

Improving Student Character through Role Playing Senja Script Scene 2: Ki Hadjar Dewantara's Perspective

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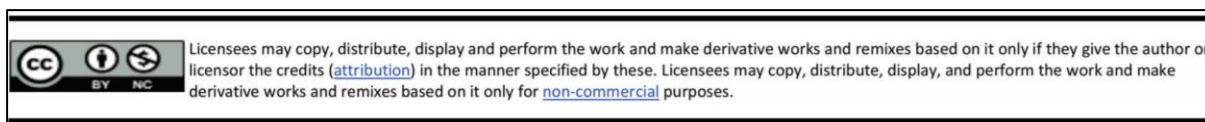
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Abstract

The teaching of arts and culture in schools, including theater, plays a crucial role in shaping students' appreciation, imagination, and creativity towards aesthetic values and local and global culture. Through role-playing, performances, and appreciation activities, students not only learn performance techniques but also understand complex human experiences such as conflict, sacrifice, and hope. The success of this process is largely determined by the teacher's choice of teaching methods, especially in the context of traditional Indonesian theater for 10th grade high school students, which requires a balance between artistic aspects and character building. The role-playing method has proven to be effective because it encourages students to explore feelings, attitudes, values, skills, and knowledge through performance and reflective discussion after the performance. This study examines the application of role playing in the script Senja Adegan 2 by Gunawan Wibisana Danubrata, highlighting its relevance to Ki Hadjar Dewantara's perspective, which emphasizes the harmony of thought, feeling, and intention as the basis of character. Through analysis of the performance process and results, the findings are expected to contribute to the development of creative, contextual, student-centered theater learning strategies that are in line with national educational values and character education objectives in secondary schools.

Keywords: Role Playing, Theater Arts, Morality, Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Senja Script



Introduction

study is based on the view that arts education, especially theater arts, plays a strategic role in shaping students' character. In high school environments, cultural arts education not only serves as a vehicle for aesthetic expression, but also as a medium for internalizing moral, social, and spiritual values. Ki Hadjar Dewantara places character as the core of education, namely the harmony between creativity, taste, and will that is reflected in real behavior. In this context, theater learning, which is full of conflict, choices of attitude, and human values, becomes fertile ground for nurturing students' character as a whole.

Changes in student behavior as a result of the teaching and learning process should ideally be evident in material-substantive, structural-functional, and everyday behavioral domains. However, the question often arises as to whether the learning achievements and positive behaviors that are observed are truly the result of the learning process designed by the teacher. To answer this question, educators need to understand the initial characteristics of students, in terms of their attitudes, habits, and background experiences before entering the school environment. This understanding is important so that learning strategies, including theater arts learning, can be tailored to the needs and real conditions of students, rather than simply following the administrative demands of the curriculum.

In the high school arts and culture curriculum, traditional Indonesian theater arts are included in the basic competencies that require students to act out scenes according to the concepts, techniques, and procedures of acting based on traditional theater sources. This content was chosen not only to

preserve cultural heritage, but also because it contains values that are relevant to the social reality of students. Through characters, conflicts, and dramatic plots, students are invited to reflect on issues of poverty, justice, responsibility, sacrifice, and faith that are closely related to the dynamics of society. Thus, traditional theater learning can be a means of actualizing the character education objectives mandated by Ki Hadjar Dewantara.

One method considered to have potential for achieving this goal is role playing. This method emphasizes role-playing activities, in which students do not simply read or memorize dialogues, but are asked to dramatize social situations that contain certain problems or conflicts. In the process, they learn to explore human relationships through demonstration and discussion, so that feelings, attitudes, values, skills, and knowledge are integrated. Role playing allows students to enter the "inner world" of the characters they play, test their emotional and moral responses, and then reflect on them in class discussions. In this way, learning does not stop at the cognitive level, but touches on the affective and psychomotor domains.

Theoretically, role playing is defined as a way of presenting lesson material by demonstrating or acting out situations experienced by people in social relationships. Students are given the task of playing characters in problematic situations, then working together to find meaning and solutions to the conflicts that arise. In theater arts education, this method is in line with the essence of theater itself, which is the performing art of human actions in front of an audience. By creating script-based theater games, students practice vocal, movement, and expression skills, while also honing their moral sensitivity. It is at this point that Ki Hadjar Dewantara's concept of character—which demands unity of creation, feeling, and will—can be implemented concretely in the classroom.

