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Internalizing Islamic Educational Values through the Semar Mbangun Kayangan Shadow-Puppet Performance: A Qualitative Study in Mulyosari Village, Indonesia

Yeyen Afryani [1*], Ikhwan Aziz Q [1*], Nahid Ayad [2*], Ehwanudin [1*]
[1] *Universitas Ma'arif Lampung, Indonesia*
[2] *University of Zawia, Libya*

yeyenafryani83@gmail.com*

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the character of Semar and identify and analyze the Islamic educational values represented in the *Semar Mbangun Kayangan* shadow puppet performance in Mulyosari Village, 16 Polos. It also examines the relevance of wayang philosophy as a medium for internalizing Islamic moral and spiritual teachings within the local community. This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with puppeteers, religious leaders, and community members, and documentation. Data were analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings reveal that the *Semar Mbangun Kayangan* performance embodies two interconnected dimensions of Islamic educational values: divine values (*ilahiyah*), particularly faith in the power of Allah, and human values (*insaniyah*), including social and moral values. Through Semar's characterization and the storyline, these values are expressed through monotheism, sincerity, honesty, patience, gratitude, humility, and wisdom. The character of Semar symbolizes an ideal human figure (*insan kamil*) whose role extends beyond physical or material concerns to the development of conscience, spiritual awareness, and moral conduct. The study highlights the significance of traditional shadow puppetry as a culturally contextualized medium for communicating Islamic educational values. It demonstrates how local artistic traditions can connect religious teachings with everyday community life while supporting the preservation of cultural identity and moral values.

Keywords: Islamic Education, Islamic Educational Values, Shadow Puppetry, Cultural-Based Education

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INTRODUCTION

The internalization of educational values is an essential process in shaping individuals' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, particularly in developing moral and spiritual awareness within society. Internalization refers to the process of instilling knowledge, beliefs, and values so that individuals can understand, accept, and translate them into their everyday practices without external coercion (Purnama et al., 2025). In the context of Islamic education, this process extends beyond the transmission of religious knowledge to the development of individuals who demonstrate noble character, spiritual awareness, and social responsibility. Islamic education seeks to establish a balanced

relationship between human beings and Allah SWT (habluminallah), as well as between individuals and their social environment (habluminannas). These dimensions emphasize that religious education should cultivate not only individual piety but also ethical conduct and harmonious social relationships. As part of this process, cultural values can serve as meaningful educational resources because they connect religious teachings with the experiences, identities, and social practices of local communities (Mappasiara, 2018). This perspective is consistent with the Qur'anic teaching in Surah An-Nisa (4:58), which emphasizes the importance of fulfilling responsibilities and maintaining justice in human relationships. Therefore, Islamic education requires approaches that enable religious values to become meaningful and applicable within the cultural and social contexts of people's lives.

Indonesia's cultural diversity provides considerable opportunities for integrating religious education with local traditions. As a multicultural society, Indonesia possesses various forms of cultural expression, including literature, music, dance, theater, and traditional performing arts. Among these cultural forms, *Wayang Kulit* (Javanese shadow puppetry) represents an important cultural heritage that contains philosophical, ethical, and educational messages. Its narratives frequently communicate the struggle between good and evil, the importance of wisdom, and the consequences of human actions, making it more than a form of entertainment (Niam, 2022). The educational potential of traditional performing arts is also supported by international research demonstrating that learning through artistic activities can connect cultural heritage with educational objectives and promote cognitive and socio-affective development (Alvarez et al., 2023). Similarly, traditional arts can function as spaces for transmitting cultural knowledge, beliefs, and values across generations through informal and community-based learning processes (Sugiarto et al., 2025). These perspectives suggest that cultural performances can provide an alternative educational environment in which religious and moral values are communicated through familiar narratives and symbolic expressions.

