

## Weaving educational and cultural values through traditional games at the *Nglarak Blarak* Festival

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### ABSTRACT

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The *Nglarak Blarak* Cultural Festival held in Kulon Progo Yogyakarta serves as a strong response to issues faced in safeguarding the traditional games and culture amid the threats posed by globalization. This research seeks to understand how *Nglarak Blarak* Cultural Festival upholds and passes on local cultural practices, thereby arguing for the role of traditional games in the broader context of culture, education and socialization processes. A cultural ethnography approach was used, involving participatory observation during the 2023 festival, in-depth interviews with 28 participants (organizers, teachers, parents, and children), and documentary analysis of promotional materials and activity reports. One-on-one interactions with the festival organizers, participants as well as local community members aimed at comprehending what such games mean and their significance in the context of the culture. Such findings indicate that traditional games like *egrang*, *dingklik ogek*, and *gerobak sodor* are not only for fun but serve several other purposes, including the development of child's multiple intelligence, social relations and culture through play. It also allows children to bond with their parents, so this is a method of culture in practice and children learn how to cooperate, play fair, and have discipline. Given the popularity of global culture, mass media and technological products, the festival offers an innovative way of cultural promotion aimed at appealing to young generations. The research concludes that these types of cultural festivals are important tools for retention of regional customs, strengthening of community spirit, and protection of cultural heritage in the fast changing social environment.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The *Nglarak Blarak* Cultural Festival is one of the critical efforts made by local communities to preserve Indonesia's traditional games from fading away. These games serve not only as recreational activities but also as informal educational tools that foster a sense of community, collaboration, and respect for customs. However, despite their significance, there are limited studies documenting and analyzing the impact of traditional games within social, cultural, and educational frameworks. This gap in research highlights the need for a comprehensive exploration of how such games contribute to both cultural preservation and

educational development. Therefore, this study aims to strengthen the literature on traditional games in the context of preserving culture and supporting education, specifically through cultural festivals like the *Nglarak Blarak* Festival.

Every traditional game passed down from generation to generation forms an integral part of Indonesia's rich and diverse cultural heritage. It is imperative to continue preserving these traditions, as Yudhotono (2009) emphasizes the essential role of government in maintaining Indonesia's cultural diversity. Additionally, Lidyasari et al. (2023) stress that traditional games, which are unique to each region across the archipelago, should be preserved so they do not fade away with time. Regiana et al. (2020) and Syafriadi et al. (2021) further argue that Indonesia's cultural wealth must be nurtured and developed for future generations to appreciate and sustain.

The importance of imparting cultural values through traditional games to the younger generation cannot be overstated. Traditional games serve as a medium to shape positive character traits in children, such as honesty, discipline, cooperation, and spirit (Regiana et al., 2020; Muzayanah et al., 2021; Triansyah, 2023). Cultural festivals are among the most effective platforms for introducing and preserving these games, helping them resonate with younger audiences. However, the challenge lies in introducing and increasing the popularity of these traditional games among today's youth. Thus, cultural festivals offer a practical solution to this problem, and the *Nglarak Blarak* Festival stands as an exemplary model for such efforts.

In Purworejo Province, one traditional culture that moves from west to east is *Nglarak Blarak*. The *Nglarak Blarak* traditional tourism programme functions as an essential medium for preserving this cultural practice, where local communities engage in traditional games and showcase their cultural heritage to the public. This festival enables direct transmission of these traditions from generation to generation, making it a critical event for cultural sustainability.

This research will utilize a cultural and educational ethnography approach to analyze the preservation of traditional performances at the *Nglarak Blarak* Cultural Festival. Drawing on the works of Syafriadi et al. (2021), Muzayanah et al. (2021), Lidyasari et al. (2023), and Najiah & Jamaludi (2023), this study aims to document and evaluate the significance of traditional games in both cultural and educational contexts.

The primary goal of this research is to examine how the *Nglarak Blarak* Festival serves as a preservation tool for traditional games while simultaneously contributing to children's education through interactive cultural practices. Additionally, this research aims to identify the role of these games in promoting community cohesion and cultural respect among participants.