The script "Senja" Scene 2 by Gunawan Wibisana Danubrata was chosen as teaching material because it contains strong conflicts and rich philosophical values. This scene depicts the struggles of a poor family who must choose between short-term economic needs and long-term educational investments, accompanied by spiritual tension when the character Randu questions God's justice. The character Emak portrays a mother who is full of sacrifice and steadfast faith, while Ranti represents a victim of social injustice. Through these three characters, students are invited to directly experience the inner situations of characters who are trapped by poverty, stigma, and helplessness, but still try to maintain their dignity and hope.

Based on this background, the researcher was interested in studying traditional theater arts learning among tenth-grade high school students through role-playing using the script "Senja" Scene 2 from the perspective of Ki Hadjar Dewantara. This study aims to understand how the application of role playing can improve students' character, particularly in terms of social sensitivity, empathy, and awareness of the importance of education as a means of freeing oneself from the shackles of poverty and injustice. Specifically, the study aims to determine the application of the role-playing method in traditional theater arts learning for tenth-grade high school students in the 2025/2026 academic year, while also examining the extent to which the process is in line with Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational principles, such as guiding children's nature, the among system, and the balance of thinking, feeling, and doing. Thus, it is hoped that the results of this study can contribute theoretically and practically to the development of a more meaningful theater arts learning model that is oriented towards character building.

Method

The research approach used was Classroom Action Research (CAR) with a descriptive qualitative nuance. CAR was chosen because the main objective of the research was to improve the quality of the theater arts learning process and to test the effectiveness of the role-playing method in instilling Ki Hadjar Dewantara's moral values in 10th grade high school students. The research was conducted through a cycle of actions that included planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. In each cycle, the teacher acted as a researcher who designed a learning scenario based on the script "Senja" Scene 2, applied role playing in the classroom, then observed the students' appreciation of the roles of

Emak, Randu, and Ranti, as well as their responses to the themes of social injustice and the importance of education.

The focus of measurement in PTK covers three main aspects, namely improvement in acting skills, understanding of thematic concepts in the script, and internalization of moral values. Acting skills are observed through vocal, movement, and expression when students play characters; understanding of concepts is assessed from students' ability to explain the themes of poverty, the role of education, and spiritual conflict; while internalization of values is reviewed from the attitudes of empathy, responsibility, and how students reflect on their role-playing experiences. The instruments used included observation sheets, interview guidelines, and student reflection journals. Observations were made to see behavior and interactions during the performance, interviews were used to explore students' inner experiences after playing characters, and reflection journals were used to find out how they interpreted education as a way to "liberate" themselves from poverty.

Ki Hadjar Dewantara's perspective was integrated into the instrument design and data analysis. The principle of liberating education was analyzed through students' statements about the role of schools in changing the future, as depicted in the character of Randu, who struggled to break free from limitations. The aspect of character is observed from the way students manage spiritual conflicts when acting out Randu's protest against God and how they understand Emak's steadfast faith. The three pillars of education (family, school, and community) are used as a framework to interpret students' reflections on Emak's position as the first educator in the family and the role of school as a space for character building.

Operationally, this research can also be interpreted as a qualitative case study of a single class if the emphasis is placed on exploring the meaning and subjective experiences of students during the role-playing process. However, the PTK framework remains the main foundation because it provides space for teachers to refine their teaching practices from cycle to cycle. Thus, the method used allows researchers and theater teachers to test, revise, and establish a role-playing learning model that is relevant to Ki Hadjar Dewantara's values and the real needs of students.

Results and Discussion

1. Results

The results of the study indicate that the application of the role-playing method in the script "Senja" Scene 2 in two cycles of action provides a significant improvement in the quality of theater arts learning for 10th grade students. In general, this development is evident in three main aspects of theater education, namely emotional development, physical development, and creative development, which also reflect the implementation of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's concept of character building. Students who initially tended to read the dialogue flatly gradually became able to convey the characters' inner conflicts and emotional tensions on stage more convincingly.

