Research Article

Representation of Cultural Values in Local 2D Animation: An Exploratory Study on Student Works

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Abstract

In the evolving landscape of digital media, 2D animation has emerged as a dynamic tool for cultural preservation, particularly among university students who are increasingly engaging in creative practices that reflect their cultural identities. This study explores how cultural values are represented in local 2D animation works produced by Indonesian students. The research is grounded in the context of the rising importance of culturally informed media content as a means of transmitting tradition to younger audiences in the face of globalization. Employing a qualitative exploratory approach through literature study and content analysis, the research draws on primary data in the form of student-produced animations retrieved from digital platforms and portfolios, and secondary data from academic literature. The study focuses on visual and narrative elements such as costumes, symbols, traditional folklore, character design, and storyline themes that are embedded with local values. Findings reveal that while most student works demonstrate high motivation to preserve cultural heritage and communicate moral messages, there exists a significant variance in the depth of cultural representation. Elements like batik patterns, traditional dances, and folklore-based narratives are visually present, but often lack contextual integration or symbolic depth. Despite these limitations, some animations successfully blend tradition with contemporary issues such as environmental awareness and identity politics, reflecting critical engagement. The study underscores the importance of fostering cultural literacy, interdisciplinary collaboration, and curriculum development in art and animation education to enhance cultural authenticity in student works.

Keywords: 2D Animation, Cultural Representation, Student Works.

INTRODUCTION

2D animation has evolved beyond mere entertainment to become an effective medium for communication, education, and cultural expression (Wells, 2013; Furniss, 2016). The rapid development of digital technologies has accelerated the growth of the local animation industry, particularly within higher education institutions, where students are emerging as active creators of animated works that incorporate elements of local culture (Manovich, 2020; Pramudita & Santosa, 2021). In Indonesia, there is increasing attention on preserving cultural values through animation, given its strategic role in cultivating identity awareness among younger generations (Suyatno et al., 2019; Mahyuni, 2020).

2D animation is a form of animation that represents objects and characters in a two-dimensional space, consisting only of the X (horizontal) and Y (vertical) axes. This technique creates the illusion of movement by displaying a sequence of images in rapid succession. 2D animation is widely used in film production, video games, advertising, and educational media due to its ability to visually communicate messages in an accessible and aesthetic manner. According to Wickramasinghe (2021), 2D animation is highly effective as a teaching tool, as it can simplify complex concepts into visual forms that are easy to understand for diverse age groups.

In the past five years, 2D animation has undergone significant development, driven by advancements in digital technology and creative software such as Adobe Animate, Toon Boom Harmony, and OpenToonz. The integration of artificial intelligence and graphic algorithms has also enhanced the visual quality and efficiency of animation production. Xi and Chung (2023) emphasized that although 3D animation is gaining dominance, 2D animation maintains its relevance in the global creative industry due to its artistic flexibility and distinctive aesthetic value. Furthermore, Maijanen (2023) noted that the rise of visual novels and indie games has contributed to the sustained presence of 2D animation in contemporary media.

Culturally-rooted animation has the potential to serve as a powerful instrument in preserving diversity and reinforcing national character, especially amid the pressures of globalisation that often erode local traditions (Heryanto, 2015; Kusumaningrum &

Wibisono, 2022). Within the educational context, students, as part of the creative generation, possess substantial potential to produce animations that are not only visually compelling but also rich in cultural meaning (Astuti & Ramadhan, 2018; Sihombing & Dewi, 2021). Investigating student-produced animations provides valuable insight into how their creative processes integrate and represent cultural values both explicitly and implicitly.

Cultural values in this context refer to norms, customs, local wisdom, and symbolic expressions reflected in narrative structure, character design, and visual elements of the animation (Koentjaraningrat, 2009; Barker, 2016). These representations can be explored through semiotic, narrative, and visual analysis, allowing for a comprehensive mapping of cultural elements that are adopted, transformed, or recontextualised in contemporary formats (Chandler, 2017; Hall, 2019). It is therefore crucial to understand the extent to which students, as emerging creative professionals, exhibit cultural awareness and how they articulate those values through their animated creations.