Within Javanese shadow puppetry, the character of Semar occupies a significant position as a wise, humble, and humorous figure who conveys philosophical and moral messages. Semar is widely recognized as one of the Punakawan characters and is frequently associated with wisdom, social criticism, and guidance for human conduct (Nugroho, 2023). In Islamic cultural interpretations, Semar has also been understood as a symbolic representation of the ideal human being (*insan kamil*) and a medium for communicating Islamic teachings through traditional performing arts (Firzanah et al., 2025). Previous studies have further explained that Semar's character represents the exemplary qualities of an educator, particularly patience, compassion, honesty, humility, and moral integrity (Alifah, 2024). These characteristics make Semar an important figure for examining the relationship between Javanese cultural symbolism and Islamic educational values. Nevertheless, the educational significance of Semar should not be understood exclusively through the symbolic characteristics of the character itself, but also through the narratives, dialogues, and audience interpretations that give meaning to the performance.

One of the wayang narratives that provides an important context for examining these values is *Semar Mbangun Kayangan*. In Javanese philosophical interpretation, the expression *Mbangun Kayangan* does not simply refer to the construction of a physical heavenly palace; rather, it symbolizes the development of spiritual awareness, moral improvement, and the establishment of a more harmonious social order. Through this narrative, Semar encourages individuals to reflect on their responsibilities, correct their behavior, and develop wisdom in dealing with personal and social challenges. Previous research by Alwiyasin (2020) demonstrates that Islamic educational values, including monotheism, worship, and noble character, can be communicated through the Javanese cultural framework of the *Semar Mbangun Kayangan* performance. Similarly, Nurohmah

(2021) explains that Semar's character represents philosophical dimensions of divine grace and human perfection, encompassing physical, spiritual, intellectual, social, moral, and aesthetic development. Furthermore, Iqbal et al. (2024) highlight how the narrative integrates monotheism, worship, and morality through cultural symbolism, drawing attention to the role of wayang as a medium for harmonizing traditional values and Islamic teachings. These studies establish the relevance of Semar and the *Mbangun Kayangan* narrative as important subjects in the study of Islamic education and Javanese cultural traditions.

Recent research has further strengthened the argument that traditional performing arts can function as instruments of cultural communication and religious education. Setiawan (2022), for example, examines the contemporary use of wayang kulit and gamelan as media for Islamic preaching in Central Java. The study demonstrates that traditional artistic expressions remain relevant for communicating Islamic messages to grassroots communities because they maintain continuity with established cultural traditions. Similarly, Salim et al. (2025) show how Javanese cultural principles can be integrated into Islamic educational practices through the activities and institutional functions of the Pathok Negara Mosque. Their findings emphasize that local cultural traditions can contribute to the preservation of community identity while supporting Islamic educational objectives. From a broader educational perspective, Alvarez et al. (2023) demonstrate the importance of connecting cultural heritage with learning experiences, while Waage (2025) highlights the potential of visual arts education to promote moral reflection, critical thinking, and virtue literacy. In addition, Sugiarto et al. (2025) explain that the transmission of traditional artistic knowledge involves not only technical skills but also the preservation of local beliefs, cultural meanings, and community values. Collectively, these studies indicate that artistic and cultural practices can provide meaningful environments for moral education, cultural continuity, and the transmission of religious values.

Although previous studies have examined the relationship between Islamic education and traditional Javanese performing arts, important aspects remain insufficiently explored. Much of the existing literature has concentrated on identifying the Islamic educational values embedded in wayang narratives, interpreting the philosophical meanings of individual characters, or examining the historical role of traditional arts in Islamic preaching (Alwiyasin, 2020; Nurohmah, 2021; Iqbal et al., 2024; Setiawan, 2022). Other studies have discussed the broader relationship between cultural heritage and educational practices without specifically examining how audiences interpret religious messages during particular traditional performances (Alvarez et al., 2023; Salim et al., 2025; Sugiarto et al., 2025). Consequently, there remains a need for empirical research that investigates how Islamic educational values are communicated, interpreted, and internalized by members of local communities through their direct engagement with specific wayang performances. In particular, limited attention has been given to the community-level educational significance of the *Semar Mbangun Kayangan* performance in Mulyosari Village, 16 Polos, including how its cultural symbols and moral narratives are understood in relation to everyday religious awareness and social behavior.

