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## The Role of Ludruk in Developing Communication, Self-Expression, and Social Skills in Elementary School

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#### Abstract

This study explores the role of Ludruk, a traditional Javanese performing art, in fostering communication skills, self-expression, and social development among elementary school children at SDN Gunungsari. Using a qualitative research design with a descriptive and analytical approach, the study investigates how Ludruk education influences children's interpersonal interactions and emotional expression. The research involved a purposive sample of teachers, students, and relevant stakeholders, and data were collected through interviews, observations, and literature studies. The findings indicate that Ludruk not only enhances students' verbal and non-verbal communication but also encourages self-confidence and collaboration, which are crucial for social integration. The study highlights the importance of incorporating cultural arts like Ludruk in elementary education, demonstrating its potential to develop students' communication and social skills in meaningful and engaging ways. The research underscores the relevance of traditional arts in modern education and their role in holistic child development.

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### Introduction

In the era of rapid globalization, the demand for effective communication skills and self-expression has become increasingly critical. Children, as the next generation, are expected to socialize, interact, and articulate their ideas effectively. However, the rapid advancement of technology often leads children to become more individualistic and less involved in social activities that require direct interaction.

Communication and self-expression are essential skills that every child should possess, especially at the elementary school level (Santana et al., 2022). These skills not only support academic success but also contribute to personality development and individual character building. Communication is the exchange of information between a sender and a receiver, where the meaning of the information is developed among those involved (Planer & Godfrey-Smith, 2021). Through effective communication, children gain the ability to build social relationships, express their thoughts, and better understand their social environment. Moreover, communication skills help children recognize and express their emotions and ideas positively (Lestyono et al., 2024; Qureshi et al., 2022). However, fostering these skills in elementary classrooms often poses challenges as the curriculum tends to focus primarily on cognitive and academic development.

Amid these challenges, it is essential to remember the richness of our cultural traditions, including traditional arts. Traditional art forms such as Javanese Ludruk hold significant potential as effective educational media (Afiaty, 2023). Ludruk can be described as a form of traditional theater where a group of performers enacts stories based on real-life events. It incorporates musical elements, such as the sound of gamelan, and humor presented by the actors, sometimes interwoven seamlessly (Zhang, 2024). Ludruk performances are not merely a source of entertainment but also an effective medium for education and knowledge transfer (Anis, 2020). By participating in Ludruk performances, children are encouraged to develop their creative ideas, unleash their imagination, engage in interactive exchanges with others, and build their confidence, enabling them to express themselves in public.

However, with the passage of time and the rapid advancement of technology, traditional arts like Ludruk are increasingly losing their appeal, particularly among the younger generation. Many children are more drawn to popular culture and digital entertainment, which often lack the social and cultural values imparted by traditional arts (Jenkins et al., 2020; Solihin, Subrata, et al., 2024; Thevenin, 2022). This raises concerns about the diminishing appreciation for traditional arts among children. Therefore, efforts to introduce Ludruk at SDN Gunungsari become crucial as a means of cultural preservation and an engaging educational medium.

Ludruk performances encompass various aspects of social life, including depictions of the struggles, efforts, and joys of diverse social groups and classes. Ludruk is a collective art form that involves various participants, including actors, musicians, and stage crews. By engaging in the tradition of Ludruk, children become aware of the importance of teamwork and mutual support in achieving shared goals. The significance of Ludruk extends beyond entertainment (Anis, 2020; Purnomo, 2021). The stories in Ludruk impart moral and social values such as honesty, mutual assistance, loyalty, commitment, and justice. By observing the characters in these stories, children can internalize these values and apply them in their lives (Umah, 2020).

The introduction of Ludruk at SDN Gunungsari serves as an effective teaching method that enables children to develop linguistic, communicative, and expressive abilities. By

participating in Ludruk performances, children acquire skills to express themselves in dialogues, develop empathy by understanding the characters they portray, and express emotions through movements and vocal intonations. Teaching these skills provides direct training in both verbal and non-verbal communication. It also enhances self-confidence in communication and public speaking (Ausubel, 1963; Funahashi, 2022).