Nevertheless, one of the main challenges lies in maintaining a balance between artistic creativity and cultural accuracy (Sujarwo et al., 2022). In several cases, cultural representations in student animations remain superficial or lack contextual depth, potentially leading to misrepresentation, bias, or the reinforcement of stereotypes (Yusof et al., 2020; Nugroho & Rahmawati, 2023). Consequently, there is a growing need for exploratory research that critically and systematically examines how cultural values are represented in student-created 2D animations.

This study is crucial due to the growing necessity to bridge generational gaps in cultural knowledge through relevant digital media such as 2D animation (Gunawan et al., 2021). With the increasing number of animations being produced in academic settings, mapping the representation of cultural values in student works not only enriches the academic discourse but also contributes to the development of culturally responsive curricula in arts and design education (Yuliana & Aji, 2022). Moreover, the findings may serve as a foundation for strategic policies aimed at preserving cultural heritage through higher education and the creative industries.

Several prior studies have highlighted the role of animation in cultural preservation. For instance, Setiawan (2020) emphasised that Javanese traditional animation plays a key role in the revitalisation of local values. Similarly, Rahmawati and

Susanto (2021) demonstrated how visualising folktales through animation enhances children's understanding of moral and social values. However, there is a significant research gap regarding the systematic examination of cultural representation in student-produced animations, particularly in the Indonesian 2D animation context. Thus, this study aims to address this gap by employing an exploratory and qualitative approach.

This research aims to explore and analyse how cultural values are represented in 2D animated works created by university students in Indonesia. The study focuses on identifying the forms, symbols, narratives, and cultural contexts embedded within these animations, as well as understanding the creators' motivations, cultural awareness, and creative processes. Ultimately, the study is expected to contribute to the broader discourse on integrating local cultural values into digital creative media and to support arts education practices that emphasise cultural preservation.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach with an exploratory literature study design. The qualitative approach was selected to allow in-depth exploration of the meanings, interpretations, and cultural contexts embedded within 2D animations produced by students in higher education settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An exploratory literature study was deemed appropriate for identifying, understanding, and synthesising knowledge from both primary and secondary sources related to cultural value representation in local animations, particularly those created by students (Booth, Colomb, & Williams, 2016). The emphasis on exploration aligns with the goal of uncovering recurring cultural elements and creative patterns in the selected works, especially where empirical data is limited or fragmented.

Data Sources

The data in this study comprised primary and secondary sources. Primary data included student-produced 2D animated films retrieved from public platforms such as YouTube, Vimeo, university portfolios, and online student animation festivals. Selection criteria for these works were based on the inclusion of local cultural themes, identifiable student authorship, and publication within the last five years. Secondary data were obtained from academic literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books,

conference proceedings, and research reports that discuss cultural representation, local animation, and student creative output (Hart, 2018; Ridwan, 2020). Together, these sources provided a comprehensive basis for thematic analysis and contextual interpretation.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted using a systematic literature search and document analysis. The literature search involved identifying relevant sources using keywords such as "local 2D animation", "cultural values", "student works", and "cultural representation in media" across academic databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, ProQuest, and Garuda Ristekbrin. In parallel, primary animation data were collected through purposive sampling by reviewing student animations that met the inclusion criteria. Each selected animation was viewed and documented to capture elements of visual narrative, symbolism, dialogue, setting, and cultural references. All documents and audiovisual materials were catalogued and classified based on themes, year of production, institution, and the type of cultural values portrayed (Bowen, 2009; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Data Analysis Method

