



UNRIYO Students’ Opinion about the Role of Youth in Preserving Javanese *Gamelan* in the Modern Era

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Abstract. This study explores the role of youth in preserving *gamelan* as part of Javanese cultural heritage in the modern era. Although *gamelan* holds deep cultural and philosophical meaning, interest among the younger generation is declining due to the influence of globalization and the rise of modern entertainment. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research involved interviews with three active students from UNRIYO. The findings show that while these students have basic knowledge of *gamelan*, most of their peers show low interest. This is largely due to the perception that *gamelan* is outdated, along with limited access and facilities for learning and practicing it. Despite this, all participants agreed that youth have an important role in preserving *gamelan*. They can contribute through active participation in performances, promoting *gamelan* via social media, and combining it with modern music to attract wider audiences. The study recommends integrating *gamelan* into school curricula, producing engaging digital content, and establishing cultural communities to spark greater interest among young people. Youth are viewed as agents of change who can help adapt and promote traditional culture in a way that fits today’s context. In conclusion, the preservation of *gamelan* is not solely the responsibility of the government or cultural institutions. It also depends on the active involvement of the younger generation in reimagining and continuing these cultural traditions in modern and creative ways.

Keywords: *Gamelan*, Cultural Preservation, Youth Role, Traditional Music, Globalization

INTRODUCTION

Gamelan is one of the most important cultural heritages in Javanese society. It is a traditional musical ensemble composed of various instruments such as *gong*, *kendang*, *saron*, *bonang*, and *gender*, played together to produce distinctive harmonies. The word *gamelan* itself comes from the Javanese ‘*gamel*’ which means hitting/drumming, and is followed by the suffix “*an*” which makes it a noun [1]. The history of *gamelan* is believed to date back to the era of the ancient Mataram Kingdom in the 8th century C.E. Archaeological evidence of *gamelan* can be found in the reliefs of Borobudur and Prambanan temples, which depict various traditional musical instruments. Since then, *gamelan* has developed and become an essential part of Javanese life, especially in traditional ceremonies, religious rituals, arts, and palace events. In Javanese culture, *gamelan* is not only a form of entertainment but also carries deep philosophical values. *Gamelan* music reflects the Javanese worldview that emphasizes balance, harmony, and unity. Therefore, it plays a significant role in shaping Javanese cultural identity and reinforcing social and spiritual values within the community.

Hypothetically, before the influence of Hinduism, Javanese society was familiar with ten skills, including *wayang* and *gamelan* [2]. In the past, *gamelan* was used to accompany performances of *wayang orang*, *ketoprak*, *ludruk*, and other traditional theater performances in Java. In these performances, elements of music, sound and visual arts were included to add to the dramatic content of the theater performances. In subsequent developments, *Gamelan* traditional musical instruments began to be played separately as song accompaniment [1]. *Gamelan* is also used as a tool for education and research. In various educational institutions, *gamelan* is taught to teach musical skills, study music theory, and train musical hearing[3]. To this day, *gamelan* continues to be preserved through education, art performances, and cultural activities both domestically and internationally. Its existence has also received international recognition as a valuable world cultural heritage.

The lack of youth interest in *gamelan* may be due to several factors. One is the dominance of popular culture and modern music that is more accessible through digital media and social platforms. Traditional music like *gamelan* is often seen as less relevant to the lifestyles and preferences of today’s younger generation. In addition, limited space for expression and the lack of *gamelan* introduction in educational and social environments have

resulted in a lack of emotional connection and knowledge among youth. On the other hand, *gamelan* is often perceived as old-fashioned and incompatible with current trends, discouraging youth from exploring or learning about it further.

