

Grassroots Community Music Education as a Strategy for Liberating Marginalized Communities in Surabaya

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses community music education as social emancipation for marginalized groups in Surabaya based on a case study of POSS (Surabaya Arts Center). For the sake of this research, POSS was explored qualitatively using a case study approach. The data were collected using interviews, observation, and documentation. The study demonstrates that POSS assumes Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed by embracing dialogic, participatory, and experiential education as principles of education. Music education at POSS is geared not just towards technical proficiency but also towards self-discovery, social identity transformation, and active citizenship of students in public life. A few of the students have proceeded to perform nationally and internationally and establish identical art communities in other regions of the country. These results illustrate that music education via community can effectively facilitate social mobility and new spheres of representation for marginalized groups. Furthermore, the study highlights the imperative of cultural recognition, trust-based leadership, and inclusive pedagogy in transforming how education can reach out to underserved communities. POSS demonstrates that music education has the potential to transform not only individuals but also communities, when it is founded upon lived experience and collective empowerment. This research calls for stronger support for community-based arts education as a genuine commitment to social justice and cultural inclusion in the educational system of Indonesia.

KEYWORDS

Music education
Liberation education
Paulo Freire
Social transformation
POSS Surabaya.

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INTRODUCTION

As part of arts education, music has great potential in shaping character and developing students' cognitive and social abilities. Various studies confirm that music education is not just a technical exercise, but also a profound pedagogical medium. Arts education, especially music, has an important role in character building (Agustin & Sandi, 2024). According to Irawan, (2019) music can make learning more fun, build self-confidence, discipline, honesty, and the ability to cooperate and express. Music can be interpreted not only as a medium of aesthetic expression, but also serves as a means of social communication, emotional strengthening, and can even increase cognitive capacity. According to Gallahue in (Halimah, 2010) the rhythm, melody, and harmony of classical music can be a stimulation to improve children's learning abilities, easily grasping the relationship between time, distance, and sequence (series), which is a skill needed for proficiency in logical thinking, math, and problem solving. Studies show that involvement in music education can improve children's critical thinking, social skills and self-confidence (Silalahi, 2019).

In recognizing the importance of arts education, especially music in its comprehensive aspects in children, access to quality music education has not been equitable, especially for children from low-income families. Whereas it is important to know that education is justice that everyone should have. Justice as equality states that more resources should be given to those in greater need (Villiers, 2024). Equity justice proposes that everyone needs to be given equal treatment all the time regardless of context (Smith, 2018). Marginalized communities need to be considered to get their rights in justice to get education, especially in this context is music education. According to Silverman in (Villiers, 2024) Social justice can be defined as a concept and a practice where as a practice, social justice principles can be practically applied in music-making activities, where community musicians and music educators intentionally design these activities with social justice in mind

Pusat Olah Seni Surabaya (POSS) is one of the unique models of community-based music education that has served the entire community, especially marginalized communities and even people with disabilities, free of charge since 2013 (Y. Wicaksono, 2019). In liberating society, Freire, (1970) believes that education must encourage critical awareness and active participation in changing the conditions of oppression. In this context, education in POSS plays a role in not only providing technical training, but also building a social ecosystem where children and parents can experience significant social change. POSS community can be interpreted as a form of community that has the characteristics of values, business models, and norms towards social, as revealed by Levander, (2010) that the form of social organization is an innovative phenomenon that is constructed to gain legitimacy and a new identity in dealing with welfare issues experienced by marginalized people. In the context of POSS, this approach is manifested in its mission to provide music education at no cost to children from underprivileged communities, including those with physical or social limitations. Salvador and Kelly McHale (2017) also describe social justice as recognizing and respecting marginalized groups, removing social barriers that hinder these groups, and taking responsibility to help those in need.

In how art can be used as a social strategy in marginalized communities, most studies still focus on formal institutions and have not yet comprehensively examined educational models in community liberation practices through music education managed by grassroots communities, especially in urban Indonesia. By using the views of Freire, (1970) which views that education is the path to liberation and critical consciousness, especially for oppressed groups. In this context, music education in the POSS Surabaya community is not just a transmission of skills, but a means to build self-esteem, social awareness, and participation of children from marginalized families.

This research is expected to be a material for review and evaluation of how an informal music education approach can encourage social transformation in children from marginalized groups in a sustainable manner.

