

## Panggung Gembira: A Medium for Santri Artistic Expression at the Modern Islamic Boarding School Nurussalam Sidogede, East OKU Regency

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Abstract	Article Info
<p>Islamic boarding schools (<i>pesantren</i>) are not only centers for religious education but also spaces for fostering students' creativity, character, and social competence. One innovative program implemented at Nurussalam Modern Islamic Boarding School is <i>Panggung Gembira</i>, an annual cultural and artistic event designed as a medium for students' artistic expression within Islamic values. This study aims to explore the implementation of <i>Panggung Gembira</i> and analyze its contribution to students' creative skills, self-confidence, leadership, and character development. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation analysis. The findings reveal that <i>Panggung Gembira</i> functions as a structured educational intervention that integrates visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning experiences, enabling students to develop creativity, responsibility, collaboration, and moral awareness simultaneously. Beyond entertainment, the event serves as an effective platform for character education and holistic learning grounded in Islamic principles. This study contributes to the growing discourse on arts-based and multisensory learning in religious education by demonstrating how cultural performance activities can enhance students' personal and social development in <i>pesantren</i> contexts.</p>	<p><b>Article History</b>  <i>Received</i> : September 09, 2025  <i>Revised</i> : December 02, 2025  <i>Accepted</i> : December 24, 2025</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b>  <i>Panggung Gembira, Santri Artistic Expression, Modern Islamic Boarding School</i></p>

Published by Yayasan Payungi Smart Madani  
 Website <https://journal.payungi.org/index.php/ijcep>  
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### INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools, known as *pesantren*, represent one of the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia. They play a pivotal role in shaping students' character, religious values, and life skills. More than just centers for religious learning, *pesantren* also serve as spaces for the development of individual potential, including in the realms of art and creativity. In response to changing times, *pesantren* have increasingly adopted more holistic approaches to education, accommodating non-academic expressions to enrich the learning experiences of their students.

In a global educational context, the integration of arts into formal and non-formal education has been widely recognized as a powerful medium for fostering holistic student development. Numerous international studies have demonstrated that arts-based learning contributes not only to cognitive achievement but also to socio-emotional competence, creativity, communication skills, and moral reasoning (Winner, Goldstein, & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013; Bamford, 2015). In religious educational settings, artistic activities serve an additional function by acting as symbolic and narrative tools through which values, identities, and ethical principles are transmitted across generations.

Within Islamic education, art has historically functioned as an instrument of spiritual expression and *da'wah*, as seen in traditions such as calligraphy, *nasheed*, religious drama, and storytelling (Necipoğlu, 2017). Contemporary scholars argue that when artistic expression is framed within Islamic epistemology, it does not contradict religious learning but rather strengthens moral internalization and spiritual awareness (Hassan & Jamaludin, 2018; Abdullah, 2020). This perspective challenges the dichotomy often drawn between religious discipline and creative freedom, suggesting instead a complementary relationship between the two.

Recent empirical studies in faith-based schools across Asia, the Middle East, and Europe reveal that structured performance-based activities enhance students' self-regulation, leadership, and

collaborative skills while reinforcing institutional values (Sahin, 2019; Al-Zahrani & Alghamdi, 2021). In this regard, pesantren represent a unique educational ecosystem where discipline, spirituality, and communal life converge, making them an ideal context for examining the pedagogical potential of arts-based programs. However, despite the growing global emphasis on creative education, research focusing on artistic expression within pesantren remains relatively limited in international academic discourse.

Therefore, situating *Panggung Gembira* within this broader global and theoretical landscape is essential to demonstrate its relevance beyond local practice. By analyzing *Panggung Gembira* as an arts-based educational intervention grounded in Islamic values, this study contributes to international discussions on culturally responsive pedagogy, religious education, and holistic student development.

As noted by Abdul Tholib (2017), pesantren in Indonesia have demonstrated remarkable resilience across various conditions, often operating under modest circumstances with limited resources. Their sustainability is largely sustained by the dedication and sincerity of the *kyai* (Islamic scholars), *ustadz* (teachers), and students who serve with a spirit of devotion rather than material reward distinguishing them from modern educational institutions. Despite such limitations, pesantren continue to function as dynamic centers of Islamic education and civilization.

The evolution of modern pesantren, such as Pondok Pesantren Modern Nurussalam Sidogede, reflects efforts to broaden the scope of student development—not only in cognitive-religious aspects but also in emotional, social, and creative dimensions. One innovation in this regard is the annual event called *Panggung Gembira* ("Joyful Stage"), an artistic expression platform infused with Islamic values, involving all students in its execution. While art has sometimes been viewed negatively in pesantren contexts—feared as a distraction from religious and academic pursuits—this perception is gradually shifting. Increasingly, art framed within Islamic principles is being recognized as an effective medium of *dakwah* (religious outreach) and a tool for instilling profound moral values.

