

21st Century Innovation in Music Education

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ROUTLEDGE


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21st Century Innovation in Music Education

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Kuadai dance music and symbolic meaning as a medium for early childhood learning

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ABSTRACT: *Kuadai* dance represents the collective expression of the role of women as a source of life in the Semende community. This paper examines the symbolic meanings in *Kuadai* performances and their musical accompaniment as a medium for early childhood learning. The study adopted an interdisciplinary approach and employed qualitative methodology to collect observational, interview, and documentary data. The results showed that *Kuadai* dance embodies values of gentleness, patience and circumspection that can be effectively instilled in young children.

1 INTRODUCTION

Kuadai dance is part of the cultural repertoire of the Semende community (*Jeme Semende*) of Lampung Province, Sumatra, Indonesia. *Kuadai* is a traditional dance representing the daily activities of Semende women and involves the use of plates held by the dancers. It is performed as a form of respect to important guests. This dance is intended to portray the inner strength in the body of female dancers. As well as a vehicle of communication, it is also a vehicle for the collective expression of the Semende community, especially that of women, who are seen as a source of life and fertility (Karnate, pers. com., 2018). According to Hartono (2016: 36), dance essentially functions as a medium of self-expression that derives from ideas, experiences, surroundings and feelings. Various aspects of *Kuadai* dance performances, such as movements, props, accompaniment and floor patterns, symbolize the rhythm of life of Semende women. The aim of this study was to analyse the symbolic meanings embedded in the performance of *Kuadai* dance and its musical accompaniment in the Semende Lampung community as a learning medium for early childhood.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Kuadai dance is one of various symbolic forms created by the Semende community. It can be interpreted as a cultural product that is closely related to the social life of the community. Dance is a representation of the beliefs and practices of daily life (Indrayuda, 2015). *Kuadai* dance, it has been suggested, can be seen to fulfill the basic human need for symbolic expression (Pujiyanti, 2013). *Kuadai* dance is a sociocultural expression of the traditions of an agrarian society. It is performed to the accompaniment of slow tempo music and singing. The music contains symbolic values that children learn from an early age (Suryana, pers. com.).

According to Blanariu (2013), the cultural system of conventions in dance can be interpreted by encoding choreographic signs. These codes represent “natural” spontaneity of repeated movements and feelings in the expression. Similarly, Kusumastuti (2009) proposed that the form and content of symbols contain meaning. Art develops as a result of the expression and creativity of the people who own it (Ardin et al., 2017). Symbols can be viewed as signs that reflect values and meanings (Langer (2006). The meanings of symbols are established through social agreement or historical tradition (Danesi (2010). The socially symbolic elements of *Kuadai* dance are expressed through the aesthetics of the female body.

2.1 *Kuadai* dance

Dance can be seen as a repertoire or presentation of performances that result from creative processes as a means of communicating experience (Jazuli, 2016). *Kuadai* is a solo dance performed by a Semende woman as an expression of respect and gratitude to the community's king or leader. It is characterised by two forms of movement: *sembah adat* (customary worship), which includes a variety of traditional actions of worship (*sejurai*, *bai tangan*, and *jain-jit*); and movements of the hand that supports a plate with the thumb. The latter is the hallmark of *Kuadai* dance, and can be classified as a gesture that conveys meaningful symbols (Arisyanto et al, 2017). The dance involves the use of 14 plates and lasts seven minutes. It is accompanied by tambourines and poetry chanted in the Semende language. The *Kuadai* costume is typical of the clothing worn by Semende women and is characteristic of ethnic Palembang Malay culture. Currently, *Kuadai* is performed as entertainment at welcoming events.

2.2 *Symbolic meaning of Kuadai*

Art in its various forms can be used to develop character in early childhood. Wahyu (2013), for instance, has shown how *Jarog* dance is used in this way to increase children's self-confidence. Learning to dance can help to develop several different forms of intelligence, including kinesthetic, linguistic, intrapersonal, natural, interpersonal, and spatial intelligence. *Kuadai* dance performances present symbolic meanings (Kusumastuti, 2009) related to the life of the Semende community that can be instilled in children from an early age. The symbolic aspects of *Kuadai* dance are apparent in various elements, including movement, props, accompaniment, stage performance, composition, floor patterns, makeup and clothing (Hadi, 2005). The objects in the performance represent specific aspects of the everyday life of the Semende community (Putri et al., 2015).