METHOD

This research uses qualitative research through a case study approach (Creswell, 2015). According to Fiantika, (2022) Qualitative research methods are research methods based on the philosophy of postpositivism, used to research on natural object conditions, where the researcher is the key instrument, data collection techniques are triangulated (combined), data analysis is inductive/ qualitative, and qualitative research results emphasize meaning rather than generalization

Qualitative research with a case study approach is a form of empirical inquiry that aims to examine in depth a phenomenon in the context of real life (Bungin, 2001). The main

purpose of case study research is to thoroughly understand the background and dynamics of the situation of a particular social unit and the patterns of interaction that take place in its environment (Fiantika, 2022)

In this sense, as well as the object of focus of the research, a qualitative method that is specific and meaningful with a combination of a case study approach was chosen because it allows researchers to conduct an in-depth exploration of educational strategies and activities that occur in the community, analyze the development of individual learner welfare, and identify factors that influence the success of education in improving learner welfare. With the case study approach, this research does not only focus on the end result, but also on the process that learners and teachers go through so that it can provide more comprehensive insights.

The focus in this research is the study of learners by making direct observations of every education that occurs in the POSS community. This observation is done in the context of the education that occurs, to record every step and interaction that occurs between learners, teachers, and parents of learners. Researchers conducted in-depth interviews with several teachers, learners, and parents of learners to explore how they perceived that the education provided had an impact on their social change. Documentation in the form of photos and video recordings were taken during the activities to illustrate the education process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Liberating Education Through Music Learning

According to Freire, education can be a path to liberation and social transformation provided that education is practiced in a dialogical, participatory manner, and based on the life experiences of students. Freire (1970), views education as not just a process of transferring knowledge, but as a means of human liberation from oppression. In the practice of music education implemented by POSS Surabaya, it shows a character that is in line with the concept of liberating education in Paulo Freire's thought.

The learning process in the POSS community does not run in a one-way manner as in the education system described by Freire as "*bank-style education*". This is reflected in how the POSS community learning strategy focuses on character education. Heru as the leader of the POSS community thinks that the POSS community is not just a music learning but also a place to develop their character, so that the credibility of students is not only judged by their musical skills but also their emotional maturity (Interview, 2022). With the orientation on children's character development, the learning cycle will be constructed within the framework of multicultural education. According to Jamaluddin, (2020) multicultural education is a response to the development of the diversity of the school population, as the demand for equal rights for every group includes all students without distinguishing groups such as gender, ethnicity, race, culture, social strata, and religion. The POSS community realizes this by opening itself inclusively, with 200 members with diverse social conditions (Y. Wicaksono, 2019). With this multicultural awareness of teachers and learners, learning will be able to be directed to create a space of liberation by intervening in the form of learning, and the attitude of educators.

In the form of learning that is multicultural and is based on the construct of students' life experiences, music learning in the POSS community is designed flexibly according to the initial understanding of each student. The presentation of learning is carried out in a western music ensemble format with music notation adapted to their experience background, both in the form of block notation, number notation, letter notation, and simple dance writing. Arrangements are also done on children's songs that are close to them. According to (B. A.

Wicaksono et al., 2023) Children's songs as learning models offer a unique way to teach values and ethics to children. Through children's songs, they can hone their musical skills, express themselves, and feel the joy of learning. Children's songs also have the ability to evoke emotions and inspire collaboration between children. These songs not only facilitate the learning process, but also serve as a medium for internalizing character values such as honesty, hard work, discipline, and togetherness. This approach is in line with Paulo Freire's (1970) idea that liberating education should start from the concrete and existential situation of learners,

"The starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people."

However, in the construct of the peak material, it will be directed to the understanding of block notation. Beam notation is used as a strategy to develop children's cognitive and musical skills, but it can also be a strong provision for developing students' abilities in every context of future circumstances both in lower, middle and upper-class performances (Interview, Heru Prasetyono 2022). Beam notation is done as an important strategy to transform children's thinking capacity from the practical stage to the stage where they can understand the meaning, structure, and value of what they are playing. In the spirit of Freire (1970), this process is not simply mechanistic learning, but rather an effort to form a critical consciousness that allows learners to read and interpret the world through their musical experiences. Furthermore, mastery of block notation becomes an important means for children from lower class communities to break through the social boundaries that have alienated them from formal music stages that are synonymous with the upper middle class or bourgeoisie. On the other hand, POSS education is chosen using an open-air system that is held every Sunday afternoon at the youth center (figure 1), presenting that the form of western music training does not have to look rigid and formal. This is in line with Fraser's opinion, (2024) that the hegemonic Western classical ensemble paradigm perpetuates colonial musical epistemologies and marginalizes the musical voices, values and practices of students from non-dominant groups