Given the substantial benefits of incorporating artistic expression media such as Ludruk into the school curriculum, it should be noted that fostering children's linguistic and performance skills is not the only positive outcome. They also gain familiarity with important cultural values in this context. Ultimately, this leads to positive personality development, an increased appreciation for local culture, and a strengthened sense of pride in their cultural identity (Solihin & Habibie, 2024). Thus, teaching Ludruk serves not only as an educational medium but also as an entertaining platform that encourages children to learn.

It is hoped that the study of Ludruk art education will influence the communication skills and self-expression of elementary school children at SDN Gunungsari. The discussion will explore the methods of teaching Ludruk that can be implemented in the elementary school environment, its positive impact on the development of communication and self-expression, and the long-term benefits of this learning approach. This study aims to provide new insights for educators and policymakers to recognize the importance of traditional arts education in the elementary school curriculum at SDN Gunungsari.

## Method

### Research design

This study adopts a qualitative research method with a descriptive and analytical approach. The qualitative method is employed to gain a deeper understanding of human or social phenomena, providing a rich and complex depiction of experiences. The descriptive approach aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of how Ludruk art education influences communication, self-expression, and social skills development among elementary school children. This approach allows for the exploration of the subject in its natural setting and provides a nuanced perspective on the teaching and learning processes associated with Ludruk.

### Research sample

The respondents in this study consist of elementary school children, teachers, and key stakeholders involved in the Ludruk art education at SDN Gunungsari. The selection of participants was purposive, ensuring that the individuals chosen were directly engaged with the Ludruk art learning process. This approach aimed to provide insights into how Ludruk

contributes to the development of communication, self-expression, and social skills within the classroom context.

### Research procedure

The research followed a structured procedure, starting with the preparation phase, which involved identifying the research objectives and selecting appropriate data collection methods. Data were gathered through interviews with relevant informants, literature studies, observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with teachers, students, and stakeholders who had firsthand experience with Ludruk art education. Additionally, literature studies were carried out by reviewing books, journal articles, and relevant publications. The research took place in the natural setting of the classroom to observe the real-time implementation of Ludruk education and its effects on the children. The study also involved observing Ludruk performances by the students to understand how these performances contribute to their development of communication and social skills.

### Data analysis

The data analysis process involved organizing and categorizing the data gathered from interviews, observations, and literature reviews. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights within the data. This analysis process allowed the researcher to synthesize qualitative findings, which were then used to build a comprehensive understanding of the role of Ludruk in enhancing children's communication abilities, self-expression, and social skills.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

#### ***Traditional Art of Ludruk for Education***

Ludruk, a traditional Indonesian performing art, originated in the regions of Jombang, Mojokerto, Sidoarjo, Surabaya, and Malang. Ludruk performances involve many participants, including musicians (karawitan), juli jula, bedayan, remo dancers, supporting actors, and main performers known as "lakon." The function of ludruk can be both entertaining and serve as a means to articulate criticism and demands toward the government. This is made possible through the integration of humor and the opportunity to express opinions and critiques in the form of performance. The term "Ludruk" is derived from the words "molo-molo" and "gedrak-gedruk." "Molo-molo" refers to the act of filling the mouth with sweet and tasty tobacco, which is then spat out to create the sound of words used in the narrative and dialogue. Meanwhile,

"Gedrak-Gedruk" describes the movement of the feet, which are firmly placed on the floor while dancing on stage. Ludruk performances reach their climax through theatrical or narrative forms, focusing on daily life, folk stories, historical events, or legends, all accompanied by gamelan music.

The movements in ludruk are more free-flowing and not as rigid as those in other traditional Javanese dances. These movements tend to be entertaining and include comedic elements. However, each character typically has distinctive movements that reflect their personality or role in the story. In ludruk performances, facial expressions and vocal expressions are extremely important, especially since the art form heavily relies on humor and social critique. Ludruk performers must be able to showcase clear facial expressions to convey emotions such as anger, sadness, or happiness, so that the intended message is effectively communicated. These expressions are often exaggerated to enhance the comedic effect and make it easier for the audience to understand the scene.