Addressing this gap, the present study offers a contextual examination of the internalization of Islamic educational values through the *Semar Mbangun Kayangan* shadow puppet performance in Mulyosari Village, 16 Polos. Its novelty lies in shifting the analytical focus from the identification of Islamic values within wayang narratives toward understanding the relationship between cultural representation, community interpretation, and the educational meaning of traditional performances in a specific rural setting. By examining the perspectives of puppeteers, religious figures, and community members, this study seeks to provide a more contextual understanding of how cultural symbols and narratives become meaningful resources for Islamic education outside formal

educational institutions. The study therefore contributes to discussions of culturally grounded Islamic education by positioning traditional performing arts as potential spaces for non-formal learning, moral reflection, and the preservation of local cultural identity. This perspective is particularly relevant to understanding how religious teachings can remain connected to local traditions while responding to the educational and social needs of contemporary communities.

The purpose of this study is to describe the character of Semar in order to identify and analyze the values of Islamic education in the play *Semar Mbangun Kayangan* in the shadow puppet performance in Mulyosari Village, 16 Polos, so as to reveal the relevance of puppet philosophy as a medium for internalizing Islamic moral and spiritual teachings for the local community.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the internalization of Islamic educational values in the *Semar Mbangun Kayangan* shadow puppet performance in Mulyosari Village, 16 Polos. A qualitative descriptive approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on exploring and describing the meanings, interpretations, and educational values embedded in a traditional cultural performance and the ways in which these values were understood by the local community (Imanina, 2020). Rather than measuring the effects of the performance quantitatively, the research sought to obtain an in-depth understanding of the religious, philosophical, and moral dimensions represented through the character of Semar and the storyline. This approach enabled the researchers to interpret the phenomenon within its natural social and cultural context.

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted in Mulyosari Village, 16 Polos, where the *Semar Mbangun Kayangan* shadow puppet performance was examined as a cultural medium for communicating and internalizing Islamic educational values. The research setting was selected because the study aimed to understand how religious and moral messages were represented through local artistic traditions and interpreted by members of the community.

The participants consisted of individuals considered to possess relevant knowledge and experience concerning the performance and its educational and religious meanings. They included puppeteers, religious leaders, and community members. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, which involves selecting individuals based on specific considerations relevant to the research focus (Sugiyono, 2019). The selection was intended to obtain information from different perspectives, including the artistic interpretation of the performance, its religious significance, and the community's understanding of the values conveyed through the story.

The selection criteria included participants' involvement in or familiarity with the *Semar Mbangun Kayangan* performance, their knowledge of the cultural and religious meanings associated with the character of Semar, and their ability to provide relevant information about the internalization of Islamic educational values in the local community. The final manuscript should specify the actual number of participants and provide a brief description of their relevant characteristics.

Data Sources and Collection Procedures

The study used primary and documentary data sources. Primary data were obtained through participatory observation and semi-structured, in-depth interviews with puppeteers, religious leaders, and community members. Documentary data were obtained from relevant records and materials associated with the performance and its cultural and educational context.

Three data-collection techniques were employed. First, participatory observation was conducted to examine the performance process, particularly the presentation of the *Semar Mbangun Kayangan* storyline, the characterization of Semar, the dialogues, and the symbolic expressions through which Islamic educational values were communicated. The observation also focused on how religious and moral messages were presented within the cultural setting of the performance.

Second, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with selected participants. The interviews explored participants' interpretations of Semar's character, their understanding of the religious and moral messages contained in the performance, and their perspectives on the relevance of these messages to everyday community life. The semi-structured format allowed the researchers to use guiding questions while providing opportunities for participants to elaborate on their experiences and interpretations.

Third, documentation was used to complement the observational and interview data. Relevant documents and supporting materials were examined to provide additional contextual information and to support the interpretation of the performance and its educational messages. Combining observations, interviews, and documentary materials enabled the researchers to examine the phenomenon from multiple sources of evidence.

Data Trustworthiness

To enhance the credibility of the findings, the study employed source and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from puppeteers, religious leaders, and community members. This comparison was intended to identify convergent and divergent interpretations concerning the Islamic educational values represented in the performance.

