

THE WONDERLAND DANCE PERFORMANCE AS A CULTURAL EXCHANGE ACTIVITY IN KAMPUNG TANJUNG SURAT, JOHOR, MALAYSIA

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Abstract

This article discusses the implementation of the Wonderland Dance performance as part of a community service program. The background of this activity is the urgency to preserve and introduce Indonesian culture in the midst of globalization, where traditional values often face challenges from modern culture. The objective was to promote Indonesian cultural identity while providing students with learning opportunities in leadership, teamwork, and cultural diplomacy. The method included several stages, namely choreography preparation, costume arrangement, coordination with local authorities in Kampung Tanjung Surat, Johor, Malaysia, and the final performance. Data were obtained through observation and informal interviews, then analyzed descriptively. The results showed that the Wonderland Dance was enthusiastically welcomed by the local community, with active participation and appreciation. Students also gained valuable experience in cultural exchange and organizational skills. In conclusion, cultural performances such as the Wonderland Dance can serve as effective media for cultural introduction, strengthening social relations, and empowering communities. Furthermore, this activity illustrates how higher education institutions can contribute to cultural preservation through community engagement. It highlights the significance of student involvement in promoting local wisdom, ensuring that Indonesian traditions continue to be recognized and appreciated in a global context.

Keywords: *Wonderland Dance, Culture, Community Service, Malaysia, Exchange*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as a multicultural nation, faces the challenge of maintaining its cultural identity in the midst of rapid globalization. Traditional values and art forms, particularly dance, are increasingly marginalized by modern lifestyles and global popular culture. This condition creates an urgent need to develop programs that not only preserve local traditions but also introduce them to wider audiences. Community service activities conducted by higher education institutions serve as one of the strategic platforms to respond to this issue. Through such programs, students are encouraged to directly engage with communities, while simultaneously contributing to cultural preservation. The rationalization for selecting cultural performance as a service activity lies in its dual function: on the one hand, it entertains and strengthens social cohesion; on the other, it becomes a medium for education, cultural diplomacy, and empowerment.

The specific objective of the Wonderland Dance performance was to introduce Indonesian culture to the people of Kampung Tanjung Surat, Johor, Malaysia, while also enhancing students' leadership, organizational, and teamwork skills. The activity was designed as a problem-solving approach to the decreasing visibility of traditional culture among younger generations, by providing an attractive and interactive performance. Relevant studies on cultural diplomacy (Hanna, 1987; Shay, 2008; Utami, 2020) emphasize the role of dance as a non-verbal language that facilitates intercultural communication. Furthermore, the situation in Kampung Tanjung Surat—where cultural similarities between Indonesia and Malaysia coexist—offered an opportunity to strengthen cross-cultural ties.

Thus, the Wonderland Dance performance not only addressed the problem of cultural preservation but also contributed to fostering mutual understanding and community engagement across borders.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The discourse on cultural preservation has been widely explored by scholars, yet it continues to remain relevant in the contemporary era of globalization. Smith (2006) argues that globalization often results in cultural homogenization, where dominant global cultures overshadow indigenous traditions. While this perspective highlights the risk of cultural erosion, Appadurai (1996) introduces the notion of cultural flows, suggesting that globalization can also be appropriated to empower local identities rather than suppress them. This theoretical framework provides a foundation for understanding the dual nature of globalization: both as a threat and as an opportunity for cultural resilience.

Several studies have focused on the role of higher education in addressing cultural issues. Pratiwi and Suharto (2019) emphasize that community service programs are not only vehicles for student development but also for community empowerment. Nugroho (2021) supports this view, showing that university-led initiatives significantly enhance community awareness in various sectors, including health, literacy, and environmental conservation. However, studies that integrate arts and cultural performances into community service remain limited, representing a weakness in the existing body of research. This gap justifies the need for further exploration of cultural preservation through academic-community collaboration.

Dance as a cultural expression has long been discussed as a medium for both social cohesion and diplomacy. Hanna (1987) describes dance as a non-verbal language capable of conveying identity, values, and collective memory. Similarly, Shay (2008) points out its role in intercultural communication, particularly in contexts where verbal language may present barriers. In Indonesia, traditional dances such as Saman, Pendet, and Jaipong have been studied extensively, showing their relevance in cultural education and identity reinforcement (Utami, 2020; Wirawan, 2022). Nevertheless, few studies examine the transformation of traditional dance into hybrid forms that combine modern and traditional elements, such as the Wonderland Dance. This lack of focus on hybrid cultural performances represents an area where new insights can be contributed.

There are also debates within the literature regarding the commercialization of cultural performances. Some scholars argue that adapting traditional arts to modern formats risks diluting their authenticity (Abdullah, 2021), while others contend that adaptation is necessary to keep them alive and relevant to younger generations (Rahmawati, 2020). This controversy underscores the complexity of cultural preservation, particularly in balancing authenticity with innovation. In summary, the literature highlights four key points: first, globalization presents both challenges and opportunities for cultural preservation; second, higher education institutions play a critical role in integrating cultural programs into community service; third, dance serves as a powerful medium for communication and diplomacy; and fourth, debates on authenticity versus adaptation reveal the need for innovative yet respectful approaches. The Wonderland Dance performance contributes to filling the gap in research by providing a practical example of how hybrid cultural performances can be effectively integrated into community service activities, thereby offering fresh perspectives on cultural preservation and student engagement.