Gamelan is not merely an art form; it represents the cultural identity of the Javanese people and symbolizes harmony, togetherness, and a balanced way of life. Preserving *gamelan* is also essential to maintaining national cultural diversity amid globalization, which tends to homogenize values and tastes. Amidst the increasing challenges of modernization and globalization, the preservation of traditional arts such as *gamelan* has become very important [4]. Without proper efforts, *gamelan* is at risk of extinction, and future generations could lose a vital part of their heritage and identity. To preserve *gamelan* and pass it on to the younger generation in the modern era, approaches that align with the interests and lifestyles of today's youth are needed. One effective strategy is integrating *gamelan* into the education curriculum, from elementary to university levels. This would allow students to become familiar with *gamelan* early on, not only as a traditional musical instrument but also as part of their cultural identity. Art in the context of formal education plays an important role in the advancement of national culture. Art is also present in non-formal and informal education, which can play a role in maintaining balance in the dynamic flow of time, as each era has an impact on national culture (Kristanto, 2022). Additionally, digital media such as videos, animations, and social media can be used to introduce *gamelan* in engaging and accessible ways.

In addition to its role in cultural preservation, *gamelan* also has great potential as an effective tool for cultural diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy can shape a country's image, fostering trust in the country's achievements and potential, which in turn will influence national interests in various fields, such as economics, politics, and, most importantly, the country's image will become more positive, as seen from the large number of people who follow the culture of that country [5]. Through *gamelan* performances in various countries, Indonesia can introduce its rich culture to the international community while building a positive image in the eyes of the world. This cultural diplomacy not only strengthens international relations but also opens up a space for respectful intercultural dialogue. Many Indonesian embassies abroad have utilized *gamelan* as part of their cultural promotion programs, and some foreign universities have even established *gamelan* classes as part of their world music studies. Thus, *gamelan* is not merely a local cultural heritage but also a bridge of communication between nations that can strengthen Indonesia's position on the international stage.

Based on the background explanation regarding the preservation of *gamelan* culture, the researchers were interested in discussing the preserving of *gamelan* as a Javanese cultural heritage is essential through formal education, digital media utilization, and collaboration with modern music to ensure its relevance and appeal to younger generations [6]. This research aims to determine the level of awareness and interest among young people in *gamelan* as a traditional Javanese cultural heritage. It also seeks to identify factors contributing to the lack of youth interest in *gamelan* amidst the rise of popular culture and modern technology. Moreover, the study examines how education, digital media, and cultural communities can serve as effective platforms to involve youth in *gamelan* preservation efforts. Furthermore, it aims to formulate creative strategies and approaches to encourage youth engagement in preserving *gamelan* in ways relevant to their current lifestyle.

This research is significant in supporting efforts to preserve *gamelan* culture in today's digital era. Specifically, it contributes practically by promoting *gamelan* preservation through formal education, such as incorporating *gamelan* into school curricula or extracurricular activities that actively involve students. Additionally, it highlights the great potential of using social media as an effective platform closely tied to young people's daily lives, making *gamelan* promotion and education more engaging and accessible. Furthermore, the collaboration between *gamelan* and modern music is also a focal point of this study, serving as a cultural innovation to bridge the musical tastes of youth with traditional values. Thus, this research is expected to serve as a basis for designing relevant, creative, and sustainable *gamelan* preservation strategies.

Collective identity theory explains how a group of people forms a sense of togetherness and awareness of shared goals, values, and struggles. This identity does not emerge spontaneously, but rather is formed through social interaction, communication, and shared experiences within a specific context [7]. Collective identity serves as the psychological and social foundation for group members to feel a sense of belonging, contribute to, and advocate for shared values. The formation of collective identity can also be explained through Serge Moscovici's theory of social representation. In this theory, identity is formed through the dissemination of social knowledge through communication and interaction. Two important processes are anchoring (introducing new concepts to make them feel familiar) and objectification (transforming abstract ideas into concrete, easily understood concepts). Through these two processes, the collective values of a social movement are embodied in norms, symbols, or concrete actions that strengthen the group [8]. Youth movements have strong potential to protect and revive local culture in the face of modernization. According to Alberto Melucci's collective identity theory, these movements are not just about taking action, but also about building a shared identity through interaction, symbolic communication, and a common understanding of the values they defend [9]. In the face of globalization and modernization, traditional cultural heritage like *gamelan* is under threat. As future leaders, young people have an important role in keeping these traditions alive. This growing awareness can be seen among students from the

Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences (FISE) at Universitas Respati Yogyakarta (UNRIYO), who believe that youth should lead efforts to preserve local culture.