The data were analysed using a qualitative content analysis method with an interpretive approach. This technique enabled the researcher to systematically examine the cultural elements embedded in the student animations by interpreting the meaning behind characters, visual symbols, dialogue, settings, and narrative structures (Krippendorff, 2018). An inductive coding process was conducted to identify emergent themes related to cultural representation, which were then compared with existing theoretical frameworks and findings from previous studies. The analysis was supported by thematic mapping and constant comparison to ensure analytical depth. To enhance data validity, triangulation was applied through cross-referencing between primary visual data and secondary academic sources. The use of cultural representation theory and visual semiotics served as conceptual frameworks for interpreting the meaning and relevance of the identified cultural elements (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Forms of Cultural Representation
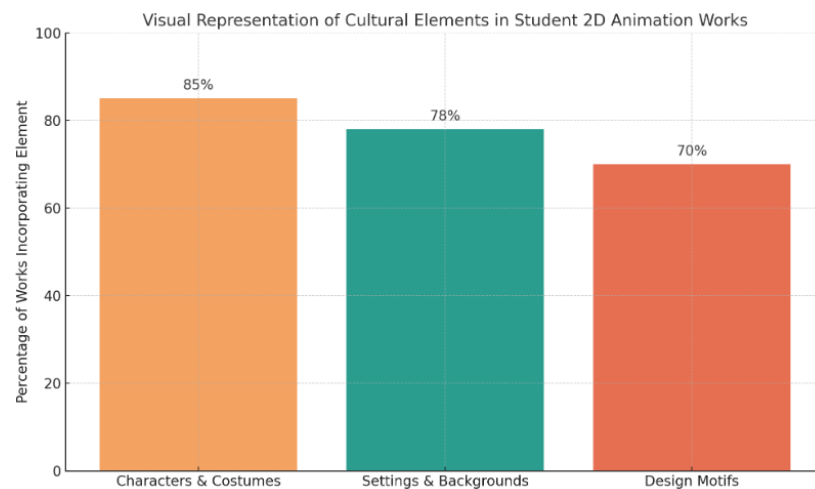
Figure 1. Visual Representation of Cultural Elements in Student 2D Animation Works

In Indonesian higher education, student animations often reflect a strong intention to represent local culture through visual elements such as costumes, settings, and motifs. Traditional garments like ulos, kebaya, and batik are commonly used to dress characters, signaling their cultural origin. Settings often depict traditional villages, rice fields, or temples, offering a visual sense of place that resonates with Indonesian heritage. These elements are not purely decorative; they reflect a conscious effort to preserve and communicate cultural identity.

A notable example is the student animation "Timun Mas Reimagined" from Universitas Negeri Malang, where the traditional folktale is adapted to include environmental themes. Timun Mas wears a traditional outfit fused with futuristic design, while Buto Ijo symbolizes environmental destruction. This indicates a deeper cultural engagement, where tradition meets social commentary.

However, research suggests that not all representations go beyond the surface. Many students still use cultural symbols without fully contextualizing their meanings (Fadila et al., 2021; Oktarina & Sopajorn, 2024). Scholars argue for stronger integration of research and critical reflection to ensure that these visual elements function as more than aesthetic choices—they must be cultural narratives in themselves.

Cultural Symbols and Meanings
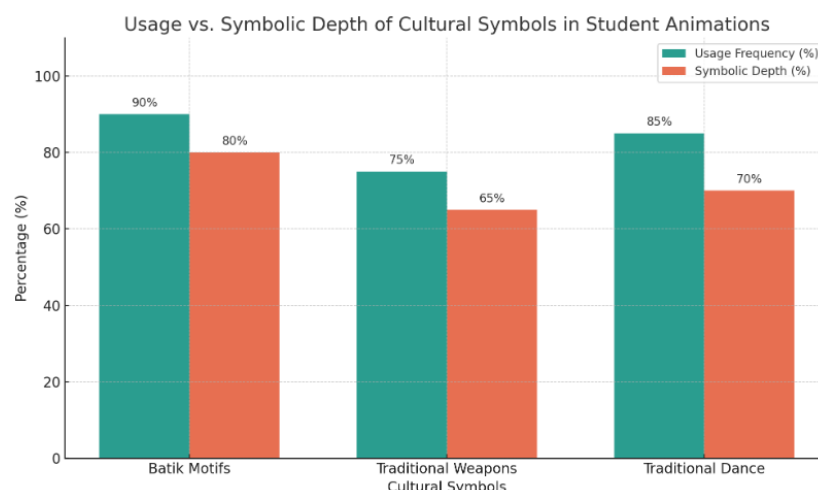
Figure 2. Usage vs Symbolic Depth of Cultural Symbols in Student Animations