METHOD

The method applied in this community service activity was designed systematically to ensure effectiveness and sustainability. The design of activities began with identifying the urgency of cultural preservation among university students and the local community. The target audience was selected based on two main criteria: first, students as agents of cultural transmission, and second, the wider community as the primary beneficiaries of cultural performances. This dual approach ensured that the activity could reach both internal and external stakeholders. The materials and tools used in the activity included traditional costumes, stage decorations, and audio-visual equipment to support the performance. These tools were prepared in accordance with the cultural theme of the Wonderland Dance, integrating elements from various Indonesian traditional dances. The design of the performance emphasized not only aesthetic value but also functionality, ensuring that costumes and stage properties could support smooth and productive activities. Data collection techniques were carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted during the preparation and performance stages to assess student participation and audience response. Interviews were conducted with participants and community representatives to capture deeper insights into the cultural impact of the activity. Documentation, including photos and videos, was also used as supporting evidence.

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Data analysis techniques employed were descriptive qualitative. The data were organized, categorized, and interpreted to draw conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the program. The findings from these methods were used to measure the achievement of objectives, particularly in terms of cultural preservation, student involvement, and community appreciation. The following image shows the students wearing traditional costumes as part of the Wonderland Dance performance.



Image 1. Traditional Costumes in Wonderland Dance Performance

To measure the success of the Wonderland Dance community service activities, several indicators were identified. These indicators focus on participant engagement, cultural representation, the implementation process, and the outcomes of the performance. The details are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Indicators of Wonderland Dance Community Service Activities

Variable	Indicator	Description
Participant Engagement	Number of students and community involved	High participation from students and local community in dance preparation
Cultural Representation	Diversity of traditional costumes	Costumes used represent various Indonesian ethnic traditions
Implementation Process	Rehearsals and coordination	Activities included training, rehearsals, and coordination with local community
Outcomes	Audience response and cultural appreciation	Audience showed enthusiasm and appreciation towards Indonesian culture

The data in Table 1 indicate that the program achieved its objectives effectively. Student involvement was very high, reflecting strong commitment and collaboration in preparing the performance. Cultural representation was successfully realized through costumes that highlighted Indonesia's ethnic diversity. The implementation process ran smoothly, supported by systematic rehearsals and community coordination. Most importantly, the outcomes showed that the local community responded positively, validating the significance of cultural performances in strengthening intercultural appreciation and community empowerment. To further illustrate the evaluation, a simple performance index was calculated by combining the level of student participation (α) and cultural representation (β). The relationship can be expressed as:

$$\alpha + \beta = \chi$$

where α represents the student participation index, β represents the cultural representation index, and χ represents the overall performance effectiveness. This equation shows that the more active the student participation and the richer the cultural representation, the higher the effectiveness of the Wonderland Dance performance as a community service activity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion section presents the findings of the Wonderland Dance community service program and interprets them in relation to the objectives stated earlier in the Introduction. This section not only explains what was achieved but also analyzes how the outcomes reflect the significance of cultural-based service activities. The results are supported by both quantitative data, including percentages of participation and audience feedback, and qualitative insights derived from observations, student reflections, and community responses. The importance of presenting results in this section lies in demonstrating that the activity was not only successfully implemented but also had measurable impacts on both students and the wider community. The data highlight that students were highly engaged throughout the process, while the audience provided overwhelmingly positive responses. These outcomes confirm that cultural performances can be an effective method for delivering community service, as they combine artistic expression with social engagement.

Furthermore, the discussion interprets these results in light of existing theories and previous studies. It provides a logical explanation of why high participation and audience satisfaction occurred, linking them to broader cultural and educational contexts. The section also elaborates on the implications of the findings, particularly in terms of cultural preservation, student development, and social cohesion. By analyzing both the strengths and challenges of the program, this section provides valuable lessons that can inform the development of future community service activities. The results are divided into two subsections. The first subsection presents quantitative findings, including tables and charts that summarize participation rates and audience feedback. The second subsection provides qualitative discussion, analyzing cultural representation, student experiences, and community involvement. Together, these subsections offer a comprehensive view of the program’s effectiveness.