The performances in *Panggung Gembira* range from religious music, traditional Islamic-themed dances, religious dramas, to spiritual poetry—all conducted within the bounds of Sharia. According to Farid (2022), this event represents the peak of artistic expression for final-year students, offering them a structured opportunity to showcase their talents through an Islamic lens. It also fosters key skills such as leadership, teamwork, responsibility, and time management. The leadership of Pondok Pesantren Nurussalam affirms that *Panggung Gembira* is not merely a form of entertainment, but a medium for Islamic character education and creative expression. It serves as a symbol of how pesantren adapt to modern challenges—where students must be well-versed not only in religious sciences but also in engaging with technology and contemporary culture.

Furthermore, this activity creates a safe and respectful space for students to express themselves within the limits of Islamic law, balancing freedom with obedience. Yuliangsih (2023) highlights that *Panggung Gembira* helps shape students' mental and moral character, nurtures leadership, and fosters community-oriented innovation and creativity. Within the strict and disciplined life of the pesantren, this event offers a constructive outlet for energy and ideas. Artistic expression here reflects not only individual creativity but also the values cultivated during students' time at the pesantren.

Nonetheless, despite its growing significance in modern pesantren dynamics, there remains limited academic research specifically exploring how *Panggung Gembira* influences students' artistic expression and its impact on their emotional and social development. Therefore, this study aims to examine in depth the function of *Panggung Gembira* as a medium of artistic expression for students at Pondok Pesantren Modern Nurussalam Sidogede in East OKU Regency.

## METHOD

This research employs a qualitative descriptive method, which is designed to explore and portray social phenomena in a comprehensive and in-depth manner within their natural settings. The study was carried out at the Nurussalam Modern Islamic Boarding School, located in Sidogede Village, Belitang Subdistrict, East OKU Regency, South Sumatra. The data used in this research comprises both primary and secondary sources. Data were collected through a combination of observation, interviews, documentation, and triangulation techniques. The collected data were then analyzed using descriptive analysis methods.

To ensure methodological rigor, this study applied trustworthiness criteria commonly used in qualitative research, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement in the research setting and triangulation of data sources, including interviews, observations, and documentation. By comparing perspectives from school leaders, teachers, students, parents, and alumni, the researchers were able to capture a comprehensive understanding of the *Panggung Gembira* phenomenon.

Transferability was addressed by providing thick descriptions of the research context, participants, and activities, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings to similar pesantren or faith-based educational institutions. Dependability was strengthened through systematic documentation of research procedures, including interview guides, observation protocols, and data analysis steps. This audit trail ensures transparency and consistency throughout the research process.

Confirmability was achieved by minimizing researcher bias through reflective journaling and peer debriefing with fellow researchers familiar with qualitative educational studies. These strategies align with contemporary qualitative research standards and enhance the reliability of the study's findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2021).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### 1. Findings from Interviews

Table 1. Summary of Interview Findings and Analysis

No	Informant	Key Statements	Analytical Interpretation
1	School Principal	<i>Panggung Gembira is not entertainment, but character education.</i>	Event functions as moral and leadership training
2	Art Supervisor	Students learn discipline and teamwork	Development of collaborative competence
3	Student (Male)	Performing builds my confidence	Strengthening self-efficacy
4	Student (Female)	I learned responsibility through committee work	Leadership and accountability
5	Teacher	Art helps students express emotions positively	Emotional regulation
6	Stage Coordinator	Planning trains problem-solving	Cognitive and organizational skills
7	Music Trainer	Students integrate rhythm and movement	Multisensory learning
8	Audience Teacher	Students show maturity on stage	Character internalization
9	Alumni	Experience useful for public speaking	Transferable life skills
10	Parent	Children become more confident	Social impact beyond school

Interview data indicate that *Panggung Gembira* contributes significantly to students' affective, social, and cognitive development. The activity engages students through visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities, aligning with multisensory learning principles

#### 2. Findings from Documentation

Table 2. Documentation Evidence and Analysis

Figure	Documentation Description	Analysis
Fig.1	Stage rehearsal	Kinesthetic learning process
Fig.2	Costume preparation	Creativity and cultural identity
Fig.3	Group discussion	Collaborative planning
Fig.4	Islamic drama performance	Moral narrative delivery
Fig.5	Traditional dance	Motor coordination
Fig.6	Poetry recitation	Linguistic expression
Fig.7	Backstage coordination	Responsibility training
Fig.8	Teacher supervision	Guided learning
Fig.9	Audience engagement	Social communication
Fig.10	Closing ceremony	Achievement recognition

Documentation confirms that learning occurs not only during performance but throughout preparation stages, reinforcing experiential and motor learning.