The traditional life of this farming community revolves around waiting for *tubang* (pinned). The reliance on agriculture for its livelihood is reflected in the emphasis on fertility symbols, which takes the form of female figures. In Semende culture, the plate represents women, who must be treated gently, carefully, lovingly and reverently. This form of dance imitates the tradition of waiting for *tubang* that is visualized through the strength, patience and familial devotion of Semende women.



Figure 1. *Kuadai* performance.
(Source: Amelia 2018)

Semende society has creatively combined these two concepts into a performance art that symbolizes respect, which is a condition for beauty. As Ardin et al. (2017) have observed, art grows and develops as a result of the expression and creativity of the people who own it. The matrilineal culture of Semende society influences the attitudes and social behavior of Semende women. *Kuadai* dance in this mountain community emphasises both content and context. This is reflected in its static movements, emotional stability and care and its focus on the feelings and strength that come from within the dancer's heart. Semende society is simultaneously human and symbolic. People are free to act, think and make their own decisions.

A cultural system contains four symbolic devices, each of which has its own function for the human being who interacts with them: constitutive symbols, which are manifested as beliefs and are usually the core of religion; cognitive symbols, which represent scientific thinking; symbols of moral judgment in the form of values and rules; and expressive symbols (Fretisari, 2016). The expression of these symbolic devices in *Kuadai* dance will be discussed in relation to the performance elements of motion, props, floor patterns.

2.3 Symbolic meaning of *Kuadai* dance movements

The movements in *Kuadai* dance have meanings that are understood and embodied in Semende community life. *Kuadai* dance comprises two main types of movements—those that convey meaning, often called meaningful motion, and those that only emphasize aesthetic values, or so-called pure motion (Tyas, 2018). This analysis focuses on those movements that contain symbols and meanings. The structure of the *Kuadai* dance movement pattern has two parts: *sembah adat* (customary prayer) and *diatakak*. In the customary prayer section, the dancer begins in a kneeling position, moves with both knees and continues with a Balinese-style motion. On the part of the crepe begins with the movement of a triangle, then the dancer moves her hand while slowly rising to stand and performing a *jainjit* motion.

2.4 *Sembah adat* movement

The traditional prayer movement is performed in a sitting position with the palms held together in front of the chest and fingertips facing up. The seated posture symbolizes respect and humility. The two hands placed together symbolize unity of heart and mind. The downward gaze is a symbol of obedience and submission. Overall, the movement conveys two meanings: first, it is a sign of respect for the king, the traditional leader, older people and the audience; second, it means that women in Semende society have responsibility for protecting the family, supporting the family unit and resolving differences among family members.

2.5 *Bale'k*

Bale'k is performed in a kneeling position with both palms supporting a plate. The various movements convey two key symbolic meanings. First, it symbolises heaven and earth, which must remain in balance and still perform as one unit. This means that Semende society must have harmony and balance between inner feelings and outward behaviour. Second, it symbolises the identity of the Semende people who strongly adhere to the customs and culture of their Malay tribe. Semende people are known as tribes of nomads, but they still maintain and use

2.6 *Sejurai* movement

Sejurai involves the movement in which the two thumbs support the plates with the hands held in front of the chest, then the plates are brought together to generate a *teng* sound. *Sejurai* is a symbol of combining the right and left sides into one unit. It means that the Semende community traditionally has a single fulcrum for good and evil. It's was known as the *Bemeraje Anak Belai* custom. *Bemeraje Anak Belai* was the most important institution in

Semende social structure, focusing on family support for *Tunggu Tubang* and *Meraje*. Its deeper meaning is that all family members, wherever they are, will return to the home of the *Tunggu Tubang* and *Merajelah*, which is used as the support of the extended family for all the decisions and good things that have happened.

2.7 *Bai tangan movement*

Bai tangan is the movement of the two thumbs supporting the plates with the hand beside the shoulder. The hand movement represents the female figure as a symbol of strength and fertility (*Tunggu Tubang*). The symbol of strength is interpreted as a female figure who is responsible for feeding her family, caring for their physical needs and maintaining their property. Women are identified as the source of life and fertility that gives birth to the next generation. The role of *Tunggu Tubang* is to pass on Semende cultural values to the next generation and to teach the roles they are expected to perform.

