



The Learning Patterns in the Inheritance of Woodcarving Skills in Jepara

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Abstract. Jepara is renowned internationally for carved furniture craftsmanship, featuring unique and aesthetically valuable carvings. This study aims to uncover the cultural learning patterns used to train and produce skilled carvers in Jepara. The research employs a qualitative method with the researcher as the primary instrument. Data were collected through observations, questionnaires, and in-depth interviews with key informants. Data analysis involves systematically categorizing the data, breaking it into units, identifying patterns, determining what is important, and drawing conclusions. The results reveal some main methods for transferring carving skills in Jepara., i.e., 1) Formal Education Initiative by R.A. Kartini, 2) Apprenticeship or "nyantrik" method, where experienced craftsmen directly guide learners in their workshops without age or time restriction, 3) Family and community learning, 4) Non-formal educational institutions, 5) Workshops and collaborative learning, 6) Market-driven adaptation, and 7) Lifelong learning and flexibility. These methods allow learners to understand market trends and consumer needs directly. This study concludes that transferring carving skills in Jepara involves technical learning and a deep understanding of cultural values and market demands.

Keywords: Learning Patterns, Inheritance, Woodcarving Skills, Jepara

1 Introduction

Jepara is renowned as a hub for the woodcarving furniture industry, a traditional craftsmanship that has evolved into a reliable industrial enterprise. Carving is the act of creating an engraving or sculpture. In the process of carving, unnecessary parts of the material are removed, similar to working with stone or marble, to achieve the desired shape [11].

The intricate carvings from Jepara, encompassing furniture, calligraphy, reliefs, and various other carved products, are widely recognized across Indonesia. Jepara's woodcarving products have penetrated extensive markets locally, nationally, regionally, and internationally, reaching continents such as Asia, Africa, Australia, and Europe. The primary materials used for these carvings are teak, mahogany, muggur, damar, sono, and sengon [8].

Nowadays, Jepara's carved products are marketed extensively both domestically and internationally. The evolution of Jepara's furniture industry begins with simple uncarved pieces, gradually progressing to finely carved furniture that is lightweight, aesthetically pleasing, and unique [5]. Ultimately, Jepara's carved furniture is regarded as high-quality art.

The artistic expression practised by Jepara's woodcarvers is significant. It records the community's events, behaviours, knowledge, and skills manifested through artistic creations. In addition, this expertise is traditionally inherited, passed down through generations, classifying this craft as traditional art. This generational transmission of skills continues today, demonstrating a successful learning process. The significance of Jepara's woodcarving industry extends beyond its economic value, encompassing cultural and historical dimensions.

This study aims to explore the cultural learning patterns and methods which carving skills are transmitted and developed, ensuring the continuity and evolution of this traditional craft in Jepara. Understanding these educational processes is crucial; it provides insights into how Jepara maintains its status as a world-leading center for woodcarving craftsmanship. The urgency of this research lies in the need to preserve and enhance these traditional skills amidst modernization and globalization, ensuring that the unique cultural heritage of Jepara's woodcarving is sustained for future generations.

2 Method

The research employs a qualitative method with the researcher as the primary instrument [12], focusing on uncovering the cultural learning patterns that produce skilled carvers in Jepara. The Data were collected through observations, questionnaires, and in-depth interviews with key informants deeply involved in the carving tradition.

Data analysis in this context involves systematically organizing and synthesizing the collected data to reveal the intricate methods of skill transfer in Jepara. This process includes categorizing the data into relevant themes, breaking it down into smaller units, identifying patterns in how skills are inherited, determining which aspects of these learning methods are most critical to sustaining the craft and drawing conclusions about the role of cultural values and market demands in shaping these learning patterns.

By systematically analyzing the data, the research uncovers how these cultural learning methods not only teach technical carving skills but also embed a deep understanding of Jepara's cultural heritage and economic context into the training of woodcarvers.

3 Results and Discussion

Here are the primary methods of learning woodcarving in Jepara.