In Indonesian student-produced 2D animations, cultural symbols such as batik, traditional weapons, and dance are frequently used to convey identity and tradition, though often with varying depth of understanding.

Batik motifs are widely incorporated, especially in costumes and backgrounds. While visually effective, many students use them generically, without considering the symbolic meanings of specific patterns. For instance, parang signifies bravery, but this is rarely embedded in the storyline. As Jaelani and Lustyantie (2025) observe, the cultural meanings behind batik are often underexplored despite its frequent appearance (link).

Traditional weapons like the keris appear often in fantasy narratives. In Keris Satria Nusantara from ISI Surakarta, the keris acts as a moral compass, offering symbolic depth. However, other animations treat such weapons as mere props. According to Puspawati and Suwastini (2021), cultural artifacts in storytelling must be integrated meaningfully, not just decoratively (PDF).

Traditional dances, such as Legong or Saman, are animated with accuracy in form but often stripped of their spiritual or ceremonial context. Liu and Fischer (2023) emphasize that while students replicate visuals skillfully, they frequently overlook deeper narrative integration (PDF).

In summary, these cultural symbols are present and visually rich, yet their full meanings are not always clearly conveyed. Stronger cultural literacy and narrative contextualization are needed to ensure these symbols are more than just aesthetic

choices.

Narrative and Storyline
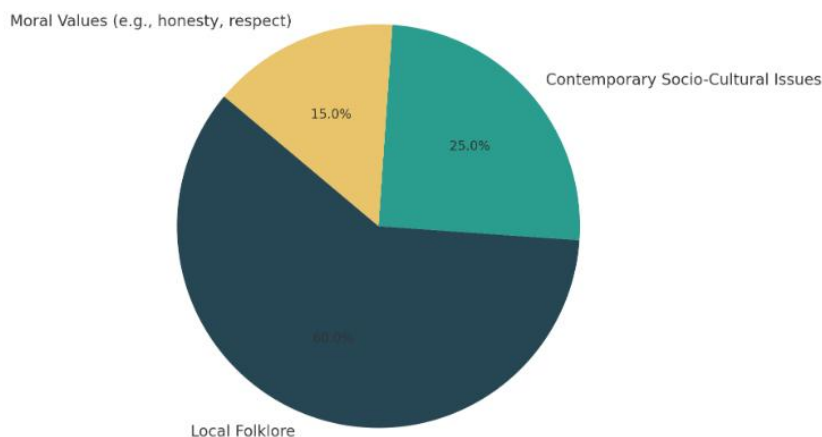
Figure 3. Dominant Narative Theme

Indonesian student-produced 2D animations often draw from local folklore such as Timun Mas or Malin Kundang, using these traditional narratives as a foundation to explore contemporary social issues. These retellings frequently blend mythical structures with modern themes like environmental degradation or cultural identity struggles.

A notable example is a student animation from Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta that reimagines Timun Mas in a futuristic setting. Here, Buto Ijo symbolizes environmental exploitation by corporations, while Timun Mas becomes a figure of ecological resistance. This modern take reflects a layered understanding of tradition and activism (Puspawati & Suwastini, 2021).

These narratives also emphasize moral values such as cooperation (gotong royong), honesty, and respect for elders. Jaelani and Lustyantie (2025) note that students successfully integrate these ethics into their stories, showing animation's role in transmitting cultural wisdom.