2.8 *Jainjit movement*

The *jainjit* movement involves stepping on tiptoe between one plate and another. This movement symbolizes the nomadic nature of Semende society. Historically, the Semende community farmed an area of agricultural land as long as it was fertile, usually about 10 years, then moved on to another area (Interview with Suandi, 2018). Hence in Semende society the *Jainjit* movement means life balance and good decision-making. This custom of migration required *jeme* Semende to be able to be environmentally and socially adaptable, maintaining a balance between rights and obligations in life in order to keep the society grounded in goodness and truth.

3 METHOD

The study was conducted in Sekipi Village, Abung Tinggi District, North Lampung Regency. An interdisciplinary qualitative methodology was employed. Observational, interview, and documentary data were collected. Observations were made of *Kuadai* dance performances, including the role of the dancer and teacher, and of the daily activities of the Semende community. Interviews were conducted with performers, instructors, traditional leaders, arts coordinators, and village residents. A range of documents was also collected, including photos and video recordings of *Kuadai* dance performances, scholarly and news reports on *Kuadai* dance, accounts of the research location and other resources. Validity was established based on the credibility of the data and the use of triangulation. The data were analysed using the techniques developed by Gertrude Prokosch Kurath in her research, which focuses on the symbols and meanings contained in dance.

4 FINDING AND DISCUSSION

4.1 *Dance props as a medium for early childhood learning*

The plate is an important medium of expression in *Kudai* dance, where it is used both as a dance prop and a stage prop (Jazuli (2016). As a dance prop, it is moved in both hands. As a stage prop, it is placed in front of the dancer, who steps on it. For Semende women, plates symbolise their responsibility for providing and presenting food to their families. Plates are used as a medium for early childhood learning using a play approach, in which young children learn that a plate is a tool used for daily meals. In dancing, plates are a symbol of the Semende's farming livelihood. Children are introduced to the idea that the plate represents food as a basic need that is close to the source of life; in this case, women are the source of life because they have a uterus. In Semende culture, the plate thus symbolises the mother who must be respected and treated gently, carefully and lovingly.

4.2 Floor pattern as a medium for early childhood learning

The *kuadai* dance floor pattern involves circular shapes and straight lines. This pattern symbolises the environment of this agrarian society, which is characterised by slopes and hills. These symbols mean that humans must be submissive to or in harmony with nature. The interaction between humans and nature will go well if there is a balance between them. This floor pattern can be taught in early childhood to develop a positive attitude towards movement in order to ensure optimal physical growth.

4.3 Accompaniment of Kudai dance as a medium for early childhood education

Based on Lontoh et al. (2016) research, the poem Syaiful Anam is a functional aesthetic need for the supporting community. The lyrics of the musical accompaniment (*Dundai*) to the *Kuadai* dance also convey meaning. *Kuadai* dance is accompanied by poetry in the Semende language, or *dundai*, which means 'lively'. *Dundai* is both an accompaniment to the performance and a special prayer. The lyrics (shown in Table 1) could be effectively used as a learning medium in early childhood.

Dundai tells of a mother who wants her child's personality to shine like a diamond. She would be ashamed if her child was not an asset for his or her parents, family, religion and society. There are various ways of obtaining such a "diamond". These include praying and teaching the child to avoid heresy and become close to God. Such expectations, directed towards children, are visualized in the special figure of the *Kuadai* dancer.

The form of the *Dundai* poem makes it suitable for use as a learning medium in early childhood, since the music and words are lively. The poem can teach young children to always be gentle and confident. The accompaniment to a *Kuadai* performance creates an atmosphere by

Table 1. Lyrics of Dundai.