3.1 Formal Education Initiative by R.A. Kartini

Alongside ongoing apprenticeship activities, Raden Ajeng Kartini pioneered efforts to support the development of Jepara's woodcarving. In 1929, the idea of establishing vocational schools for native Indonesians emerged. On 1 July 1929, the woodworking school with majors in furniture and carving was inaugurated under the name "Openbare Ambachtsschool," which later evolved into a State Technical School and eventually became the State Craft Industry High School.

Subsequent industrial activities focused on producing household furniture such as wardrobes, tables, chairs, benches, *slintru*, and other carved furniture. The community endeavored to emulate the idealized lifestyle of the royal court, attempting to create everyday necessities similar to those found within palaces or royal residences.

Ornamental carvings are designed to enhance the aesthetic appeal of an item or product. To some extent, an aesthetic appeal can be predicted from a visual artwork's image features [13]. However, aesthetically, these carvings should be integrated into the product's overall design rather than being merely added on or attached. Ornamental carvings contribute significantly to the overall quality of a product alongside other elements. Besides, designing these ornaments is integral to the overall product design process. Their strategic placement enhances the product's beauty and communicates specific themes or symbolic meanings. According to Blumer (1969) in Aksana (2009), humans form "meaning" in two ways: (1) meaning is something attributed to objects, events, phenomena, etc., and (2) meaning is a "physical attachment" imposed on events and objects by human [1]. These efforts underscore how ornamental carvings in Jepara serve not only to beautify products but also to convey meaningful themes or symbols, enriching the cultural and aesthetic value of each piece.

3.2 Learning through Apprenticeship or *Nyantrik*

One of the primary methods of learning woodcarving in Jepara is through apprenticeship (locally known as *nyantrik*), which involves not didactic teaching but observation, coaching, and successive approximation while carrying out various tasks and activities [3]. Apprenticeship or *nyantrik* is a work training method where individuals learn skills through hands-on experience under the guidance of a professional or expert. This method is widely practised by woodcarving artisans in Jepara.

There are usually no written rules or formal curricula in the apprenticeship process conducted by Jepara's woodcarving artisans. The learning process is situational and flows naturally according to the work activities at the apprenticeship site. Apprentices follow the tasks performed by the artisans at their workplaces, workshops, or *brak* (workspaces).

Apprenticeships are not restricted by age; everybody can become an apprentice, whether adults, youths, or even children, as long as their physical abilities and skill levels are appropriate. Older individuals who choose to apprentice are typically still physically capable of working. In addition, there is no fixed duration for apprenticeships. The length of an apprenticeship depends on several factors, such as skill proficiency—where apprentices may decide to leave once they feel sufficiently

skilled and ready to work independently—and the desire for new experiences, where apprentices may move to another artisan's workshop to gain new skills or knowledge that can enhance what they have already learned.

This apprenticeship or *nyantrik* process allows participants to learn directly from daily practical work in the field. They gain insights into carving techniques, workshop management, and evolving market dynamics. This hands-on experience is invaluable as apprentices learn from the real challenges faced by artisans in running their businesses.

Beyond learning technique, apprenticeships or *nyantrik* also teach the values of hard work, perseverance, and creativity—and all innovation begins with creative ideas [2], which are essential foundations for a successful woodcarver. In the context of culture and tradition, this apprenticeship method is also necessary for transferring knowledge and skills among generations, ensuring the preservation of Jepara's globally recognized woodcarving art. This learning process is informal and situational, without written rules or formal curricula. Apprentices follow the daily activities and tasks the artisans perform in their workshops, adapting to the workflow and gaining practical skills.

3.3 Family and Community Learning

Another significant pattern of learning transmission is through family and community involvement. Several artisans in Jepara inherit their skills from their parents or relatives, making woodcarving a family tradition. This learning method is deeply embedded in the community's cultural fabric, where knowledge is shared and passed down through generations in a natural and integrated manner.