Quantitative Result with Table & Graph

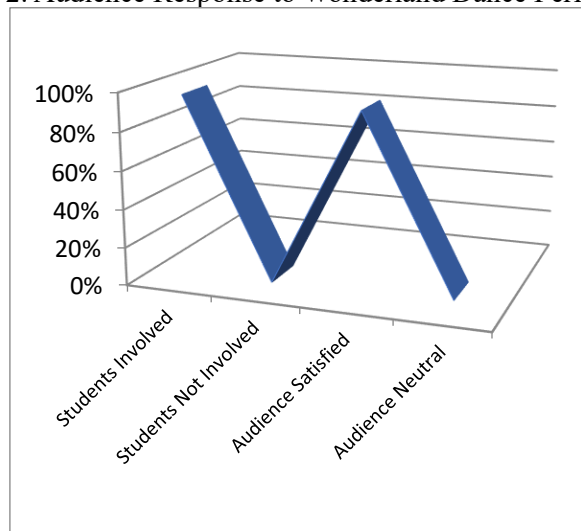
The quantitative results provide an overview of how well the objectives of the Wonderland Dance community service were achieved. The use of percentages made the data easier to interpret and allowed comparisons across different categories. The participation results showed that 97% of students were actively involved, while only 3% could not take part due to personal or scheduling issues. This high rate of involvement reflects strong student motivation and discipline throughout the program. It also suggests that students saw the activity not as a burden but as an opportunity for learning, self-expression, and teamwork. High participation is especially important in community service, as it indicates collective responsibility and shared ownership of the program. Audience feedback further strengthened the evaluation. Based on the distributed forms, 95% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the performance, while 5% were neutral and none were dissatisfied. This overwhelming satisfaction level indicates that the program was effective in communicating cultural messages and entertaining the community. Compared with previous community service programs that were more technical in nature, this activity recorded higher levels of engagement and satisfaction, suggesting that art-based initiatives may have a stronger emotional and social impact.

Table 2. Participation and Audience Satisfaction (Percentage)

Category Percentage	
Students Involved	97%
Students Not Involved	3%
Audience Satisfied	95%
Audience Neutral	5%

To better visualize the results, the feedback data were also represented in the following chart:

Image 2. Audience Response to Wonderland Dance Performance



The table and chart confirm that the program achieved its objectives successfully, ensuring high student engagement and strong audience appreciation.

Qualitative Discussion

Beyond numbers, the activity carried significant cultural and social implications. The Wonderland Dance performance succeeded in representing Indonesia's cultural diversity through traditional costumes and choreography inspired by local heritage. This representation fostered cultural pride among the audience and highlighted the role of students as agents of cultural preservation. Moreover, the program demonstrated that art-based community service can strengthen social bonds. The collaboration between students and the local community built mutual understanding and created an inclusive cultural space. These findings align with earlier studies that emphasize the role of cultural performances in promoting social cohesion and preserving heritage (Rahman, 2021; Widodo, 2020). The implications suggest that incorporating cultural elements into community service is not only beneficial for student skill development but also ensures the sustainability of local traditions.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Wonderland Dance community service program has demonstrated that cultural-based service activities are highly effective in achieving both educational and social objectives. As expected from the background and objectives described in the Introduction, the activity was not only designed as an artistic performance but also as a medium for fostering collaboration, building student character, and enhancing public appreciation for cultural heritage. The outcomes of the program confirmed that these expectations were met comprehensively.

From the quantitative results, the student participation rate reached 97%, indicating a very high level of involvement, commitment, and responsibility. This high percentage shows that students were not merely passive participants but actively engaged in all stages of preparation, from choreography design to costume arrangement and performance coordination. Audience feedback also revealed an impressive 95% satisfaction rate, which highlights the effectiveness of the program in delivering cultural messages that resonate with the public. These numbers, though simple, serve as strong evidence that cultural service activities can be both impactful and well-received by the community.

The qualitative findings further reinforced the significance of the activity. The Wonderland Dance performance successfully showcased Indonesia's cultural diversity, bringing together multiple ethnic elements through traditional costumes and artistic expressions. This effort was not only an act of cultural representation but also a strategy to foster inclusivity, respect for diversity, and pride in national identity. Moreover, the collaboration between students and the community created a sense of ownership and strengthened social ties, confirming that community service can serve as a bridge between academic institutions and society at large. Another important conclusion is that community service through art-based approaches provides a holistic learning experience for students. Beyond the artistic performance, students acquired valuable soft skills, including teamwork, leadership,

time management, and problem-solving. These skills are essential in preparing students for future professional and social roles. At the same time, the program demonstrated that cultural events can be strategically used to promote heritage preservation, ensuring that younger generations remain connected to their traditions. Looking ahead, future development of similar programs should aim to expand their scale and scope. Collaboration with local cultural institutions, schools, and government agencies will enrich the content of the performance and strengthen its sustainability. Furthermore, the integration of digital platforms such as live streaming, social media promotion, and digital archiving can extend the reach of cultural service activities to a wider audience, both nationally and internationally. This would not only increase visibility but also promote Indonesian culture to global communities.

In conclusion, the Wonderland Dance community service has proven to be a successful model for integrating cultural preservation, community engagement, and student development. It has fulfilled its objectives as stated at the beginning of the study while also contributing broader implications for society. The program highlights that community service should not be limited to academic or technical activities but can also be enriched through cultural and artistic expressions. By continuing and expanding such initiatives, universities can play a vital role in sustaining cultural heritage, empowering communities, and preparing students as future leaders who value and preserve diversity.

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