Figure 1. Routine exercise activities of the POSS community (Doc. Author, 2024)

In this context, western music education that is hegemonic in the colonial context is broken with the communal context of non-dominant communities through open-air performances. In this case, music education at POSS not only equips learners with musical skills, but also empowers them socially and culturally to participate in spaces that were previously closed to marginalized groups

Relationships between teachers, students and guardians are also built in a dialogic and participatory manner. Based on interviews with POSS community teachers, namely Heru, Puguh, Kusumawardhana, Edi and Yudat (2022), decision-making in the POSS community is generally done informally, with an approach that encourages active involvement of all parties. This method allows all members to feel valued and contribute equally to the planning process. The involvement of parents is an important part of any program planning and evaluation, ensuring that decisions are inclusive and reflect the needs of all. Involving parents in the decision-making process will result in policies that are more relevant and responsive to learners' conditions in the field. The form of teacher relations is also reinforced by the organizational structure, which is familial and non-hierarchical.

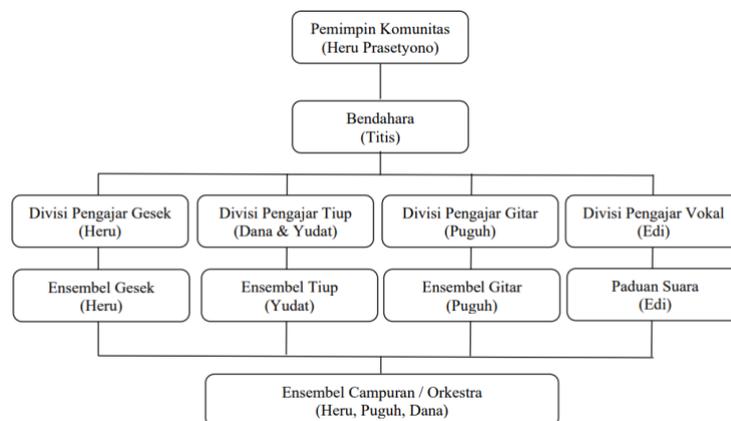


Figure 2. Organizational structure of the POSS community
 (Source: B. A. Wicaksono, t.t., 2024)

Although the structure of the community if organized can look like this (Figure 2), the application of the POSS community system is based on family values and mutual trust. The hierarchical system is flexible with a division pattern based on honesty and responsibility, especially in the management of musical instruments. The division is given according to the expertise of the teachers to handle musical instruments according to their respective fields. This is in accordance with Heru's statement as the leader of the POSS community, " *Ya paling lek tanggung jawab ya misal instrumen gitar, dipegang Mas Yudat. Ya wes sepenuhnya kuserahkan ke Yudat. Mboh kape diapakno, pokok dirawat dan lain-lain*" (Interview, 2022).

Working patterns built on emotional closeness, mutual respect, and collective responsibility encourage the creation of strong participatory practices in the POSS community. The sense of belonging among members not only grows among teachers and learners, but also actively involves parents. This form of involvement is evident in various tangible supports, such as the provision of *keyboard* instruments for learning purposes and the provision of alternative practice rooms at the homes of student guardians when social distancing regulations due to the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the use of public spaces. These contributions show that the relationship between the community and parents is not

merely formal, but built on solidarity and mutual concern for the continuity of children's education. This approach is in line with the thinking of Paulo Freire (1970), who stated that liberating education can only happen if all parties involved including teachers, students and parents are in an equal relationship and listen to each other. Involving many parties in the decision-making process is not just a technicality or formality, but part of the learning process together. In this way, everyone feels ownership and responsibility for the direction of education.

By applying the principles of dialogic, participatory, and life experience-based education, in line with Freire's perspective, the POSS community creates a liberating learning space for children from marginalized groups. The results of this process can be seen in changes in the attitudes and awareness of diverse learners as well as changes in their social identity

The Impact of Music Education on Social Awareness and Transformation

The transformation experienced by POSS community learners does not stop at the aspect of musical skills alone, but extends to the dimensions of self-awareness, social identity, and their role in society. The music education applied at POSS, which is carried out in a dialogical, participatory manner, and based on the life experiences of students, provides an actualization space that encourages the growth of critical consciousness (*conscientization*), as formulated by Paulo Freire (1970). In this process, music is not just a medium of aesthetic expression, but a means of social emancipation, a tool to understand the reality of oppression and at the same time transform it.