The characters of Panakawan (typically portrayed by a clown-like figure such as Kartolo) often tell jokes or make comments that evoke laughter. Panakawan typically appears to lighten the mood and offer indirect life advice through humor. Performances of Ludruk are often opened with a Remo dance, an expression of the fighting spirit of the East Javanese people. The choreography of the Remo dance is characterized by controlled and simple forms, both in terms of movements, costumes, and performance style. Over time, artists have created various innovative movement sequences for both the Remo dance and Ludruk. These dances are also frequently used as a form of expression for real-world events, including political matters. In addition to dance, there are two other elements presented on stage by Ludruk artists: songs and chants.

In Ludruk, elements such as dialogue, movements, expressions, and character roles play a direct role, including the ability to express themselves verbally. The story is conveyed in various ways, such as through dialogue, which requires a high level of linguistic skill from the students. Participating in Ludruk performances requires children to express themselves clearly, appropriately, and expressively. This includes practicing communication that is contextually relevant, engaging, and comprehensible, which fosters confidence in linguistic interactions. The use of humor in dialogue also helps children contextualize conversations and build a sense of trust with the audience.

Ludruk performances are marked by a certain freedom, but they remain tied to the narrative. Children are encouraged to express the characters they play through speech and movement. This fosters self-awareness and an awareness of their own physicality. It also trains them to convey emotions and messages through movement and non-verbal expressions. Practicing these movements helps children perform confidently and interact with both the audience and other performers. By practicing movements as part of Ludruk dancing, children develop the ability to use non-verbal communication in different life situations. They learn how to interpret facial expressions and body language and respond appropriately to these situations.

This training also enables children to control their emotions and communicate effectively without relying solely on verbal expressions. In this sense, Ludruk is not only a form of entertainment but also a highly beneficial educational medium for children. By training their physical movements in the context of Ludruk, children can develop important non-verbal communication skills that will be valuable throughout their lives. They learn to interpret the facial expressions and body language of others and adjust their own responses to various situations. This training also encourages emotional control and effective communication without relying on verbal expressions.

Facial expressions and portraying characters, such as Panakawan, with clarity and confidence, are crucial in Ludruk since most emotions are conveyed directly through expressions. Children learn to control and enhance their facial expressions to align with the emotions they wish to convey, such as happiness, sadness, anger, or surprise. This skill not only helps them express themselves more effectively but also builds emotional awareness, making it easier for them to understand and respond to the emotions of others. Children are often given roles such as Panakawan or other characters in Ludruk. Through these roles, they learn to view the world from different perspectives, sharpen their empathy, and appreciate others' roles. For example, playing a Panakawan character, who frequently offers advice or jokes, teaches children how to deliver messages or critiques in a subtle and acceptable manner. They learn to understand the emotions of the characters they portray and how to convey their intended message effectively. Through these roles, they also learn to communicate messages or critiques in a more considerate and acceptable way. All of this valuable learning contributes to shaping children's personalities, making them more empathetic and attentive to their surroundings.

Ludruk requires intense interaction between performers. Children practice teamwork, responding, and adapting to their peers' reactions. This teaches them important social skills such as teamwork, empathy, and adaptability. While rehearsing or performing, children also learn to understand timing and support other performers, for example by giving them the space to speak or act. A Ludruk performer learns to read the audience's responses and adjust their expressions or movements to make the performance more engaging or humorous. This trains children to develop social awareness and the ability to interpret others' reactions, teaching them to be more responsive to the people around them.

Through Ludruk, children not only acquire basic performing arts skills but also enrich their communication, empathy, and emotional awareness, which will support them in their social lives and everyday interactions. They learn to collaborate within a team to create an engaging performance and practice emotional regulation and creative self-expression. By doing so, children can develop their personalities and become individuals who are more skilled and empathetic in interacting with others. Moreover, they can learn cultural values and traditions embedded within the Ludruk performing art. Through this experience, children also gain confidence and learn to overcome nervousness when performing in front of others. They learn to respect differing opinions and work together to achieve common goals.

However, teachers must be able to teach students how to enrich their communication skills and self-expression so that they can become confident individuals who can communicate effectively in various situations. Therefore, teachers need to implement diverse teaching methods that can help students develop their communication abilities. Additionally, teachers should provide students with active communication practice so that they become more comfortable and skilled in this area. With proper guidance and support from teachers, students can gradually improve their communication skills.