#### 3. Findings from Observation

Table 3. Observational Findings and Analysis

No	Observed Activity	Analytical Meaning
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1	Students manage time	Self-regulation skills
2	Peer collaboration	Social learning
3	Stage discipline	Behavioral control
4	Emotional expression	Affective learning
5	Teacher feedback	Scaffolding process

### A. Preliminary Research by the Organizing Committee of *Panggung Gembira*

The implementation of *Panggung Gembira* began with a research phase conducted by the organizing committee. The primary goal of this research was to understand audience needs and tailor the event concept to align with the values and culture of the pesantren. The committee focused on two main target groups: the students (*santri*) as both performers and primary audience, and the teachers and school leaders as mentors and supervisors.

This research involved reflecting on previous years' events, internal discussions, and gathering preferences from the prospective audience. The outcome was a content strategy that combined light entertainment with moral and religious messages to deliver educational value. Internal assessments were also conducted to assign committee roles based on each member's strengths and abilities.

### B. Event Design Development

Following the research phase, the committee proceeded to design the event through collaborative forums and brainstorming sessions involving division leaders. The goal was to synthesize diverse ideas into a cohesive and meaningful program. This design included theme selection, event structure, visual elements, and the delivery of key messages.

A dominant design choice was the use of green as the primary color, symbolizing tranquility and natural harmony. The stage design adopted a minimalist and futuristic style, supported by modern lighting and decorations. The program was structured around four temporal segments: the past, pre-modern era, present, and future—each represented through themed performances.

The central message was: "*Declaring the truth, not merely justifying reality,*" a principle reflected in each performance segment. The design philosophy emphasized efficiency and visual appeal under the motto: "*simple, elegant, yet cost-effective,*" carefully considering movement, color, light, and sound as emotional and aesthetic elements.

### C. Activity Planning

This strategic phase included theme formulation, committee structuring, event scripting, and media design. Scheduling was aligned with the pesantren's academic calendar to ensure that the event would not interfere with teaching and learning activities.

## DISCUSSION

### 1. The Strategic Role of Research in *Panggung Gembira* Planning

Research played a critical role in the early planning stages of *Panggung Gembira* at Nurussalam Modern Islamic Boarding School. As emphasized by Goldblatt (2014), the depth and accuracy of research significantly influence the success of an educational and cultural event. The organizing committee recognized the importance of understanding their primary audience—students (*santri*), teachers, and pesantren leaders so that the event content could address diverse educational, spiritual, and cultural expectations.

Through this research process, the committee succeeded in formulating a concept that was not only entertaining but also educational and morally grounded. Light entertainment was harmoniously blended with Islamic values and character education, aligning students' creative aspirations with the institutional vision of the pesantren. Reflection on previous *Panggung Gembira* implementations informed improvements in the current year's planning, supporting Yurita et al. (2019), who argue that sustainable event planning must be grounded in systematic evaluation of past experiences.

Internal research also guided the efficient delegation of responsibilities based on each committee member's abilities and interests (Siregar, 2025). This indicates that the research process functioned not only at a conceptual level but also at an operational level, allowing students to learn organizational management, leadership, and responsibility experientially. In this sense, research became the foundation for meaningful student involvement and holistic learning.

Recent empirical studies from international contexts reinforce the findings of this study regarding the educational value of arts-based activities in formal and non-formal educational institutions. Large-scale quantitative and mixed-method studies have shown that participation in structured arts

programs significantly enhances students' creative thinking, self-regulation, and problem-solving abilities (Winner et al., 2015; Fancourt & Finn, 2019). Research published in *Thinking Skills and Creativity* and *Teaching and Teacher Education* further demonstrates that arts-integrated educational events foster higher levels of student engagement and motivation, particularly when learners are actively involved in planning and execution processes (Henriksen et al., 2016; Escala et al., 2024). These findings align with the *Panggung Gembira* model, where students are not passive performers but active researchers, planners, and organizers, indicating that research-based event design contributes meaningfully to holistic learning outcomes.

## **2. Event Design as a Reflection of Aesthetics and Values**

The design phase of *Panggung Gembira* was participatory and professionally managed. Brainstorming and mind-mapping sessions involving all division leaders facilitated the integration of diverse ideas into a coherent event design (Goldblatt, 2014). Students were directly involved as designers and performers, while teachers acted as advisors to ensure that artistic expression remained aligned with educational and Islamic values.

