ceremonies such as during village cleansing ceremonies and Earth Thanksgiving also reflects the value of mutual cooperation. Community members collectively contribute to preparing and organizing the events. Likewise, the collaboration between Disporabudpar and PEPADI members in organizing performances demonstrates institutional and community-based cooperation.

The orderly participation of communities and young people in watching *wayang kulit* performances at the Grobogan Regency Town Square until the end of the event reflects social etiquette and respect among audiences. The attendance of diverse community members also strengthens social relationships between citizens and the Grobogan Regency Government.

Furthermore, *wayang kulit* performances organized by Disporabudpar contain educational moral messages for younger generations while introducing traditional arts to ensure their continuity. Based on field findings, when analyzed through Zubaedi's three dimensions of social values, *wayang kulit* performances in Grobogan

Regency demonstrate strong alignment with the values of affection, responsibility, and harmony in social life.

The Meaning of Wayang Kulit Performances for Adolescents in Grobogan Regency

Education serves as a medium for preserving ancestral cultural heritage because education and culture are closely interconnected. Cultural preservation can be effectively achieved when it is integrated into the educational process, as education itself constitutes an essential part of cultural transmission. Rudyansah (2020) argues that the purpose of education is not only to develop individual knowledge and skills but also to preserve and enhance cultural values introduced to younger generations as valuable heritage that influences the future and civilization of a nation (Fahira, 2023). Therefore, education extends beyond academic achievement, such as literacy and numeracy, and functions as a platform for cultural preservation.

This perspective is reinforced by Émile Durkheim's social theory, which emphasizes that educational institutions are not merely spaces for transferring knowledge but also important agents in the socialization of collective values within society (Fathoni T. et al., 2024). Cultural preservation through education can be implemented through various approaches, including extracurricular activities, curriculum content, local subjects, and cultural learning programs.

Merlina Agustin et al. (2025), through their research in Panglipuran Village, Bali, found that cultural education in Balinese formal schools is systematically integrated into the learning process. Students are introduced to Balinese history, Balinese language, and traditional arts to ensure that younger generations understand their cultural roots.

This integration is supported by local government policies that incorporate regional cultural content into the national curriculum. In addition, extracurricular activities such as traditional dance, *gamelan*

music, and sculpture provide opportunities for students to actively engage with cultural practices. School festivals also serve as platforms for strengthening Balinese cultural identity among students (Agustin et al., 2025).

A similar study was conducted by Intan Rahmalina and Ahmad Fatah (2025) at MTs Miftahul Huda Ngasem Jepara. Their findings indicate that the school not only focuses on academic achievement but also demonstrates commitment to preserving local culture through traditional carving education. This approach aims to foster students' appreciation of local heritage while developing their creativity, particularly in producing Jepara's iconic carving works. The subject is integrated into the Cultural Arts curriculum as a compulsory local content subject (Sazkya & Trimurni, 2025).

These studies demonstrate that cultural preservation can be carried out through formal education, both through specific cultural subjects and through the integration of cultural values into existing subjects. At the junior secondary school level, Social Studies contributes to cultural preservation through learning materials related to cultural diversity and heritage. At the senior secondary school level, History, Sociology, and Anthropology subjects provide students with an understanding of cultural identity, social values, and the importance of preserving local traditions.

Therefore, the preservation of *wayang kulit* performances in Grobogan Regency is closely related to the role of education and how adolescents interpret this traditional art form. The knowledge gained through school-based cultural learning, combined with direct interaction through watching *wayang kulit* performances, contributes to the formation of adolescents' understanding and appreciation of *wayang kulit* as a cultural heritage.

Based on field findings, Retna, a Social Studies teacher at SMP Negeri 1 Kradenan, Grobogan, explained that *wayang kulit* is introduced during Social Studies learning as

an example of cultural acculturation and as a cultural heritage that requires preservation by younger generations. Bety, another Social Studies teacher at the same school, stated that students were assigned to draw *wayang kulit* figures as part of learning activities related to cultural acculturation, with the aim of introducing students to various characters in *wayang kulit* (Interview, May 21, 2026). Observations at SMP Negeri 1 Kradenan revealed that students were familiar with several *wayang kulit* characters and storylines (*lakon*). Furthermore, illustrations of *wayang kulit* figures displayed on classroom walls indicated students' engagement and familiarity with this traditional art form.

Deny, S.Pd., a Sociology and Anthropology teacher at SMA Negeri 1 Pulokulon, Grobogan, stated that *wayang kulit* had been discussed during classroom learning as an example of community oral tradition (Interview, May 24, 2026). However, different findings were identified at SMK Negeri 1 Purwodadi, Grobogan. Giarto, S.Pd., a history teacher, explained that *wayang kulit* had not been specifically discussed in history lessons due to limited instructional time, which prevented teachers from providing a comprehensive explanation of cultural history. He further explained that, as a vocational school, SMK Negeri 1 Purwodadi prioritizes preparing students for employment after graduation; therefore, learning activities place greater emphasis on developing practical and technical skills rather than extensive historical discussions (Interview, June 2, 2026).

Field findings regarding adolescents' interpretations of *wayang kulit* performances in Grobogan Regency reveal diverse perspectives. *Wayang kulit* is perceived by adolescents as a traditional performing art that conveys moral messages and should be preserved as an ancestral cultural heritage, particularly by younger generations (Ayrin Septiana, Grade 8C, SMP Negeri 1 Kradenan, Interview, May 23, 2026). Another student, Fathan Azhar

(Grade 8E, SMP Negeri 1 Kradenan), interpreted *wayang kulit* performances in Grobogan Regency as a government initiative to preserve traditional culture (Interview, May 23, 2026). These interpretations were shaped by the students' experiences of attending several *wayang kulit* performances held at the Grobogan Regency Town Square.