Technique triangulation involved comparing information obtained through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. For example, participants' explanations of the moral and religious messages were examined in relation to the dialogues, characters, and symbolic expressions observed during the performance. Differences among the sources were considered during interpretation rather than being automatically treated as inconsistencies.

The use of multiple sources and techniques is important in qualitative inquiry because interviews and observations may reveal different dimensions of participants' experiences and social practices (Dado et al., 2023). In addition, providing sufficient contextual information about participants, research settings, and observed phenomena strengthens the transparency of qualitative reporting and enables readers to assess the potential transferability of the findings (Younas et al., 2023).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted through three interconnected stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification (Rijali, 2018). These stages were applied throughout the research process to organize and interpret information relevant to the research objectives.

First, data reduction involved selecting, organizing, and summarizing information obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation. The researchers focused on data related to the character of Semar, the storyline of *Semar Mbangun Kayangan*, and the religious, philosophical, and moral messages communicated through the performance. Information that was relevant to the research focus was organized into categories to facilitate further interpretation.

Second, data presentation involved arranging the reduced data into descriptive narratives and, where appropriate, tables or other supporting representations. The information was organized according to the meanings and educational dimensions emerging from the data, particularly Islamic values associated with faith or *aqidah*, worship, and morality. This stage enabled the researchers to examine relationships

between the symbolic representation of Semar, the storyline, and the community's interpretations of the values conveyed.

Third, conclusion drawing and verification involved interpreting the patterns and meanings identified during data presentation and examining whether the interpretations were consistently supported by the collected evidence. The researchers compared interview accounts with observational and documentary information to ensure that the conclusions reflected the available field data. Through these interconnected analytical stages, the study developed an interpretation of how Islamic educational values were represented in the *Semar Mbangun Kayangan* performance and understood by the local community

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The wayang play or story "Semar Mbangun Kayangan" is a story themed on the journey to truth, showing Semar's efforts to improve the attitudes and personalities of the Pandavas. The play contains many life lessons and Islamic teachings, expressed in the dialogues of each character (Margiyono & Wardani, 2022). The meaning of "Mbangun Kayangan" in the wayang tradition does not mean building a physical palace in the sky, but rather a metaphor for building the nobility of the soul, improving morals, and restructuring a damaged social order. From an Islamic educational perspective, this play reflects the process of*Purification of the Self*(purification of the soul) and strengthening of monotheism as the main foundation for a leader or individual to achieve a noble degree of humanity (insan kamil), so as to be able to create a just and prosperous society (Mutholingah, 2021).

Researchers have collected data through observation, interviews, and documentation of puppeteers, religious figures, and the community in Mulyosari Village, 16 Polos. Based on the research results obtained through interviews with puppeteers, religious figures, and the community in Mulyosari Village, 16 Polos.g, In the Wayang Kulit performance featuring the play Semar Mbangun Kayangan, it is stated that the play Semar Mbangun Kayangan is a means of Islamic education based on culture where the figure of Semar is interpreted as a symbol of knowledge to build the soul and human self-control.The play Semar Mbangun Kayangan is a wayang play that can be used as an example in everyday life. It contains Islamic educational values such as morality, morality, and worship.. Through the touch of Sunan Kalijaga's preaching, Semar's character was transformed from animist beliefs into a medium for introducing monotheism, which can be seen from the use of figurative terms such as*"Great God"*for the mention of Allah SWT and philosophy*"Kalimosodo Library"*such as the representation of the Shahada. Semar was introduced and developed as a strategic cultural da'wah medium. Semar, whose appearance is simple but has a noble character (Anjani & Fahruddin, 2024). The Wayang Kulit performance serves as an effective model of character education because it encapsulates Islamic teachings in Javanese cultural symbolism.*flexible*and in-depth, so that the message of Islamic values is more easily accepted by the audience.

Figure 1. Interview with the Puppeteer



Wayang as a Tool for Spreading Islamic Teachings

Wayang as part of cultural da'wah media, its use in the process of Islamization of society, especially in the process of Islamization of society, especially in Java (Widoyo, 2021). Pioneers of Islamic da'wah in the archipelago, especially Walisongo. The Walisongo's role in Islamic da'wah in Java was very significant, one of which was using Wayang Kulit media, which was performed by Sunan Kalijaga. The effectiveness of da'wah using wayang is also proven by the success of the Walisongo's da'wah, especially Sunan Kalijaga (Pramitaningsih, 2023).