The woodcarving skills of Jepara's woodcarvers are often acquired through informal learning processes within the family. The close individual relationships within families—between husbands, wives, and their children—form the foundation of a deeply ingrained woodcarving tradition that shapes these woodcarvers.

According to a survey conducted in 2022 by the Jepara Woodcarving Association, about 70% of woodcarvers reported learning their skills primarily through family-based education. Of these, 40% were female, highlighting the significant involvement of women in the craft. Besides, approximately 60% of young woodcarvers aged 15-25 started working in family workshops before seeking employment in more significant industries. (Jepara Woodcarving Association, 2022).

Children begin by observing and watching what their parents do in the family environment. Parents assign tasks according to their children's abilities and encourage them to ask questions if they encounter difficulties or uncertainties. Children then imitate their parents' actions. This form of learning is not limited to boys; girls also participate in the process. As a result, it is common to find many skilled female woodcarvers in Jepara.

However, the roles of male and female woodcarvers tend to diverge after marriage. While male woodcarvers typically continue their craft as their primary occupation, many female woodcarvers take it up as a secondary job post-marriage. After gaining sufficient skills within the family setting, children who reach adolescence are often tasked with helping their parents. Eventually, they become independent and seek employment in various woodcarving industries across Jepara.

By the time these young woodcarvers join the workforce, they possess a solid foundation of basic skills that enable them to adapt in various orders. They can also modify designs and innovate new forms since they have high creativity. The combination of family-based learning and practical industry experience ensures that Jepara's woodcarving tradition remain firm and continues to evolve.

After learning in the family environment and feeling capable enough, adolescent children are assigned tasks to help their parents work until they can finally be independent and seek jobs that match their skills in the carving industries throughout Jepara. With their basic skills, artisans can adapt to any given order, modify forms, and innovate shapes with their creativity while working in the carving industry.

These characters highlight the importance of family education in sustaining and propagating Jepara's woodcarving traditions. The family environment provides a nurturing space for young learners to acquire and refine their skills, ensuring the continuity of this esteemed craft through successive generations.

3.4 Non-Formal Educational Institutions

In addition to traditional learning methods, non-formal educational institutions in Jepara provide structured woodcarving training. These institutions, such as the Carving School in Pekeng and the Wood Carving Skills Training Center Fedep Jepara (PPKUFJ) in Sukodono, offer specialized courses that help individuals develop their carving skills. These centers combine traditional techniques with modern educational practices to ensure comprehensive skill development.

3.5 Workshops and Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning refers to a range of instructional strategies that encourage students to work together in small groups (typically two to five students) to enhance their learning and that of their peers [7]. Collaborative learning in workshops is also a fundamental pattern in transmitting woodcarving skills. Artisans often work together in groups, sharing techniques and insights. This collaborative environment brings up mutual learning and encourages the exchange of ideas, contributing to the overall enhancement of the craft.

3.6 Market-Driven Adaptation

The learning process in Jepara's woodcarving also adapts to market demands. In general, demand refers to the extent of consumers' desire to purchase a product [6]. Apprentices and artisans are exposed to current market trends and consumer preferences, allowing them to modify their skills and products accordingly. This market-driven approach ensures that the craft remains relevant and economically sustainable, helping to maintain a steady number of practitioners despite the broader decline in traditional craftsmanship. Throughout the 20th century, rapidly changing living conditions led to a significant decline in demand for traditional craftsmanship [9], resulting in a noticeable reduction in practicing artisans. However, in Jepara, the

woodcarving artisans have managed to sustain their craft by adapting their learning processes to market demands.

3.7 Lifelong Learning and Flexibility

Learning is recognizing the framework we think, feel, and act within. It involves critically evaluating its sufficiency, understanding its origins, and developing newer, more suitable frameworks that are more inclusive and discerning of experiences, including those related to ageing. Ultimately, it means acting based on this updated frame of reference. This represents the most crucial form of adult learning, which continues throughout life [4].