### ***The Ludruk Learning Process at Gunungsari State Elementary School***

Teaching Ludruk to children at Gunungsari State Elementary School can be done through interactive and creative methods suitable for their age. The goal is for children to not only understand Ludruk as an art form but also benefit from developing communication, self-expression, and teamwork skills. Here are some methods and stages that can be applied:

#### **1. Role Play Practice**



**Figure 1.** Role-Playing In Ludruk Art

Children can be encouraged to play various characters in Ludruk, such as the main character, Panakawan, or clowns. This role-playing practice introduces children to the concept of character and social roles. Teachers can guide children to develop their characters and deliver dialogue expressively according to their roles. Through Ludruk role play, children also learn teamwork and the importance of mutual support. Additionally, this activity enhances communication and self-expression skills.

## 2. Drama Games



**Figure 2.** Drama Game in Learning

Light and fun drama games will help children feel more confident and free to express themselves. For example, the teacher can organize a game where children guess characters or participate in exercises where they express specific emotions as characters in a Ludruk story. This helps children recognize different expressions and experience the differences between characters.

## 3. Group Activities



**Figure 3.** Group Activities in Learning

Group activities are important for building teamwork and cooperation among children. Teachers can divide children into small groups and assign each group a role in a Ludruk story. Each group can perform together, and children learn to support one another and work as a team. Teachers can start with simple Ludruk stories, such as humorous tales or folk stories, and use visual aids or other media to engage the children. Ludruk learning can also include brief discussions about the social messages or moral lessons within the stories.

Through these methods, Ludruk learning at Gunungsari State Elementary School is not only entertaining but also educational, providing children with measurable improvements in communication, self-expression, and collaboration.



1. **Improved Verbal Communication:** Teachers noted that students became more confident in speaking, demonstrated by their ability to articulate ideas clearly during class discussions and Ludruk performances.
2. **Stronger Emotional Expression:** Students were able to portray a range of emotions through their performances, reflecting a greater ability to express feelings both on stage and in social interactions.
3. **Enhanced Collaboration:** Observations during Ludruk practices revealed that students actively worked together, showing increased willingness to share responsibilities and support each other during group activities.

These outcomes highlight how Ludruk helps children overcome shyness, build courage, and develop emotional articulation, thus fostering essential developmental skills in an engaging and culturally enriching way.

### ***Overcoming Shyness and Building Courage***

Performing on the Ludruk stage requires courage, especially for children who may not be accustomed to being the center of attention. When they take on a character, they learn to face the audience and become part of the story. This experience helps them overcome shyness because the focus shifts from themselves to the character they are portraying. Over time, through practice and group support, their confidence in performing before an audience grows. They also learn that it's okay to make mistakes and continue expressing themselves despite fear or anxiety. Thus, Ludruk not only develops their communication skills but also teaches them the courage to stand in front of others and share their creativity.

### **Discussion**

This study aimed to explore how the implementation of Ludruk as a learning method can enhance communication skills, self-expression, and social abilities in children at SD Negeri Gunungsari. Ludruk, as a traditional performing art form that combines dance, music, and theatre, has great potential to develop various social and emotional skills in children. Through this performance-based method, children not only learn to communicate verbally but also express themselves through facial expressions, body language, and group interactions.

According to [Stephenson \(2023\)](#), performing arts can play a crucial role in children's emotional development, helping them articulate their feelings and ideas more confidently. Thus, integrating Ludruk into education can contribute to the broader goal of nurturing well-rounded individuals with enhanced social competencies. The research findings indicate that the learning process through Ludruk at SD Negeri Gunungsari was highly effective in helping children overcome shyness, improve their verbal and non-verbal communication skills, and

boost their self-confidence. The process began with introducing the basic elements of Ludruk, including dance movements, facial expressions, and vocal techniques (Anis, 2020). Children were encouraged to actively participate in various exercises, both individually and in groups.

Ludruk training, as described by Lestari (2024), involves learning how to embody characters through physical expression and speech. In this research, students were tasked with performing different roles in Ludruk stories, from main characters to comic figures. They were trained in adjusting their facial expressions, body movements, and speech to align with the character they portrayed. This process proved to be an effective method for improving communication skills, as noted by Borromeo (2020), who argue that dramatic performance encourages a deeper understanding of verbal and non-verbal communication.