Religious figures also stated that Wayang Kulit art is seen as a cultural heritage.*Sorry.*(A Javanese term used to describe something that has very high, noble, and quality artistic, cultural, and moral value.) which functions strategically as a medium for preaching, entertainment, and also as a guide to moral character that is rooted in the traditions of Sunan Kalijaga.Sunan Kalijaga, known as a creative saint in spreading Islam, adapted the character Semar from pre-Islamic Javanese folklore to symbolize wisdom and humor. Semar is depicted as old, fat, and humorous, yet wise, representing moral values such as patience and honesty (Rukiah & Sugihartono, 2024).Its strength lies in its unique approach to depicting human characters, introducing Islamic teachings to the public visually and culturally. To maintain the younger generation's understanding and alignment with their faith, the puppeteer's role is crucial in providing education and direct communication to prevent cultural and religious values from becoming erroneous.The puppeteer in conveying a story has a goal of being*"commeratif"*namely remembering that in every story there must be meaning and philosophy or even other thoughts and interpretations (Prayoga, 2018).However, efforts to integrate Islamic values into wayang in the modern era currently face major challenges, especially the fragmentation or differences of opinion within the Muslim community itself.

Figure 2. *Interview with Religious Figures*



Internalization of Worship and Moral Values through Semar Symbolism

The character of Semar in shadow puppetry possesses strong symbolism in instilling Islamic values of worship and morality (Subarkah & Ayundasari, 2021). Semar's simplicity and obedience symbolize values of worship such as sincerity, trust (Tawakal), and awareness of God (Tawhid), which form the basis for forming religious behavior in daily life. In addition to these values, Semar also represents noble morals, such as justice, patience, wisdom, and social concern. Through his advice and behavior in the wayang play, the public is encouraged to internalize Islamic teachings contextually and culturally. Thus, Semar's symbolism serves as an effective educational medium in shaping the moral and spiritual character of the community (Febriyanti & Santoso, 2023).

The results of in-depth interviews with informants in Mulyosari Village 16 Polos provide a comprehensive picture of the community internalizing Islamic educational values in Wayang Kulit performances and the results of the interviews show that the wayang kulit performance of the play Semar Mbangun Kayangan has succeeded in instilling strong Islamic educational values such as sincerity, honesty, responsibility, and tawakal to the audience. The figure of Semar is seen as a real role model in working hard

sincerely.*Lilahita'ala*, humility, and wisdom in leadership without seeking personal gain. Most of the informants admitted to having no significant difficulty in absorbing these values because they were considered aligned with the teachings of monotheism, faith, and morals that they had long studied. The informants hoped that wayang kulit could be packaged more attractively for the younger generation so that the moral and humanitarian values contained within it would not disappear. As a concrete effort, they committed to continuing to preserve this culture by discussing the meaning of wayang stories within the family environment and providing real-life examples of behavior in community life. Through consistent practice of these values, they believe that wayang kulit can continue to be an effective means of character education and maintain cultural identity based on religious values.

Figure 3. Community Interviews



The Educational Impact of Wayang Performances on Society

The Wayang Kulit performance in Mulyosari Village, 16 Polos, has a significant educational impact on the internalization of Islamic values in the community. The delivery of moral messages through symbols, dialogue, and wayang storylines makes Islamic teachings more easily accepted because they align with local culture, thus fostering a contextual understanding of religion.

This educational impact is evident in changes in community attitudes and behavior, such as increased awareness of worship, mutual cooperation, tolerance, and respect for local wisdom values with Islamic nuances. Wayang serves as a tool to instill moral and ethical principles in society and serves as an effective non-formal educational medium because it can reach various age groups and educational backgrounds (Putri Rahmawati and Sumiati, 2025). Thus, wayang performances serve not only as traditional entertainment, but also as a means of cultural preaching and sustainable community character development in accordance with Islamic educational values.