The learning process at POSS has encouraged learners to reflect on their social position and find empowerment through musical skills. In line with Fraser, (2024) Music education provides opportunities for students to cultivate a sense of belonging, joy, meaning, and purpose in their lives. Through music, students can get to know themselves, their community, and the world. This can be seen from some learners who were initially passive and insecure, slowly showing an increase in self-confidence, courage to perform in public spaces, and even taking on the role of music group leader in their community. One of them is Danil, who is now not only actively performing in concerts, but also mentoring and establishing a new music community called *Paseban Art & Music Center* (PAMC) in Sidoarjo. According to Wicaksono (2024), the formation of this new community by POSS students is a form of reproduction of the values of liberation, independence and social solidarity that have been developed at POSS. The POSS music education model thus not only produces competent learners, but is also able to become social agents who transfer the same spirit to other communities.

In addition to individual role changes, music education at POSS also creates meaningful social mobility. Some students have successfully performed on national and international stages, including in Gita Bahana Nusantara. This shows that music, in the context of POSS education, functions as a bridge across social classes.

The transformation of social identity is also reflected in their public representation as performers who voice their own class without necessarily adopting the dominant styles of the upper class. One concrete example that reinforces this dimension is Nur Alam's Javanese performance featured in Kusumawardhana & Young's research.



Figure 3. Documentation of Jawa Nur Alam's performance at the music day and celebration of W.R. Supratman's birth (Source: Jawa Pos newspaper 6/6/2019 at (Kusumawardhana, 2021))

In a performance visually recorded in the community's official documentation (Figure 3), Wardhana, (2021) shows how Jawa performs classical music while wearing a T-shirt, cloth slung over his shoulders, and barefoot. While this performance may be considered informal by the standards of classical performance aesthetics, it marks a form of *symbolic resistance* and affirmation of the authentic social identity of a marginalized community group.

The Javanese phenomenon is explained in Bourdieu's study by (Muhammad Kusuma Wardhana, 2021) through the concept of *habitus*, where the habits and lifestyles attached to individuals for a long time shape the way they think, act and respond to social structures. Nur Alam's Javanese habitus was born from the experience of living as part of a rural community, so his musical practice is inseparable from awareness and comfort in that identity. What is considered "extraordinary" for the wider community, namely a village boy playing classical music in casual and local clothing, is actually an ordinary and natural practice for him (Muhammad Kusuma Wardhana, 2021)

This is where POSS music education shows its strategic role, not forcing students to imitate elitist styles for the sake of being recognized, but instead encouraging them to bring awareness and courage to present their own version of themselves on symbolic stages. Moments like this are important not only because of their uniqueness, but because they represent a reversal of symbolic positions that represent their social identity process. Classical music that has been associated with the upper class was successfully performed with the visual identity of the lower class, without losing its artistic meaning. Mass media such as Jawa Pos even felt the need to immortalize this event because of its contrasting value and courage, a proof that POSS is not only shaping musical skills, but also a new social identity representation space for marginalized children. This transformation affirms that transformative music education does not have to conform learners to upper-class standards, but instead gives legitimacy to their authentic identities to perform and be recognized in the public sphere.

One of the most tangible forms of social transformation that occurs through music education in the community can also be seen in how POSS succeeded in collaborating on the international stage with the *World Symphony Orchestra* (figure 4). This achievement not only marks musical success, but also shows a shift in the social and cultural position of

students from marginalized groups to formal art spaces that were previously exclusive and difficult to access.



Figure 4. The collaboration between the POSS music community and Tumapel Youth Orchestra, together with the World Symphony Orchestra (WSO), in an event entitled “A Musical Journey 3” was held in 2017. (Source: B. A. Wicaksono, t.t., 2024)

Through a free and active process of learning, POSS students are not merely given technical musical competence, but also accumulate symbolic capital confidence, respect, and social credibility that enables them to participate on an equal level in realms that are otherwise dominated by the dominant. In Freire's (1970) model, this is the point at which the process of conscientization is at its most intense: when learners become aware of their position in an unequal social hierarchy and begin to move in and rework that position actively by means of aesthetic practice. POSS trains its learners to remake themselves not as consumers of education, but as critical subjects with the ability to perform in their communities.