One of the key findings of this study was the significant improvement in communication skills among the children after participating in Ludruk-based learning. This method provided opportunities for the children to develop public speaking skills, express their thoughts openly, and interact with their peers in a more informal yet structured setting. In this context, children learned to communicate in a more expressive and creative manner. As noted by Fitria (2024), drama and theatre can significantly enhance verbal communication skills, especially in terms of articulating messages clearly and engagingly. In Ludruk, children were trained to express their emotions through dialogue, which not only improved their ability to speak clearly but also helped them develop empathy by understanding the emotions of others. Furthermore, the inclusion of humor and interactive dialogue in Ludruk encouraged the children to experiment with language and tone, making their communication more dynamic. This finding aligns with the research of Dobinson & Dockrell (2021), who emphasize the importance of expressive language in fostering effective communication and social interaction.

Another significant outcome of the research was the development of self-expression among the children. Through Ludruk, the children were given opportunities to openly express their emotions, whether joy, sadness, anger, or happiness. Ludruk provided a platform for them to freely explore and communicate their feelings without restrictions, whether through physical movements, facial expressions, or vocalizations. According to Eddy et al. (2021), performing arts help children connect with their inner selves, allowing them to express complex emotions through creative means. In this study, the children learned to embody characters with exaggerated facial expressions and gestures, particularly when playing comic roles, such as the Panakawan characters. This process helped them refine their emotional expression and gain more control over how they communicated their feelings to others (Solihin et al., 2024). Moreover, the arts facilitate the development of emotional intelligence, enabling children to recognize, understand, and regulate their emotions more effectively. In this sense, Ludruk not only improved the children's ability to communicate but also contributed to their emotional maturation (Anis, 2020).

The research also revealed that Ludruk significantly improved the children's social skills, especially in terms of cooperation and teamwork. The children had to work together to prepare

the performance, with each child taking on a specific role, whether as an actor, dancer, or musician. This required them to collaborate, communicate effectively, and support one another in achieving the shared goal of presenting a successful performance. Cooperative learning, as discussed by [Fletcher et al. \(2024\)](#), has been shown to enhance children's social skills, as it fosters a sense of community and encourages positive interaction. This study found that children who were initially shy or less confident in interacting with their peers became more willing to communicate and engage socially after participating in Ludruk activities. In addition to fostering cooperation, Ludruk training also helped children understand the importance of respecting others and valuing their contributions. As [Bailey \(2021\)](#) argue, group activities like drama promote inclusivity, empathy, and mutual respect, which are essential skills for social development.

Beyond verbal communication, the study highlighted that Ludruk plays a crucial role in enhancing non-verbal communication skills, such as facial expressions, body language, and spatial awareness. Through Ludruk training, the children learned to control their facial expressions and use their bodies to convey emotions clearly and effectively. As noted by [Abakumova et al. \(2021\)](#), non-verbal cues are often more powerful than words in conveying feelings and intentions. In Ludruk, children were taught to adapt their body movements and facial expressions to suit the character they were portraying, which not only helped them understand the importance of non-verbal communication but also improved their ability to read others' emotions. According to [Saggese \(2023\)](#), the ability to express oneself non-verbally is a vital social skill, particularly in fostering deeper emotional connections with others. This study showed that Ludruk training helped children develop these skills, making them more attuned to the emotions of their peers and more capable of expressing themselves in a socially acceptable manner.

One unexpected yet significant finding of this study was that Ludruk training had a positive impact on the children's social interactions outside of the classroom. Children who had previously been more introverted or hesitant to speak up became more confident in social settings, both in school and at home. This was particularly evident in their increased willingness to speak in front of their peers and express their opinions more openly. This finding supports the work of [Liu \(2023\)](#), who found that drama-based activities not only improve communication skills but also foster greater social engagement among children. Through Ludruk, children learned to interact more freely, share ideas, and collaborate on projects outside the context of formal classroom settings.

## Conclusion

The research concludes that Ludruk is an effective educational tool for developing communication skills, self-expression, and social abilities in children. Through participation in Ludruk training and performances, children significantly improved their verbal and non-verbal

communication, gained confidence in expressing themselves, and developed important social competencies such as cooperation, empathy, and respect for others. By integrating Ludruk into educational practices, schools can help children develop more holistically, preparing them for the social and emotional challenges of the future.

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