The results of this study areshows that the shadow puppet show Semar Mbangun Kayangan in Mulyosari Village, 16 Polos, is not merely entertainment, but an effective way to teach Islam. The character Semar is portrayed as an exemplary figure or a perfect human being who teaches morality, honesty, and patience within oneself. As a result, people find it easier to understand religious values such as monotheism and worship because they are conveyed through their everyday culture. In addition to making people more religious, the messages in this puppet show have also been proven to change social behavior for the better, such as increasing attitudes of mutual cooperation and mutual respect in rural areas. Many previous researchersdiscusses the values of Islamic education in Wayang Kulit performances, but the focus and context are different from Sini's research. Dian Alwiyasin's (2020) study shows that the values of Islamic education (tawhid, worship, morals) in the Semar Mbangun Kayangan play are conveyed through a Javanese cultural approach. The application of these values and the reinforcement of these values are*brotherhood*This aims to form a society with Islamic and harmonious character (Dian Alwiyasin, 2020). Apriyani Nurohmah's (2022) research on the character of Semar in the play Mbangun Kayangan represents the philosophy of divine grace and human perfection. The dimensions of Islamic education, which include physical, spiritual, intellectual, social, moral, and

aesthetic aspects, are conveyed through a Javanese cultural approach. Educational institutions are expected to be able to innovate dynamically and progressively according to the needs of the times without abandoning the essence of these basic values (Apriyani Nurohmah, 2022). Muhamad Muslih's (2021) research states that the play*Semar Builds Heaven*integrates the values of monotheism, worship, and morality through a Javanese cultural approach. Using Sunan Kalijaga's perspective, the character of Semar serves as a vehicle for preaching, harmonizing tradition and religious teachings. This approach facilitates the audience's understanding of Islamic moral messages, perseverance, and wisdom effectively through the lens of shadow puppetry (Muhamad Muslih, 2021).

These findings significantly contribute to the development of a non-formal Islamic education model based on local wisdom, where traditional arts such as Wayang Kulit have proven to be effective instruments of cultural da'wah for rural communities. This research demonstrates that the flexible use of cultural symbolism can facilitate audiences of all ages in absorbing religious and moral values without feeling forced. Furthermore, the results of this study support the preservation of national cultural identity aligned with the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah, while also serving as a reference for educational institutions to innovate in instilling character through an artistic approach.

The limitations of this research lie in its specific geographic location in Mulyosari Village 16 Polos, the challenges of fragmented internal views of Muslims regarding wayang as a medium of da'wah, and its limited focus on one specific play. Therefore, future researchers are recommended to expand the research locus to more heterogeneous areas, conduct comparative studies between wayang plays, explore the use of digital technology to be more relevant to the younger generation, and examine modern puppeteer communication strategies to minimize ideological conflict in the integration of culture and religion.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the significant role of the *Semar Mbangun Kayangan* shadow puppet performance as a culturally embedded medium for internalizing Islamic educational values within rural communities. The central finding indicates that the performance functions not merely as a traditional form of entertainment but also as a non-formal educational medium through which Islamic teachings are communicated using familiar cultural symbols, narratives, and moral messages. The character of Semar represents wisdom, humility, sincerity, and self-control, while the concept of *Mbangun Kayangan* is interpreted symbolically as an effort to develop spiritual awareness, purify the soul, and improve individual and collective morality. The internalized values encompass *aqidah* (faith and monotheism), worship, and *akhlakul karimah* (noble character), including honesty, patience, responsibility, gratitude, and social solidarity. The novelty of this research lies in its examination of how these values are understood and internalized by members of a specific rural community through their direct engagement with a contemporary wayang performance. Unlike studies that primarily examine the philosophical meanings of wayang characters or the historical relationship between Islam and Javanese culture, this research emphasizes the connection between cultural representation, community interpretation, and the educational significance of traditional performing arts in everyday social life