The visual design adopted a modern minimalist style infused with Islamic nuances. The dominant use of green symbolized tranquility, spirituality, and harmony, reinforcing the pesantren's religious identity. More than aesthetic considerations, the design embodied philosophical meaning through the theme of time from the past, present, to the future and the core message: "*Declaring the truth, not merely justifying reality.*" This demonstrates that the event design functioned simultaneously as a visual, symbolic, and educational medium.

From a learning perspective, the design process reflects principles of multisensory learning. Visual elements (stage layout, lighting, costumes), auditory components (music, dialogue, poetry), and kinesthetic activities (dance, movement, stage blocking) were integrated throughout the performances. This aligns with theories of multisensory and kinesthetic learning, which suggest that learning becomes more meaningful when learners actively engage multiple sensory modalities (Gardner, 2011; Lengel & Kuczala, 2010). The design motto, "*simple, elegant, yet affordable,*" further underscores the integration of aesthetics, values, and effectiveness, as suggested by Pakaradena et al. (2018).

Empirical evidence from neuroscience and educational psychology further confirms that multisensory learning environments significantly enhance cognitive processing and emotional engagement. Studies published in *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* and *Educational Psychology Review* report that learning experiences combining visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities improve information retention and conceptual understanding compared to single-modality instruction (Shams & Seitz, 2018; Mayer, 2020). Moreover, arts-based multisensory activities have been empirically linked to improved emotional regulation and self-expression among adolescents, particularly in culturally and value-oriented educational settings (Daykin et al., 2018; Clift & Morrison, 2020). In the context of *Panggung Gembira*, the integration of music, movement, drama, and visual symbolism enables santri to internalize moral and religious values through embodied experiences, reinforcing learning outcomes beyond cognitive achievement alone.

Empirical evidence from international research supports the findings of this study regarding the educational value of performance-based and arts-integrated learning. Studies conducted in secondary schools and religious institutions have shown that participation in performing arts enhances students' self-confidence, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal communication skills (Daykin et al., 2018; Clift & Morrison, 2020). These outcomes resonate with the experiences of santri involved in *Panggung Gembira*, who reported increased confidence, responsibility, and social maturity.

From a leadership development perspective, arts-based programs provide authentic contexts for students to practice decision-making, coordination, and accountability (Karkou & Glasman, 2022). Similar findings were reported in Islamic schools in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, where structured cultural performances fostered student leadership while maintaining religious norms (Ismail et al., 2019; Alsubaie, 2021). This suggests that *Panggung Gembira* aligns with broader patterns observed in faith-based education internationally.

Furthermore, multisensory learning approaches have been empirically linked to deeper engagement and long-term retention of values and knowledge (Shams & Seitz, 2018; Mayer, 2020). By integrating visual symbolism, auditory elements, and kinesthetic movement, *Panggung Gembira* facilitates embodied learning experiences that allow santri to internalize moral messages more effectively than through verbal instruction alone. This supports the argument that arts-based learning is particularly effective in moral and character education contexts.

## **3. Planning as the Foundation of Event Organization**

Planning emerged as the most strategic phase in the implementation of *Panggung Gembira*, laying the foundation for all subsequent activities. The organizing committee applied the principles of

time, space, and tempo (Goldblatt, 2014) by aligning the event schedule with the pesantren's academic calendar, selecting appropriate venues, and managing rehearsal rhythms to avoid academic disruption.

The planning phase included a wide range of performance proposals, such as *hadroh*, dance, drama, poetry, pantomime, and stage design, all conceptualized and executed by students. Teacher involvement extended beyond supervision to technical and pedagogical guidance, ensuring that each performance conveyed moral messages and reflected Islamic ethics.

This phase functioned not only as a technical preparation stage but also as a collaborative learning process. Students developed planning skills, creative thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities. International empirical studies consistently indicate that participation in performing arts and large-scale cultural events contributes significantly to leadership development, self-confidence, and social responsibility. Research conducted in secondary schools and faith-based institutions shows that students involved in organizing and performing arts events demonstrate higher levels of self-efficacy, communication skills, and collaborative leadership compared to their peers (Karkou & Glasman, 2022; OECD, 2019). Similar findings were reported in studies of Islamic educational institutions in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, where arts-based programs strengthened students' discipline, moral awareness, and sense of communal responsibility while maintaining religious norms (Ismail et al., 2019; Alsubaie, 2021). These empirical patterns support the conclusion that Panggung Gembira functions as a character-building platform, enabling santri to translate abstract Islamic values into lived social practices.