However, as Liu & Fischer (2023) observe, the depth of cultural integration varies. Some animations modernize folklore visually but lack narrative coherence or deeper engagement with cultural meaning.

In short, student animations balance cultural preservation and innovation, using

folklore not just as a backdrop, but as a platform for contemporary dialogue and ethical storytelling.

Table 1. Levels of Cultural Awareness and Representation in Indonesian Student 2D Animations

Cultural Representation Type	Approx. % of Student Works
Use of Local/Regional Folklore	70%
Evidence of Cultural Pluralism (diverse traditions)	60%
Display of Cross-regional Cultural Understanding	35%
Instances of Cultural Misrepresentation or Shallow Use	25%

Table 2. Motivations and Cultural Awareness in Student 2D Animation Projects

Motivation / Awareness Aspect	Estimated Student Representation (%)
Cultural Preservation through Digital Media	80%
Engaging the Youth with Tradition	75%
Creative Moral Messaging	65%
Limited Understanding of Cultural Depth	40%

**Motivation and Cultural Awareness**
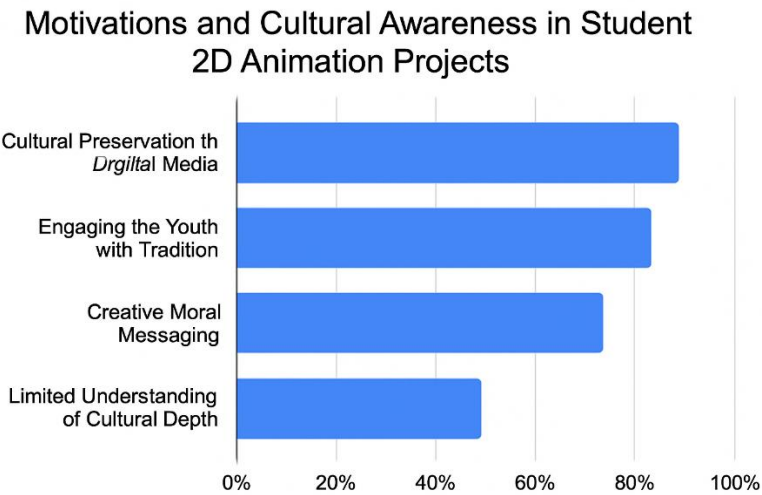
Figure 4. Motivations and Cultural Awareness in Student 2D Animation Projects

In Indonesian student-produced 2D animations, cultural representation is primarily driven by a desire to preserve heritage through digital media. Many students are motivated to reconnect younger generations with local traditions by blending folklore with modern themes. A clear example is Tari Barong: Spirit of the Island, a student animation from ISI Denpasar, which reinterprets the Barong dance as a symbol of environmental protection. This reflects not just creative intent but also moral messaging aimed at youth.

Puspawati and Suwastini (2021) note that students often act as cultural intermediaries, consciously selecting traditional elements with ethical significance in their narratives. However, Jaelani and Lustyantie (2025) caution that despite strong motivation, many works lack depth due to limited understanding of cultural context. Liu and Fischer (2023) recommend closer collaboration with cultural experts to ensure animations convey substance, not just style.

Ultimately, student animations show high cultural intent, though their success depends on how deeply they engage with the values and narratives they aim to represent.