Their view aligns with collective identity theory and the spirit of youth movements, where young people are not just passive receivers of tradition, but active participants in cultural preservation. Through shared values and experiences, they form a collective identity that motivates action. When FISE UNRIYO's students show concern for *gamelan*, they are building a youth-driven cultural movement that reflects a deeper identity transformation from learning about culture to making it part of who they are and what they stand for.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to explore how young people contribute to preserving gamelan in the modern era. This method helps the researcher understand the views, experiences, and actions of youth in cultural preservation, especially among students at FISE UNRIYO who are active in arts and cultural activities. The research took place in June 2025, and participants were selected through purposive sampling, meaning they were chosen because they matched the research goals. Data was collected through interviews, observation, and literature review. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three students in a relaxed setting to gather insights about their motivations and efforts in preserving gamelan. A literature review supported the study with information from books, journals, and articles related to gamelan, cultural preservation, and youth involvement. The data analysis followed three steps: data reduction (sorting out relevant information), data presentation (organizing findings in narrative form), and drawing conclusions (identifying key patterns and insights). Direct quotes from respondents were included to strengthen the results. Overall, this method offers a clear understanding of how FISE UNRIYO students help preserve gamelan in the face of modernization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the data was collected and based on the data, all respondents can be stated that they have a basic knowledge of *gamelan* as a traditional Javanese musical instrument, assess that young people's interest in playing or knowing *gamelan* is currently low, and agree that the role of young people is very important in preserving *gamelan*, both through direct involvement in cultural events and the use of technology and social media.

A. Basic Knowledge of Gamelan

Gamelan is a traditional Indonesian musical art form composed of a set of percussion instruments such as *gong*, *kenong*, *bonang*, *saron*, and *kendang*. UNESCO recognized *gamelan* as a *Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity* in 2014[10]. As a symbol of Javanese culture, *gamelan* holds not only aesthetic value but also philosophical and spiritual meaning. However, changing times pose major challenges to *gamelan*'s existence. Urbanization, globalization, and the influx of popular culture have led to a decline in youth interest in traditional arts such as *gamelan*. Therefore, adaptive preservation strategies using creative and modern approaches are required, especially by youth.

Understanding *gamelan* is important because it is more than just a traditional musical instrument, it symbolizes Javanese cultural identity, carrying historical, philosophical, and artistic values passed down through generations. *Gamelan* plays a key role in traditional ceremonies, art, and social events[11]. By learning about *gamelan*, young people can appreciate their cultural roots and help prevent the loss of heritage in the face of globalization and foreign influences. This knowledge also opens the door to creative innovations, such as blending *gamelan* with digital media or modern performances, making it more appealing and accessible to today's audience. Mastering basic knowledge of *gamelan* is a crucial first step in preserving and revitalizing national culture. The study shows that students recognize *gamelan* as part of Javanese art and identity. They don't see it as something outdated, but as a living tradition that reflects important values. For them, preserving local culture is not just about honoring the past, but also about shaping the identity and character of the younger generation.

Some statement from respondent:

Sepengetahuan saya, gamelan adalah alat musik tradisional asal jawa. gamelan juga bermacam macam, seperti gendang, gong, dsb. biasanya gamelan digunakan untuk acara seni jawa seperti jatilan, ketoprak, dll. biasanya gamelan disimpan di tempat tertentu dan dirawat supaya tetap bertahan sebagai alat musik tradisional yang awet hingga masa depan dan seterusnya (To my knowledge, *gamelan* is a traditional musical instrument from Java. *gamelan* also has various kinds, such as *drums*, *gongs*, etc. usually *gamelan* is used for Javanese art events such as *jatilan*, *ketoprak*, etc. usually *gamelan* is stored in a certain place and maintained so that it survives as a traditional musical instrument that lasts until the future and beyond).

B. Youth's Interest is Still Low

Youth are agents of change with energy, creativity, and great influence in society. According to *the National Population and Family Planning Agency* (BKKBN), youth aged 16–30 years constitute a dominant demographic group and have the potential to shape new culture while preserving the old [12]. A study by BKKBN showed that young people involved in cultural activities such as traditional music tend to have a stronger sense of cultural identity[13]. Therefore, youth involvement is crucial in bridging traditional cultural preservation with modern trends.