Lirik <i>Dundai</i>	English
<i>Ulan Nuli Tembaga</i>	<i>Hope of copper</i>
<i>Sayang Sekirah Layu.</i>	<i>Do not let it wither</i>
<i>Dindanglah Dindang</i>	<i>Resounding echoed</i>
<i>Ulan Nuli Tembaga</i>	<i>Expectations of copper</i>
<i>Sayang Intan Dik Dapat</i>	<i>It's a pity diamond if it's not obtained</i>
<i>Badan Dik Malu</i>	<i>Your body will be embarrassed</i>
<i>Dindanglah Dindang</i>	<i>Resounding echoed</i>
<i>Bunga Pandan</i>	<i>Pandanus flowers</i>
<i>Bersuling Dani</i>	<i>Soft flute</i>
<i>Asap Kemenyan</i>	<i>Incense smoke</i>
<i>Memanggil Dewe (2x)</i>	<i>Call God</i>
<i>Sayang Kemane</i>	<i>Where are you going?</i>
<i>Nyandarkan Badan</i>	<i>Leaning body</i>
<i>Nyandarkan Badan</i>	<i>Leaning body</i>
<i>Kepade Dewe</i>	<i>To God</i>
 <i>Kapal Api Menuju Rembang</i>	 <i>The fire ship headed for Rembang</i>
<i>Sampai Dirembang Menukar Uang</i>	<i>Arriving at Rembang exchanged money</i>
<i>Sangkan Hati Selalu Ribang</i>	<i>The heart is always happy</i>
<i>Sanggulan Ading Berisi Kembang</i>	<i>Sister hair bun contains flowers</i>
<i>Aik Rawang Bergenai Rawang</i>	<i>The water is stagnant</i>
<i>Gadis Sekini La Turun Mandi</i>	<i>A girl will go down in the shower</i>
<i>Sikur Hilang</i>	<i>One is gone</i>
<i>Sikur La Melayang</i>	<i>The others floated</i>
<i>Sikur Mbak Kumbang</i>	<i>One hope is as big as a beetle</i>
<i>Lah Putus Tali</i>	<i>Don't get disconnected too</i>

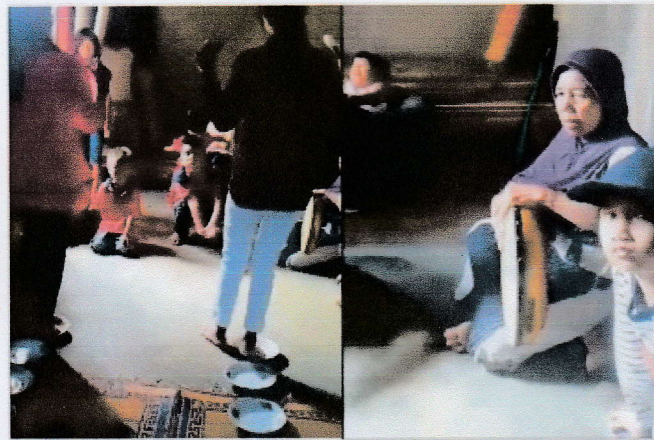


Figure 2. *Kuadai* is taught to preschoolers.
(Source: Amelia, 2018)

emphasising shifts and patterns of movement. A *Kuadai* dance lasts seven minutes and is accompanied by a tambourine-like musical instrument and a poem in Semende. The movements of the dancers are in harmony with the slow tempo of the musical accompaniment. These qualities can instill in young children the values of gentleness, patience, kindness and circumspection in one's behavior.

The symbolic meanings of *Kuadai* dance are conveyed in movement, poetry, floor patterns, and music. Through habituation, these meanings can be taught in early childhood. The movements teach children to be strong, responsible, patient and circumspect. The poetry teaches them to be gentle, patient, circumspect and good. The tambourine music creates enthusiasm and a caring attitude. The floor pattern teaches children to be physically active for optimal growth.

5 CONCLUSION

Kuadai dance is a means of early childhood education that utilises movement, music (*Dundai*), props (plates) and floor patterns to guide children to be gentle, polite, responsible, patient and circumspect. It also plays a role in optimizing children's growth and development and encouraging them to be actively engaged and enthusiastic in their daily activities. These qualities are instilled from an early age through habituation.

Aspects of the form (text) of *Kuadai* dance performances can be seen to have educational value. Analysis of the symbolic elements of the performance discussed indicates that the embedded meanings can be taught in early childhood. Furthermore, the implication for early childhood, First, constructive symbols are evident in the customary prayer movement as a means of connecting a child to God. Children learn to uphold noble traditions of respect for their elders and other people, which are core Islamic values.

Second, the symbols that form the science of *Kuadai* dance are found in movement, poetry, floor patterns, and music. The meanings contained in these elements can be taught in early childhood through a process of habituation. The movements teach children to be strong, responsible, patient and circumspect in their behavior. The poetry teaches children to be gentle, patient circumspect and good. The tambourine music creates enthusiasm and a caring attitude. The floor pattern teaches children to be physically active for optimal growth.

Third, symbols of morality are evident in the choreography, teaching children from an early age to respect others, uphold traditional customs and culture, maintain a balanced life by caring for their family and fellow citizens, and to have patience and perseverance.

Fourth, as a symbol of expressive disclosure, *Kudai* teaches that each child is unique and should continue to learn to improve their particular abilities.

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