This study builds upon the cultural preservation theories as proposed by Yudhotono (2009), Lidyasari et al. (2023), and the educational theories surrounding character building

and informal learning as discussed by Regiana et al. (2020) and Muzayanah et al. (2021). It also integrates cultural ethnography as a method of understanding the dynamics of cultural transmission and the role of festivals in educating the younger generation.

The study expects to highlight the value of cultural festivals as an effective medium for preserving traditional games and fostering intergenerational cultural transmission. It also aims to offer recommendations for further improving the educational impact of such festivals, particularly for younger audiences, while reinforcing the importance of cultural identity and social values in a modernizing world.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The primary objective of this research is to identify the strategies for the preservation of traditional games using culture-based approaches through the study of the *Nglarak Blarak* Culture Festival in Kulon Progo Regency, Central Java. Collecting primary data was done in depth through literature study and document analysis such as brochures and video and photo documentation relating to the festival, as well as activity reports. Subsequent to this, data was descriptively analysed with an ethnographic cultural focus. This analysis sought to extract the meaning, values, and functions of traditional games in relation to the local community, the educational value of the festival, and examine how the festival contributes to the character shaping process to the participants (Kurniati et al., 2020; Djunaid et al., 2022). Having conducted this analysis, the aim of this study was achieved, where the analysis looked for effective strategies in preserving traditional games through culture-based festivals and identified other ways and means for the development and utilisation of traditional games as innovative teaching tools (Dewantara & Krisnadi, 2017).

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Conceptualisation of *Nglarak Blarak*

*Nglarak Blarak* Festival is one of the best ways to celebrate the rich culture and tradition of Kulon Progo in Yogyakarta. Every year it is refreshing to see this festival being inaugurated with the villagers setting out from the surrounding areas of Kulon Progo. Villagers used to sell *blarak* (coconut fronds) in the local market and this activity has become a craze which is now a festival. Children, as well as the next generations, are able to witness the beauty of traditional games along with culture.



**Figure1. Nglarak Blarak Festival, Kulon Progo**

Source: Author Documentation (2024)

### The Importance of *Nglarak Blarak* Festival in the Protection of Culture

From this research, it can be concluded that the Festival *Nglarak Blarak* has meaning in preserving the culture and the dances in Kulon Progo. With the support of this festival, children and teenagers are familiarised with traditional games such as *egrang*, *dingklik ogek*, *gobak sodor* and they actually practise it (Pangestika, 2021; Puspitasari et al., 2021; Fajriani et al., 2022). This process teaches not only the physical aspects of the traditional games but also the socio-cultural construct which is embedded in them such as teamwork, sportsmanship and being innovative (Fajriani et al., 2022).



**Figure 2. Traditional Games as *Egrang* (left), *Dingklik Ogek* (up right), and *Gobak Sodor* (down right).**

Sources: Amalia (2023), Anonymus (2020, 2022)

In addition, *Nglarak Blarak* Festival assists in the preservation and enhancement of the culture of the local people. People are during the festival given the opportunity to participate in the local traditional dances, songs, food, and they actually feel proud, so that they develop a positive sense of community ownership (Bastaman & Saputra, 2023).

### Function of Festivals in the Evaluation

This investigation also revealed the vulnerability of the *Nglarak Blarak* Festival as a tool of learning media for children. Participation in various traditional games helps children in non-technical aspects, such as motor skills, creativity, and social interaction (Fajriani et al, 2022). In fact, several schools in Kulon Progo have incorporated this festival into their teaching programmes to help market local culture in the local culture teaching to cultivate students' character (Wibowo & Pranata, 2020; Utama et al., 2021).

In any case, hawkers trying to promote and sustain traditional games through the *Nglarak Blarak* Festival are confronted with challenges, especially the issues dealing with the interest of young people towards local culture with respect to the onslaught of global pop culture. It is therefore necessary to search for new ideas that can be used to present the festival in a way that still catches the interest of children and teenagers and integrates traditional culture into modern popular technology (Waluyo, 2017; Pangestika, 2021).