The findings are consistent with previous studies demonstrating that traditional arts can serve as effective instruments for communicating religious and moral values. Setiawan (2022), for example, found that wayang kulit and gamelan continue to be used as contemporary Islamic preaching media because they provide culturally familiar forms of communication and enable religious messages to reach grassroots communities. Similarly, Miftachurrozaq et al. (2023) demonstrated that Kubro Siswo art incorporates Islamic educational values, including faith, worship, morality, and social responsibility, through artistic expressions and community practices. These findings support the present study's

argument that Islamic educational messages can be communicated through local cultural traditions without necessarily separating religious teachings from community cultural identity. Furthermore, Hidayat et al. (2023), in their study of Wayang Kekayon Khalifah, identified the representation of Islamic educational values through puppet narratives and their relationship with the social environment. Sari et al. (2024), through a systematic literature review, also confirmed the relevance of wayang art as a medium for integrating Islamic educational values within Indonesian cultural traditions. More recently, Salim et al. (2025) demonstrated that Javanese cultural principles can be incorporated into Islamic educational practices through community institutions and religious activities. Beyond the Indonesian context, the study by the authors of *Linking Curriculum Content to Students' Cultural Heritage* (2023) highlighted how learning through the arts can connect learners' cultural backgrounds with educational objectives while supporting cognitive and socio-affective development. Waage (2025) also emphasized the potential of visual arts education to cultivate virtue literacy, critical reflection, and moral deliberation. Collectively, these studies reinforce the argument that cultural and artistic experiences provide meaningful opportunities for value-based education. However, the present study extends this discussion by focusing specifically on the community-level interpretation and internalization of Islamic educational values through the Semar character and the narrative of *Semar Mbangun Kayangan* in Mulyosari Village. The similarities between the present findings and previous research can be explained by the shared educational characteristics of traditional performing arts. Wayang, Kubro Siswo, and other culture-based artistic practices communicate values through narratives, symbolic representations, collective experiences, and culturally recognizable forms of expression. These characteristics make moral and religious messages more accessible to audiences because the messages are connected to their existing cultural knowledge and social experiences.

Nevertheless, differences emerge in the research focus, methodological approaches, and sociocultural settings. Setiawan (2022), for instance, concentrated on the contemporary use of wayang and gamelan as Islamic preaching media and examined the debates surrounding their religious legitimacy. Miftachurrozaq et al. (2023) investigated the Islamic educational dimensions of Kubro Siswo, an artistic tradition with different performance characteristics and forms of cultural expression. Meanwhile, Sari et al. (2024) employed a systematic literature review rather than examining direct interactions within a particular community. In contrast, the present study adopts a descriptive qualitative field approach involving participatory observation, interviews with puppeteers, religious figures, and community members, as well as documentary analysis. This methodological orientation enables the research to explore how audiences interpret the symbolic messages of Semar and relate them to their religious and social experiences. The local context of Mulyosari Village also influences the findings because community familiarity with Javanese cultural traditions provides an important foundation for interpreting the religious meanings embedded in the performance. Therefore, differences among these studies should not necessarily be understood as contradictory findings, but rather as evidence that the educational functions of traditional arts are shaped by the interaction between artistic forms, cultural contexts, communication strategies, and audience characteristics. Furthermore, this study has several differences while also complementing existing findings. Dian Alwiyasin's (2020) research highlights the value of Islamic education in the play*Semar Builds Heaven*as a means of building Islamic brotherhood through a Javanese cultural approach, while this study emphasizes the process of internalizing monotheism directly in the lives of rural communities through the experience of watching wayang. Apriyani Nurohmah (2022) interprets Semar as a representation of divine grace and a perfect human being in the holistic dimension of Islamic education, while this study focuses more on the practical impact of this symbolism on changing religious and social attitudes in society. Muhamad Muslih (2021) emphasizes

the role of Sunan Kalijaga in the historical integration of Islamic preaching and wayang culture, while this study examines the contemporary context and the response of rural communities to the symbolism of monotheism in current wayang performances. Subarkah and Ayundasari (2021) examine the symbolism of Semar as a carrier of worship and moral values, while this study expands on this by showing that this symbolism functions as a means of strengthening monotheism as the main foundation for moral formation. Febriyanti and Santoso (2023) view wayang as a medium for culture-based character education, while this study more specifically positions wayang as a medium for monotheism education and examines the practice of its acceptance empirically in society. Thus, the findings of this study not only identify the value of Islamic education in wayang, but also confirm its function as a medium for transforming the community's awareness of monotheism through a contextual cultural approach.