Furthermore, one student at SMP Negeri 1 Kradenan interpreted *wayang kulit* as a traditional Javanese performing art resulting from cultural acculturation between indigenous Indonesian culture and foreign cultural influences in the past. This understanding was acquired through Social Studies learning, where *wayang kulit* was introduced as a cultural product that continues to be preserved today. The student also gained additional exposure by watching *wayang kulit* performances held at the Grobogan Regency Town Square through YouTube platforms (Irza Mareta Putri, Grade 8B, SMP Negeri 1 Kradenan, Interview, May 23, 2026).

A different interpretation of *wayang kulit* performances was identified among senior high school students, particularly adolescents at SMA Negeri 1 Pulokulon, Grobogan Regency. *Wayang kulit* performances were interpreted as a traditional art form with historical significance because they functioned as a medium used by Sunan Kalijaga to spread Islam in Java. Therefore, the art form was considered a cultural heritage that must be preserved to prevent its disappearance (Oktafiana Shokibah, Grade 11F, Interview, May 26, 2026). This interpretation was based on historical knowledge obtained from the History teacher and additional exposure through watching *wayang kulit* performances on YouTube. Another student interpreted *wayang kulit* performances in Grobogan Regency as an effort to preserve traditional arts that can unite the wider community through performances held at the Grobogan Regency Town Square. This understanding was shaped by personal experiences of attending performances and

by knowledge gained from Sociology and Anthropology lessons, where *wayang kulit* was introduced as part of folklore traditions inherited from previous generations. Therefore, the preservation of this cultural practice was considered necessary (Tegar Ramadhan, Grade 11F, Interview, May 26, 2026).

A similar interpretation was expressed by a student at SMP Negeri 1 Kradenan, who viewed *wayang kulit* performances as entertainment containing moral education values (Sofia Naris Afrilia, Grade 11F, Interview, May 26, 2026). Meanwhile, students at SMK Negeri 1 Purwodadi interpreted *wayang kulit* based on their existing knowledge. Some students perceived it as a traditional Javanese art form (Ellean Mahadewi, Grade 11 AKL 1, Interview, June 5, 2026), while others viewed it as an art form containing moral messages (Nikki Putri, Grade 11 AKL 1, Interview, June 5, 2026). Another student interpreted *wayang kulit* performances as a medium for character education within society, particularly in Grobogan Regency (Anisya Wardani, Grade 11 AKL 1, Interview, June 5, 2026).

Based on field findings, it can be concluded that *wayang kulit* performances are perceived by adolescents as an art form containing moral messages and functioning as a medium for character education. However, some adolescents also interpret *wayang kulit* as a form of cultural acculturation, folklore tradition, and historical heritage associated with the role of the *Wali Songo* in spreading Islam in Java. These diverse interpretations demonstrate the strategic contribution of Social Studies, History, and Sociology-Anthropology subjects in supporting cultural preservation among younger generations.

The phenomenon above can be further analyzed through Mead's Symbolic Interactionism Theory as follows:

a. Mind. At this stage, adolescents interpret and process information obtained through teachers' explanations

regarding *wayang kulit* as a cultural art form. Knowledge gained through classroom learning becomes the initial foundation for adolescents in constructing their understanding of *wayang kulit*.

b. Self. At this stage, adolescents begin to reflect on themselves after receiving cultural knowledge through learning activities and experiencing *wayang kulit* performances directly or through digital media platforms. The information they acquire and the experiences they encounter are internally processed, resulting in the formation of personal meanings regarding *wayang kulit* performances and awareness of their role in preserving traditional arts.

c. Society. Adolescents' interpretations are formed through social interactions between the school environment and the broader social environment of Grobogan Regency. Interaction within schools occurs through teachers' explanations of *wayang kulit* in Social Studies, History, and Sociology-Anthropology subjects, as well as through learning activities such as assignments to draw *wayang kulit* figures. Meanwhile, *wayang kulit* performances held in Grobogan Regency function as a social environment that provides cultural exposure and stimulation, enabling adolescents to recognize, appreciate, and participate in maintaining the continuity of this traditional art form.

CONCLUSION

The existence of *wayang kulit* performances in Grobogan Regency is maintained not only within the Grobogan Regency Town Square and Pavilion, but also across various areas of the regency, particularly in western Grobogan. The continuity of these performances is closely related to the initiatives undertaken by Disporabudpar, which previously organized regular *wayang kulit* performances every Friday Kliwon night as an effort to revive this traditional art form when its existence was declining.

In addition, innovations and modernization introduced by *dalang*, while remaining within the boundaries of traditional principles, have contributed to strengthening public interest, especially among adolescents. The social values reflected in *wayang kulit* performances in Grobogan Regency include honesty, responsibility, justice, loyalty, educational values, social harmony, mutual cooperation, social relationships, compassion, politeness, and cultural etiquette. These values are represented through the *lakon* (story lines), characters, and dialogues delivered by the *dalang*, demonstrating that *wayang kulit* functions not only as a form of entertainment but also as a medium for transmitting moral values and character education.

Adolescents in Grobogan Regency give meaning to *wayang kulit* performances as traditional cultural expressions that contain moral values and serve as a medium for character education. This meaning is constructed through various social interactions, including cultural learning in schools, direct experiences of attending performances, and exposure through digital media. Therefore, *wayang kulit* performances remain meaningful cultural practices that connect ancestral values with adolescents' contemporary understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage

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