In terms of emotional expression, there was an improvement in the students' ability to appreciate the complex emotions of the characters Randu and Emak, such as frustration, rebellion, regret, assertiveness, affection, and patience. This appreciation was not only evident in their intonation, but also in their facial expressions and dramatic pauses when acting out key scenes. The application of role playing in two cycles showed a significant improvement in emotional expression, where students were able to appreciate the emotional conflicts of the frustrated Randu and the self-sacrificing Emak, shifting from reading the dialogue to projecting authentic suffering, as seen in the scene where Ranti stands in front of a simple house with her hands covering her face as an expression of trauma and inner turmoil.



Figure 1 Ranti Scene

The documentation of the performance in Figure 1 Ranti Scene confirms this transition through body language, stage positioning, and a visual atmosphere that supports the representation of coastal poverty.

In terms of physical performance, the students showed progress in their mastery of vocals and movement. They were able to utilize the dynamics of volume and intonation, for example, the transition from a soft whisper when Randu uttered the word "waras" to Emak's stern scolding of Randu, as well as the hysterical screams during the climax of the conflict. Body movements have also become more focused and functional, as seen in facial expressions that are consistent with the dramatic situation, gestures such as throwing a glass, and clear blocking when Emak hugs Ranti while talking to Randu. Mastery of these physical elements strengthens the integrity of the performance and helps students express the script's message more communicatively to the audience.

Creative aspects also improved through the students' ability to analyze and interpret the subtext of the script. In post-performance discussions, students were able to relate the characters' dialogues and actions to broader moral dilemmas, such as the conflict between despair and faith, between short-term economic needs and the importance of education as an investment in the future. They were able to explain how Randu's accusations of God's injustice reflected a spiritual crisis, and how Emak's attitude of defending education and family dignity illustrated the steadfastness of values. The ability to interpret these hidden meanings shows that role playing not only hones technical theater skills, but also fosters students' critical thinking and ethical sensitivity.

Overall, the findings confirm that these three aspects—sensory development, physical development, and creative development—develop in an integrated manner and are in line with Ki Hadjar Dewantara's character education objectives. The direct experience of playing characters who face poverty, injustice, and struggles of faith encourages students to empathize, reflect on their own positions, and appreciate education as a path to self-liberation from various limitations (). Thus, the role-playing method in Scene 2 of the script "Senja" has proven to be effective as a means of learning theater arts that is not only oriented towards the aesthetics of performance but also towards shaping the character of students.

2. Discussion

This study confirms that the role-playing method in theater arts education not only functions as a technical strategy for staging, but also as a pedagogical medium for internalizing Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational philosophy. Through direct involvement in the conflicts and dramatic situations in Scene 2 of the play "Senja," students experience a learning process that touches on the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains in an integrated manner. Teachers act as mentors who guide the process using the among system principle: being at the front as role models, in the middle building enthusiasm, and at the back providing encouragement so that students can express themselves freely while remaining within the corridor of moral values.

From a pedagogical theater perspective, the results of the action research show that the three pillars of emotional expression, physical expression, and creative expression experienced significant improvement after two cycles of action. In the early stages, students tended to read the dialogue flatly and did not fully understand the emotional weight of the characters; after repeated

role-playing with reflection sessions, they began to be able to authentically convey Randu's inner tension and Emak's determination. The development table shows that emotional development moved from a low level (merely reading the dialogue) to a strong emotional appreciation; physical development progressed from monotonous intonation to dramatic vocals and movements; while creative development increased from superficial understanding to critical subtext analysis of the themes of poverty, justice, and the role of education.

From the perspective of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's philosophy, this finding is in line with the idea that education should guide the harmony of creativity, emotion, and will. The students' appreciation of Randu's despair, Emak's sacrifice, and Ranti's fate allows them to practice empathy (emotional expression) and test their attitudes towards social suffering. Their active use of movement, vocals, and blocking is a manifestation of the development of will in the form of courage to express themselves, while their ability to interpret the meaning of dialogue and relate it to social reality shows the growth of critical thinking. Thus, role playing proves itself to be a concrete means of character building, not just an aesthetic exercise.

The strength of the script for "Senja" Scene 2 lies in its philosophical depth: existentialism in Randu's despair, theological problems concerning God's justice, pragmatism in education as redemption, and humanism that preserves the dignity of poor families. When students act out these scenes, they not only recite the dialogue, but also "borrow" the characters' perspectives and are tested to position themselves: whether to succumb to despair or to strengthen hope through education. This process makes the theater class function as a moral laboratory, in line with Ki Hadjar's idea that school is a place for sowing the seeds of culture and character.