### Tools and Materials of *Nglarak Blarak* Game

As part of the player's culture in a specific ethnic group, the *Nglarak Blarak* game utilises instructional aids and materials which for the purpose of enhancing learning through a fun construction play. In this sense, APE or *alat peraga* educative which refers to educational equipment is critical because it can be made from local materials that are inexpensive and eco-friendly.

Unfinished work WU is also known as EGT which refers to a preschool educational game and has been known as one of the most affordable and efficient ways to enrich the knowledge of preschool children (Hijriati, 2017; Hasanah et al., 2022; Faizah et al., 2020). It refers to tools for EPE which are used at different preschool centres. Tools and toys for educational purposes APE at preschool level can be made from unused waste materials, unrestricted spending use the funds, and instil a culture of innovation and recycling (Hijriati, 2017; 2021). For instance, we trained some mothers on how to create APE from household wares and it was shown that used packaging and refuse can be put to some good use (Hidayah et al., 2021).

The instruments are used in such a game *Blarak* dance. The materials used for the game of *Nglarak Blarak* can be different depending on the available source of creativity and inspiration. But, some of the commonly used materials to make APE include: used materials such as used cardboard, plastic bottles, and old clothes that can be transformed into creative and educational toys (Hasanah et al., 2022; Faizah et al., 2020); natural materials such as wood, leaves, and stones that can be utilised for making toys (Fasha, 2023; Puspitasari & Rahmawati, 2021); and simple materials such as papers, glue, and paints which serve the purpose of beautifying and decorating the toys (Muasmara et al., 2021).

Sain and Rosidah emphasised how the APE *Nglarak Blarak* has a more significant function than just entertaining children; it serves to nurture their cognitive, motor, social skills, and other development areas. It is evident that all APE has a constructive impact on children's, especially preschoolers, imagination and creativity through active social interaction (Sain et al., 2013; Rosidah, 2023). In the same way, training for teachers and parents on how to make APE was designed to enable them to appreciate the value of these materials in the child's development (Fasha, 2023; Puspitasari & Rahmawati, 2021; Mustika, 2021).

The coconut frond has important meaning in the context of *Nglarak Blarak*, which is a cultural area of the community. In the traditional game played by *Rerenggan*, the coconut frond is not just a playing tool but also embodies aspirations and is an aspect of culture that is respected by its practitioners. The coconut frond is almost always used as the main material in making *blarak*.



**Figure 3. Coconut Frond**

Source: IAINSU (2025)

The coconut frond is an easily obtainable material and suitable for various activities within the community. For instance, the coconut frond serves as a tool or medium for play that can enhance social interaction and children's creativity (Zainuri et al., 2019). The use of coconut fronds for play purposes demonstrates the efficiency of local materials whereby the community utilises what is available around them (Ardiani, 2023). Cultural Symbols and Identity, two. Aside from its functional aspect, the coconut frond has other symbolic meanings. Many customs even incorporate the frond, considering it as a part of nature that is always blessed amidst the diverse landscapes rendered by self-service work. Therefore, within the *Nglarak Blarak* realm, the coconut frond can be interpreted as not only stemming from the cultural heritage of the tribe or being a legacy.

As quoted from Jaring Acara.id, there are four players involved as rules. Three individuals will take the role of '*penarik blarak*' or coconut frond strippers, while another person

will be the rider, who will sit on the frond that the strippers will pull. The first action that a player involved in *Nglarak Blarak* performs is for the jockey to roll a container made from a woven basket (called *bumbung*) to the centre of the field, which is outlined by boundary lines.

As soon as the jockey rolls the basket, the strippers move. This aligns with the meaning of ' *Nglarak Blarak*' in Javanese as dragging the coconut frond, which forms part of the game mechanism. The prerequisite for this game is walking while pulling the palm frond, which has several riders seated inside a basket that the jockey rolls along the ground. This task is completed when the rider dismounts from the '*blarak*' and takes the basket with them like a backpack. After this, the jockey is required to remove coir growing on the surface of the ground. The coir that falls to the ground needs to be struck by the rider. The striking is done from behind in between the legs to clear the coir from the arena.