Consistent with Bruner's constructivist theory, students constructed knowledge through active participation and experiential learning, rather than through passive instruction. Thus, planning became a meaningful educational experience that strengthened students' cognitive, social, and affective competencies.

#### **4. Coordination as Collaborative and Experiential Execution**

Coordination represented the practical realization of the planning process. Internal coordination was carried out through regular meetings, task distribution, rehearsals, and evaluations involving all committee members and performers. The structured organizational system consisting of a central committee, field coordinators, and technical divisions ensured efficient communication and division of labor.

External coordination involved collaboration with sound system operators, lighting technicians, and LED screen teams. Joint rehearsals ensured synchronization between artistic performances and technical execution. Although no formal marketing strategy was implemented, the event successfully enhanced the pesantren's public image. As noted by Arifin (2020), educational and cultural events can function as effective tools for institutional branding when they communicate clear moral and educational messages to the public.

From an educational standpoint, this coordination process fostered experiential and kinesthetic learning. Students learned by doing managing conflicts, adapting to unexpected challenges, and cooperating with peers and external stakeholders. These findings support previous studies that emphasize the role of experiential learning in developing leadership, communication skills, and social responsibility.

#### **5. Evaluation as a Tool for Reflection and Improvement**

Evaluation was conducted comprehensively, encompassing internal assessments, content monitoring, and performance appraisal of each division. Evaluation activities began during the pre-event phase through night rehearsals and final run-throughs. Teacher-appointed judges used structured evaluation sheets to assess performance quality, discipline, creativity, and message delivery.

However, audience satisfaction surveys had not yet been systematically implemented, despite their importance in measuring broader social impact (Dewantara, 2022). Nevertheless, written evaluations from judges covered both technical and performative aspects, including costumes, stage presence, lighting, and visual composition. These evaluations provided constructive feedback for future improvements.

From a broader educational perspective, evaluation processes in arts-based programs are essential for ensuring sustainability and continuous improvement. Empirical studies emphasize that reflective evaluation, including peer feedback and instructor assessment, enhances students' metacognitive awareness and learning ownership (Hattie, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2021). Research in *Arts & Health* and *Studies in Educational Evaluation* also highlights that systematic evaluation strengthens institutional learning cultures and reinforces the long-term impact of arts-based educational interventions (Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Brown et al., 2020). Although audience satisfaction surveys have not yet been formally implemented in Panggung Gembira, the existing evaluative practices already align with international recommendations for reflective and experiential learning frameworks.

This evaluation process reflects the pesantren's commitment to making *Panggung Gembira* a sustainable educational platform. Continuous reflection and improvement ensure that the event remains relevant, educational, and aligned with Islamic values. In line with Kolb's experiential learning cycle, evaluation enabled students to reflect on their experiences, conceptualize lessons learned, and apply them in future activities.

The findings of this study have several important implications for educational practice and policy in pesantren and other religious educational institutions. First, they highlight the potential of arts-based programs as complementary pedagogical strategies that support academic learning, character education, and leadership development simultaneously. Integrating structured artistic activities into the pesantren curriculum may help address students' socio-emotional needs while preserving institutional values.

Second, this study underscores the importance of institutional support and structured planning in ensuring that artistic expression remains aligned with educational and religious objectives. Clear guidelines, teacher supervision, and reflective evaluation mechanisms are essential to maximize the educational impact of such programs.

Future research may expand this study by employing mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to examine the long-term effects of participation in *Panggung Gembira* on students' academic achievement, career trajectories, and civic engagement. Comparative studies across different pesantren or countries would also contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of arts-based learning in Islamic education.

## CONCLUSION

*Panggung Gembira* at Nurussalam Modern Islamic Boarding School represents an effective integration of artistic expression, multisensory learning, and Islamic character education. By engaging students cognitively, emotionally, and physically, the program fosters creativity, self-confidence, leadership, and moral responsibility. This study demonstrates that arts-based educational practices can serve as powerful pedagogical tools within religious institutions. The findings contribute to educational discourse by providing empirical evidence that culturally grounded performance activities can support holistic student development and innovation in pesantren education.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors gratefully acknowledge the meaningful contributions and support provided by the teachers and students of Nurussalam Modern Islamic Boarding School during the entire course of this research. The authors also wish to extend their appreciation to the school's administrative staff and the event organizing committee for facilitating access and offering crucial data. The completion of this study was made possible through their invaluable collaboration.

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International Journal of Community Engagement Payung

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