The role of teachers in this context is closely related to the principle of Tut Wuri Handayani. Teachers do not dictate how to cry, get angry, or beg, but rather encourage students to explore their emotions from their own experiences and imagination. At the same time, teachers ensure that the courage to criticize fate and social reality—represented by Randu's rebellion—remains within the framework of politeness and ethical responsibility. The creative freedom given on stage is balanced by reflective dialogue after the performance, so that criticism does not stop at an outburst of emotion, but becomes a more mature understanding of the structure of injustice and the importance of knowledge as a path to independence.

Visual documentation of the performance reinforces the semiotic reading of the learning process. The image of Ranti standing alone in front of a simple hut, with lighting that emphasizes loneliness and vulnerability, can be interpreted as a sign of social suffering and stigma that befalls poor families. The mastery of body language and spatial composition in this scene shows that the students not only understand the script literally, but are able to translate it into visual symbols that touch the audience's empathy. This signifies the successful integration of the artistic goals of theater and the mission of character education.

The image of emotional conflict between Randu, Emak, and Ranti shows how students process their creativity and critical courage. Randu's pointing gesture and challenging body position, facing Emak's steadfast figure and Ranti's fragile one, creates a composition that depicts an accumulation of despair as well as ideological tension between protest and resignation. From a learning perspective, the configuration of this scene shows that students have been able to use their bodies and space to represent abstract ideas such as divine justice, structural poverty, and human dignity. This indicates that they are beginning to understand theater as a sign language, not just a place for memorizing dialogue.



Figure 2. Randu's emotional conflict

Figure 2 depicts the emotional conflict between Randu, Emak, and Ranti in front of their house, reflecting the tension between family, school, and community roles in shaping the characters' perspectives on poverty and education.

The connection between field findings and Ki Hadjar Dewantara's theory is also evident in the three dimensions of education. The script places the family as the main locus of education through the figure of Emak, who acts as the first and foremost educator, while school is presented as a hope for a better future, and society is depicted as a space that is often unfair to the weak. When students analyze and act out these relationships, they are actually invited to reflect on their own position in these three environments. Thus, theater learning is not separate from their lives, but rather helps them develop a new perspective on family, school, and the social environment.

Overall, this discussion shows that the role-playing method in Scene 2 of the script "Senja" is able to integrate theater arts competencies with the character building desired by Ki Hadjar Dewantara. The measurable improvement in emotional, physical, and creative skills in the PTK cycle, supported by a semiotic reading of the performance and student reflections, provides a strong basis for stating that theater arts learning can be designed as an emancipating educational practice. The practical implication is that arts and culture teachers can use this model as a reference to develop more dialogical, contextual, and character-oriented theater learning, while encouraging further research to test the effectiveness of role playing in different scripts and school contexts.

Conclusion

This study confirms that the application of the role-playing method in the script "Senja" Scene 2 is effective as a theater arts learning instrument that also builds the character of students in the perspective of Ki Hadjar Dewantara. Through two cycles of action, students showed a marked improvement in holistic theater skills, including emotional expression, physical expression, and creative expression, with the ability to shift from simply reading dialogue to authentically and communicatively presenting the characters' inner conflicts.

The script for Scene 2 of "Senja," which is full of spiritual and socioeconomic conflict, serves as a moral laboratory, forcing students to face head-on the dilemmas of poverty versus education, struggles of faith, and efforts to maintain self-respect amid social injustice. Through role-playing and reflection, students not only acquire artistic skills, but also develop social awareness, empathy for the suffering of Emak, Randu, and Ranti, and an understanding of the importance of education as a means of freeing oneself from limitations.

Philosophically, the implementation of role playing in this study is proven to be in line with Ki Hadjar Dewantara's concept of character building, as it balances creativity, emotion, and will in the learning process. Teachers act as mentors who apply the *among-ing ngarsa sung tuladha, ing madya mangun karsa*, and *tut wuri handayani* system by guiding students to express themselves freely while remaining morally responsible. Overall, the role-playing method in drama material that is rich in values can be recommended as a relevant theater arts learning practice to be integrated into the arts and culture curriculum, in order to realize contextual and liberating national character education.

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