As the game begins, one of the players of *Nglarak Blarak* sets their piece to a player who has coconut fibre placed on their legs as footwear. Sandals, which resemble coconut-like footwear, must be worn while running or walking towards the midpoint. The game of *Nglarak Blarak* continues with one of the participants stepping into a container that is a large woven basket. Then she performs jumping jacks and runs while being trapped in the cage, similar to the sack racing game.

### **Cultural Meaning of Traditional Games as a Respected Heritage within the *Nglarak Blarak* Culture Festival**

From this perspective, it can be seen how various traditional games such as *engklek*, *dakon*, *gobak sodor*, and others played during the *Nglarak Blarak* Cultural Festival carry deeper meanings and values for the Kulon Progo community (Puspitasari et al., 2021; Fajriani et al., 2022). Considering their meanings in the context of culture, these games emphasise more significant values that include 'togetherness' or 'social interaction,' sportsmanship, and physical activity. In particular, the traditional games played during this festival are meaningful from the perspective of societal ideology, the expression of mythology, philosophy of traditions, and culture (Nurhidayat et al., 2023). For example, in the game of *dakon*, playing with beans depicts the cycle of human life, while *engklek* characterises different aspects of nature representing a balanced life. Children's participation in these traditional games is a multifaceted process. They do not just play; they learn to respect, to form an identity, and to love their culture and heritage.

### **Educational Activities in Traditional Games at the *Nglarak Blarak* Cultural Festival**

The *Nglarak Blarak* Cultural Festival not only showcases various existing cultures but also archives traditional games with the aim of the festival. Within the festival's programme, there are informal activities that have educational objectives, such as physical education

lessons (Batinoluho & Basera, 2022; Santoso & Oktavio 2024). Kicks, throwing movements, and jumping, also involve types of intelligence such as kinesthetic and interpersonal, logical-mathematical, and various other intelligences (Utama et al., 2021).

On the other hand, traditional games also impact a child's character, enabling them to collaborate, be disciplined, exhibit sportsmanship, and develop good socializing skills (Fajriani et al., 2022). In the *Nglarak Blarak* Cultural Festival, this activity is altruistic in the broadest sense, where children have the right to learn traditional games under the guidance of parents and teachers. By involving children, it is hoped that they will not only become acquainted with traditional games but also understand the educational use in teaching the values of character development.

The policy motivation to use cultural festivals as a means to promote traditional games has been successful in increasing society's awareness, particularly among the youth, regarding the importance and relevance of traditional games. One positive aspect of this festival is that it provides an excellent platform to showcase, practise, and preserve traditional games, thereby contributing to the development of respect and appreciation for local cultural heritage (Dewantara et al., 2024).

However, new problems persist such as the impact of global culture, the role of technology, and rising apathy among the younger generation. In this context, the situation underscores the necessity for more creative and innovative approaches, for instance, using digital technology to market and present traditional games in a more appealing manner to children.

## Discussion

This study contributes greatly to understanding the interaction between traditional games, cultural heritage, and education based on the strategy employed in the *Nglarak Blarak* Culture Festival in Kulon Progo, Yogyakarta. This study illustrates that traditional games are by no means a simplistic entertainment activity; rather, they represent a sophisticated system of culture which facilitates the transfer of ideas across generational family boundaries, sustaining the society's values and attributes.

This study further supports the previous effort on culture enhancement by Wijayanti and Heriyanti Hijriati (2017), who put forth that culture festivals are powerful tools for societal change. We can henceforth regard the *Nglarak Blarak* Festival as an important means of fighting the onslaught of globalization on their cultural identity. It is argued that by providing a space for *egrang*, *dingklik ogek*, *gaga sodor* and other traditional games to be played and enjoyed, the festival is attempting to stimulate the reproduction of culture.