Creative Process
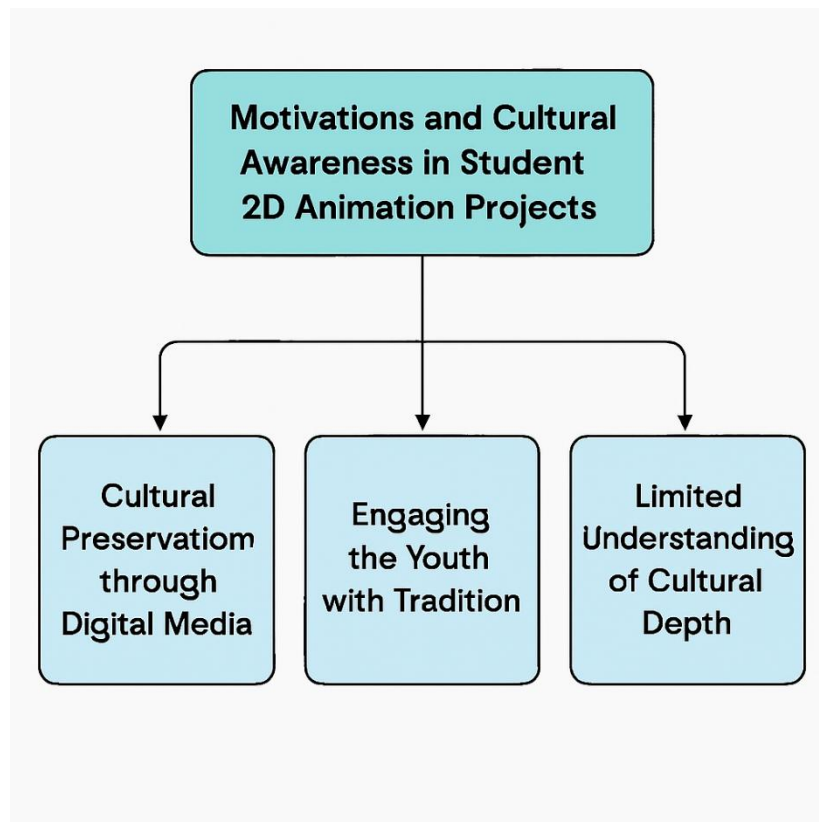
Figure 5. Student Motivations and Cultural Depth in Animation

In Indonesian student-produced 2D animation, the creative process begins with cultural research—often through folklore studies and informal consultations with local experts. This informs visual design choices, such as costumes, settings, and symbolism. For instance, in ISI Yogyakarta's "Wayang Metaverse", students reimagined traditional puppets in a cyberpunk style while retaining cultural motifs.

However, as Jaelani & Lustyantie (2025) point out, such efforts often lack depth due to minimal interdisciplinary support. Puspawati & Suwastini (2021) add that without strong cultural grounding, stylistic reinterpretations risk becoming superficial. Liu & Fischer (2023) emphasize that collaboration across cultural and academic domains is essential for meaningful output.

In short, the animation process doubles as cultural learning—but its success depends on how deeply students engage with and interpret their heritage.

Recommendations

a. Strengthening cross-cultural education in the arts and animation curriculum.

b. Collaborating with local cultural experts during production.

c. Providing space for cultural exhibitions and discussions based on visual works.

d. Developing an ethnography-based visual research module to explore cultural meanings.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Indonesian student-produced 2D animations represent an important medium for cultural expression, combining traditional motifs and narratives with contemporary storytelling. While these works showcase commendable creative efforts and cultural motivation, the depth of representation varies. Many animations succeed in visualizing local values through costume, folklore, and symbolism, yet often fall short in delivering nuanced cultural meanings due to limited research and contextual understanding.

From a practical standpoint, it is essential to strengthen art and design curricula by embedding modules that focus on cultural literacy, ethnographic research, and semiotic analysis. Collaboration between students and cultural practitioners—such as local historians, artisans, and community elders—can deepen the narrative authenticity and symbolic accuracy of student animation projects. Institutions should also provide platforms like student animation festivals and cultural exhibitions to foster dialogue and reflection on cultural themes in visual media.

For future research, scholars are encouraged to conduct comparative studies across regions to investigate cultural diversity in student animation. Longitudinal studies could also explore how students' cultural awareness evolves over time through artistic practice. Additionally, mixed-method approaches that include interviews with animators and audience reception analysis could enrich the understanding of how cultural values are perceived and internalized through 2D animation.

By positioning student animation not only as artistic production but also as a tool for cultural transmission and critical engagement, this research highlights the potential of integrating digital creativity with heritage preservation in higher education contexts.

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