The contribution of this research is the development of a more contextual understanding of Islamic educational internalization through local cultural performance. The study suggests that the internalization process can be understood through the relationship between three interconnected dimensions: cultural representation, audience interpretation, and the application of moral values in social life. First, cultural representation occurs through the character of Semar, the storyline, symbolic expressions, and dialogues that communicate Islamic teachings. Second, audience interpretation involves the process through which community members understand and associate these representations with Islamic concepts such as monotheism, sincerity, patience, responsibility, and humility. Third, the application dimension concerns the ways in which these values are connected to everyday religious practices and social relationships. This conceptual contribution expands previous discussions that primarily identify Islamic educational values in traditional arts by emphasizing the importance of community interpretation as an intermediary between artistic messages and educational meaning. In this respect, wayang kulit can be understood not only as a cultural product or medium of religious communication but also as a space for informal and intergenerational learning. The findings also reinforce the importance of integrating local wisdom into Islamic educational discourse, particularly in communities where cultural traditions remain an important part of collective identity. Nevertheless, this conceptual interpretation should be regarded as an analytical contribution derived from the present qualitative findings rather than a universally validated causal model.

The findings have several practical implications for Islamic education, cultural preservation, and community development. At the practical level, religious educators, teachers, community leaders, and puppeteers can collaborate to develop culturally responsive educational activities that integrate Islamic values with traditional artistic performances. The symbolic character of Semar and the moral messages of *Semar Mbangun Kayangan* can be incorporated into religious discussions, character education activities, community gatherings, and intergenerational learning programs. For younger audiences, the presentation of wayang can be adapted through educational videos, digital storytelling, animation, and social media content while maintaining the philosophical and religious meanings of the original performance. At the academic level, this study provides a basis for further investigation into the relationship between Islamic education, local wisdom, cultural communication, and informal learning. At the policy level, local governments, educational institutions, cultural organizations, and religious communities should consider strengthening partnerships to support the preservation of traditional performing arts as part of community-based educational development. Such initiatives should involve both cultural practitioners and religious scholars to ensure that artistic interpretations remain contextually appropriate and that religious messages are communicated responsibly.

The limitations of this study lie in its limited coverage of a single village, which makes it unable to reflect the more heterogeneous conditions of the community. Focusing on a single wayang play also limits understanding of the possible meaning of monotheism in other plays. The descriptive qualitative approach used makes the results difficult to generalize broadly. Furthermore, differing views within the Muslim community regarding wayang as a medium for da'wah (Islamic propagation) also have the potential to influence the perceptions of some respondents.

Future research should investigate different geographical and sociocultural settings, compare several wayang performances, and examine how audiences from different age groups interpret the messages conveyed. Longitudinal research and mixed-methods approaches are also recommended to investigate whether exposure to culturally based educational performances is associated with measurable changes in religious awareness, moral attitudes, and social behavior. Such investigations would provide stronger empirical evidence concerning the long-term educational significance of traditional performing arts.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the shadow puppet performance of the play Semar Mbangun Kayangan in Mulyosari Village, 16 Polos, is an effective medium for cultural da'wah and a means of Islamic education. The figure of Semar is internalized as a symbol of a perfect human being (*perfect human being*) which teaches that building "heaven" is not physical development, but rather an effort to improve morals, purify the soul (*tazkiyatun nafs*), and strengthens the values of monotheism (belief in God) and humanity. Through symbolism and easily digestible language, this performance successfully transforms religious values into concrete life guidance for the community. In practice, this performance has a significant educational impact on changing the social behavior and religiosity of the local community. Internalizing values such as honesty, patience, sincerity, and mutual cooperation has been proven to strengthen Islamic character in harmony with local culture. Thus, wayang kulit is not merely traditional entertainment, but a sustainable non-formal educational instrument that maintains the moral and spiritual identity of rural communities.

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