The educational aspect of traditional games which forms part of this study aligns with what has been noted about character development and multiple intelligences. These games

are more than physical drills; they are vehicles of whole person education that develops, among others, bodily kinesthetic, interpersonal, and logical-mathematical intelligence. Some of the characteristics such as cooperation with others, sporting behaviour, discipline, and socialization with others as noted above, support the likely hypothesis of the conversions of perspectives on traditional games as previously reported in the literature.

What is more valuable from this study is its emphasis on the challenge of adapting a culture when trying to preserve it. This study acknowledges the problem posed by culture and the devotion to technology among the youth, which is a concern of researchers such as Waluyo (2017). The proposal to use information and communication technology to engage children and adolescents in traditional games, as a strategy for cultural preservation, exemplifies an approach that views the old and the new as complementary rather than conflicting.

An overview of the European Perspective on Education gave us insight into how the local people strive to utilize the resources at their disposal for educational purposes. The focus on the use of waste materials and natural materials in the construction of games indicates not only an economic pragmatism but also ecological concern and ingenuity.

My primary intention is to reflect on those discrepancies which exhibit the gaps in folklore studies on games and contests as ethnological sources of sociocultural and artistic heritage as well as ethnographic material from Indonesia known as the *blarak* culture covering nurturing activities in Karanganyar and Blora, Central Java which can still be observed today.

The festival's expressions of culture, the symbols in the form of characters and folklore embodying a living rationale demonstrate a multi-functional role (Indrianto et al., 2022). On the body of shields, palm fronds and calabashes known to be low in rank from coconut are attached, yet actively serving as head feathers. These extend beyond cultural frameworks, serving as expressions of diverse folk traditions. These dominant features surpass the stems, forming striking sculptural designs with cut-out and leaf-like shapes.

Strategies examining this cross-disciplinary approach will be advantageous for creating alternative ways of further reasoning for the guided attention examining essentials in visual culture, which capture the intersections between social, cultural or postmodern prose, rhetoric, narrative elements blended with visual aesthetics, thus engaging with the fundamental metaphysics into engagement with peacemaking respects within theories of social inclusion. In parallel, shifting focus on great interest to non-verbal phenomena tends to foster expansion of boundaries to primary imaging, accessible engineering to design distinguished for pervasive presence, so access dimensions varied to portray engaging French conceptual art filters myriad visual expressions stripped back to conquer stargazing ideas towards art. Even though it is possible to allocate substantial resources to investigate the phenomenon, investing in longitudinal studies would most likely yield similarly substantial returns in the arts.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the essential role of the *Nglarak Blarak* Cultural Festival in preserving and transmitting local traditions in Kulon Progo, Yogyakarta, through the medium of traditional games. These games—such as *egrang*, *dingklik ogek*, and *gaga sodor*—are not only recreational activities but also embody rich cultural and educational values that foster cooperation, creativity, discipline, and community spirit among children and participants. The research contributes significantly to the fields of cultural preservation and informal education by showing how traditional games serve as effective tools for character development and intergenerational knowledge transfer. From an academic perspective, this study fills a gap in the literature regarding ethnographic research on cultural festivals and provides a framework for understanding the pedagogical value of indigenous play.

The implications of this research extend to both educators and cultural policy-makers, as it demonstrates how traditional games can be integrated into learning strategies to promote character building, while also suggesting that cultural festivals can serve as innovative platforms to sustain local identity in an era of globalization. However, this study is not without limitations. The research is geographically specific to Kulon Progo and focused on a single festival event in 2023, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader cultural contexts. Furthermore, the reliance on qualitative methods, while providing depth, may benefit from complementary quantitative approaches in future work.

Future research is encouraged to explore similar festivals across other regions to compare models of cultural transmission and to conduct longitudinal studies that assess the long-term impacts of traditional game participation on children's development. Additionally, further investigation could focus on the incorporation of digital tools and gamification strategies to make traditional games more accessible and appealing to modern youth. Research into institutional and governmental roles in preserving intangible cultural heritage would also provide a more comprehensive understanding of the support structures necessary for sustaining festivals like *Nglarak Blarak*. In sum, this study affirms that cultural festivals are not passive displays of tradition but dynamic, educational, and transformative spaces that safeguard and renew cultural heritage for future generations.

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