Woodcarving in Jepara is characterized by lifelong learning and flexibility. There are no age restrictions for those who wish to learn, and the duration of learning is not fixed. Individuals continue to refine their skills throughout their lives, often moving between different workshops to gain new experiences and knowledge.

These patterns of learning transmission not only preserve the rich heritage of Jepara’s woodcarving art but ensure its continuous evolution and adaptation to contemporary contexts. Integrating traditional methods with modern practices creates a dynamic and sustainable model for the future of this revered craft.

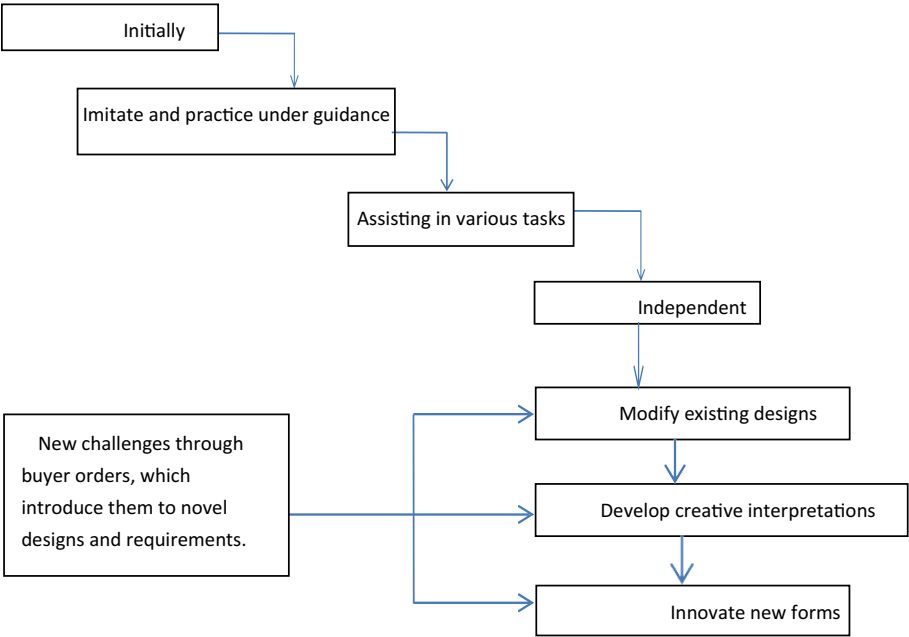


Figure 1. Learning Process Scheme of Jepara Woodcarving

The learning process of Jepara's woodcarving artisans follows a structured progression: initially, they observe skilled artisans at work, and then they begin to imitate and practice under guidance. As they gain proficiency, they transition into assisting in various tasks, gradually mastering the craft and becoming independent woodcarvers.

Once established, these woodcarvers encounter new challenges through buyer orders, introducing them to unique designs and requirements. Through intense observation and practical experience, they learn to modify existing designs, develop creative interpretations, and innovate new forms. Furthermore, this iterative process enhances their technical skills and fosters a deep understanding of market dynamics, enabling them to adapt swiftly, evolving consumer preferences and maintaining the relevance of their craft in contemporary markets.

4 Conclusion

The learning process in Jepara's woodcarving industry demonstrates a systematic and adaptive evolution from one generation to the next. Beginning with observing and imitating experienced artisans, young artisans acquire basic skills through active practice and assistance in daily tasks. Gradually, they master these skills and become independent in their carving work.

Adaptation to market demand is essential in this learning process. Through buyer orders, artisans adapt to new designs and use their experience and creativity to modify existing designs, develop new creations, and innovate in their carvings. This process ensures the relevance of Jepara's woodcarving industry in a dynamic global market and the sustainability of traditional carving art.

Thus, this learning scheme reflects how the Jepara woodcarving industry not only preserves tradition but also thrives and evolves through adaptation to modern market demands, fostering the creation of innovations in the art of carving.

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