This aligns with Hess's (2019) view that social justice-oriented music education empowers youth to learn skills for analyzing and challenging oppression systems through creative practice. As she clarifies, Music education can sharpen students' demands for justice by engaging them in critical reflection and collective action (Hess, 2019, p. 6). In the same vein, Fraser (2024) argues that social justice music classrooms enable students to be advocates and agents of change, called to act for equity through musical expression.

Thus, the power of music education over the POSS community can be understood as a process of emancipation that extends to three related axes personal, social, and cultural. Students' self-understanding emerges through contemplative musical experiences, their social identity is strengthened through public participation and recognition, and their communities are transformed by collective acts of creation. In these ways, music education at POSS becomes no longer a narrowly pedagogical context but is converted into an arena of resistance and renewal a living testament to education as a practice of freedom.

however, it should be noted as a non-profit community-based organization focused on participation and solidarity, POSS is not immune to various structural and operational issues.

One of the primary concerns faced is the shortage of resources whether in the form of funding, infrastructure, or access to regular teachers. Music learning activities at POSS depended heavily on voluntary contributions, informal networks, and a spirit of mutual cooperation among the administrators, teachers, parents, and the network of community partners. The lack of institutional support caused activities to be unstable, especially during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, when the community lost access to public spaces for practice and performance.

Several solutions have been implemented internally, such as providing practice spaces by parents, donating musical instruments, and adopting a trust-based and family-oriented management model established by Heru as the community leader. This participatory leadership model has proven successful in fostering a sense of ownership, collective responsibility, and emotional connection among members. However, reliance on informal structures remains a weakness that needs to be addressed in the future. Until the presence of an administrative record system, standardized learning assessment, and strategically planned leadership regeneration, the reinforcement of sustainability and scalability of this movement is prevented. It is here that the government's role becomes ever more vital. Communities like POSS need to be given formal recognition, policy backing, and facilitation by way of funding, community teacher training, and strategic cross-sectoral collaboration. The government can position arts communities as partners in efforts to build inclusive and socially equitable education. Through pro-community regulations and needs-based funding mechanisms, the state can ensure that alternative educational spaces such as POSS not only survive but also thrive and inspire other regions.

Government involvement is not only important in terms of logistics but also as a constitutional responsibility to guarantee every citizen's right to meaningful, culturally relevant, and socially relevant education. The success of POSS demonstrates that when education is conducted in a dialogic and experience-based manner, the outcomes are not merely musical skills but also the formation of conscious, independent, and transformative individuals. Therefore, state support for community-based arts education is not a form of charity, but rather the embodiment of the mandate of social justice itself.

Despite operating under conditions of multi-limited resources both in terms of funding, facilities, and institutional support the POSS Surabaya community was able to prove that music education based on the spirit of solidarity and bias toward marginalized groups can still create a liberating space. These limitations became the starting point for the emergence of solidarity and innovation in participatory learning, relevant to the reality of the learners, and meaningful both culturally and socially. Thus, there is great hope that educational models such as POSS can become an inspiring reference for the development of community-based arts education in other regions. Not only in the field of music, but also in other learning contexts that prioritize an inclusive, participatory, and community-driven approach based on real needs and potential. POSS shows us that true education is not about curricula and buildings, but about relationships, awareness, and the courage to see potential within limitations.

CONCLUSIONS

This study illustrates that the music education program at Pusat Olah Seni Surabaya (POSS) significantly influences the self-awareness, social identity, and social change of the learners, especially those who belong to marginalized groups. By using Paulo Freire's dialogical pedagogy approach, which is participatory and rooted in lived experience, the POSS community is able to create an empowering educational environment. In this case,

music education goes beyond the mere transmission of musical skills and becomes a means of cultural and social emancipation that enables learners to understand, reflect on and transform their social reality.

The findings in this study show that the learning process at POSS helps develop learners' critical consciousness (*conscientization*), so that they become willing to perform in public spaces, form new communities, and participate in national or even international music forums. These changes are clear evidence that community-based music education has the potential to address social injustice and increase the visibility of marginalized communities in formal culture. POSS has shown that music education does not have to be exclusive or elite, but can be an egalitarian and transformative territory for children regardless of social status.

In this way, community music education programs such as POSS can be a model of alternative solutions that can be used in the context of the education system in Indonesia, especially in addressing issues of social justice, equality in access to arts education, and the development of children from vulnerable groups.

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