Young people's interest in *gamelan* remains low for several reasons. First, globalization and technology have shifted their attention to modern trends like international pop music and digital activities. Second, *gamelan* is

often seen as old-fashioned and not trendy, making it less appealing. Third, many think playing *gamelan* is difficult and expensive, requiring special skills or courses. Also, since *gamelan* is rarely used in daily life and mostly appears at special events, young people have limited chances to experience it. Respondents agreed that interest among youth in learning or playing *gamelan* is still quite low. A respondent said:

Menurut saya, kenapa anak muda sekarang kurang minat dalam memainkan ataupun mengenal gamelan iyalah, arus globalisasi. Dimana sekarang internet mendunia, anak" muda lebih cenderung fokus pada dunia digital hal-hal baru yang mereka temui sesuai tren sekarang. Budaya populer dari luar yang masuk ke Indonesia, seperti alat-alat musik. Jadi anak-anak muda sekarang lebih tertarik dengan dunia luar ketimbang sesuatu disekitar mereka (In my opinion, why young people now lack interest in playing or knowing *gamelan* is, of course, globalization. Where now the internet is worldwide, young people are more likely to focus on the digital world of new things they encounter according to current trends. Popular culture from outside that enters Indonesia, such as musical instruments. So young people are now more interested in the outside world than something around them).

C. The Role of Youth in Preserving Gamelan

Cultural preservation refers to systematic efforts to maintain specific cultural values, practices, and expressions so they remain alive and relevant in society. According to Koentjaraningrat (2009), cultural preservation can take three forms: preservation of objects (artifacts), cultural practices (such as performing arts), and values (ethos, norms, and beliefs). In the modern era, cultural preservation is not only carried out by formal institutions but also requires active participation from the community, especially the younger generation [14].

Modernization presents challenges such as changing musical tastes, the dominance of popular culture, and the declining interest of young people in *gamelan*. Many teenagers prefer digital music and instant entertainment available on platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Spotify[15]. Technology also offers new ways to promote *gamelan* to a wider audience, such as through collaborations with modern music, virtual concerts, and social media content. Reviving *gamelan* can involve interactive methods like digital *gamelan*, online lessons, and adding it to school curriculums [2]. These innovations are best driven by tech-savvy youth with an interest in arts and culture. The study shows that most FISE UNRIYO's students are highly aware of the importance of *gamelan* as part of local heritage. They see *gamelan* not just as a traditional instrument, but as a symbol of Javanese identity with deep artistic, spiritual, and historical meaning. Students believe youth have a vital role in preserving *gamelan*, especially in the face of modernization and global cultural influences. Young people play a key role in preserving *gamelan* as they are the future of cultural continuity. They can get involved by learning to play *gamelan*, joining cultural events like performances or festivals, and using social media to promote it through videos, posts, or educational content. This helps *gamelan* reach a wider audience, especially other young people. Joining art communities or cultural groups also allows them to share knowledge and experiences. These efforts help keep *gamelan* alive and appreciated by future generations.

A respondent said:

Mungkin anak muda pecinta & kreator musik bisa memadukan gamelan dengan lagu-lagu pop modern, ataupun dengan genre musik lainnya (Maybe young music lovers & creators can combine *gamelan* with modern pop songs, or with other music genres).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that although youth generally have basic knowledge about *gamelan* as a traditional Javanese musical instrument, their interest in actively learning or playing *gamelan* remains relatively low. This lack of enthusiasm is influenced by globalization, technological advancement, and the popularity of modern culture, which tend to shift young people's preferences toward contemporary music and digital entertainment. Nevertheless, the study highlights that the youth movement plays a pivotal role in cultural preservation and as the next generation, youth are not only responsible for maintaining but also revitalizing cultural heritage.

Through collective actions such as forming communities, organizing cultural events, and integrating *gamelan* into modern platforms and music genres, youth movements can transform *gamelan* into a more engaging and relevant part of contemporary society. Furthermore, by using digital media to promote *gamelan*, young people are able to bridge tradition and modernity, ensuring that cultural heritage is preserved and appreciated in the global era. In this way, the youth movement becomes a central force in cultural preservation, where active participation, creativity, and innovation are key strategies to sustain *gamelan*'s existence in the modern world.

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