

Dramaturgical Analysis and Cultural Values in the Staging of the Musical Dance Poem Mengayau in Sabah

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ABSTRACT

This musical dance poetry performance is a narrative adaptation of the folk tales of the Iranun community, reinterpreted through the integration of dance, music, poetry, and acting within a contemporary musical framework. This paper aims to examine the performance structure and cultural significance in the staging of the musical dance poetry "Mengayau" performed at the Auditorium of the National Department for Culture and Arts (JKKN), Sabah. This paper employs a qualitative approach using interview methods, direct observation of the performance, and analysis of historical and academic documents related to the Iranun tradition. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis and supported by Aristotle's dramaturgical analysis theory (1996) as well as performance semiotics to evaluate the narrative structure and cultural sign system manifested through body, sound, and text. The study found that the performance of mengayau demonstrates a strong artistic cohesion between choreography, musical structure, and poetry as the main dramatic drivers. Dance serves as a body language that expresses emotions, conflicts, and character transformations, while poetry and song lyrics act as a reflective medium that connects literal and symbolic meanings. In the cultural aspect, this performance acts as a channel for reinterpreting the identity and collective memory of the Iranun community, particularly in interpreting the narrative of 'mengayau' in terms of contemporary values and sensitivities. This paper contributes to the discourse of performing arts by asserting the musical performance as a living, dynamic, and multilayered cultural text

Keywords: Musical Performance; Dance Poetry; Mengayau; Iranun Community; Performance Dramaturgy; Cultural Text.

INTRODUCTION

Musical performances are a form of performing arts that are integrative and interdisciplinary. It combines elements of music, acting, dance, and language, becoming a dramatic unity in conveying aesthetic, emotional, and structured meaning. In the academic discourse of performing arts, musical theatre is not defined merely as entertainment; rather, it signifies a complex performance system that operates through various interactions of artistic mediums. Brown (2024) explains that musical performance art is a triadic combination of music, dance, and narrative that collectively forms cognitive and affective experiences for the audience. Musical theatre is a form of art that integrates singing, acting, dancing, and production for the purpose of storytelling and is a highly interdisciplinary artistic field that utilizes various fields of knowledge for performance and education (Finney, 2020).

This explanation positions musical theatre as a meeting space for various forms of art that operate simultaneously and interdependently. Based on the framework of performance art theory, a musical performance is defined as a form of artistic expression grounded in the integration of body, sound, and text, which serve as complementary channels of stage communication. The bodies of actors or dancers serve as visual and kinesthetic mediums, sound involves musical and vocal elements, while the text appears in the form of dialogue, lyrics, and narrative symbols. This integration requires an understanding of the meaning in a musical performance, formed through the dynamic interaction between various performance elements that occur simultaneously on stage.

The production of an effective musical performance requires a deep understanding of the relationship between mind and body through the concept of embodied or enactive cognition (Hagen et al., 2018). This perspective emphasizes that cognitive processes are not solely centered on the mind but are also shaped through the active bodily experience in the space and time of the performance. In the aspect of musical performance, the coordination of movement, breath control, and vocal expression are not merely technical skills, but rather an integration of the mental, emotional, and physical aspects of the performer. This approach demonstrates that musical performances are produced through bodily actions that directly interact with music, rhythm, and stage space, and reinforces the explanation that musical performances should not be analyzed separately according to distinct artistic disciplines. In this regard, through the concept of dramaturgy, musical performances serve as a medium for narrative delivery that uses music and movement as the main drivers of storytelling. The narrative in a musical performance is shaped through musical structure, rhythm arrangement, choreography, spatial usage, and visual symbols such as costumes and set design. Not only conveyed through spoken dialogue or verbal text. These elements play a role in nurturing emotions, structuring conflicts, and indirectly building the development of the story.

The staging of a dance musical lies at the intersection of choreography and written text, whether in the form of dialogue or song lyrics that serve as a dramatic language (Liza Gennaro, 2021). Dance is a critical element that serves as an important narrative and expressive tool within the structure of the performance. Dance also serves as a form of body language that has the ability to develop and strengthen dramatic meaning. Dance acts as an important narrative instrument to express emotions, internal conflicts, and character development (Brown, 2023). Through the structure of movement, body dynamics, and use of space, choreography is able to express the internal experiences of characters that are manifested visually and kinesthetically. There are seven main functions of dance in musicals, namely as an exploration of character psychology, a narrative tool, an unspoken aspect of the libretto, a transition tool, a medium for character development, a metaphor, and a form of dance abstraction in the narrative.

Musical performances require a high level of creative ability to build characters and outline dramatic events through movements rich in meaning. Body movements become a system of signs that carry layers of implied meaning and transcend the boundaries of spoken language. The bodies of dancers or actors become the site of the manifestation of symbolic meaning by connecting emotions, dramatic intentions, and narrative (Gang & Zhang, 2022). The role of choreography has shifted from decorative elements to meaningful dramatic elements that are integrated with the libretto (Dame, 1995). This indirectly complements meanings that cannot be fully expressed through verbal dialogue.

Poetry also becomes an important element in the structure of a musical performance, whether through dialogue or the lyrics of poetic songs. Poetry acts as an aesthetic medium that combines the beauty of language with musical and movement expressions, as well as diversifying the layers of meaning in the performance. Poetry becomes a bridge between literal and symbolic meanings. Poetic language can strengthen complex emotions and ideas in symbolic form, making the narrative delivery more impactful. Talle (2022) introduced the concept of transcreation, which is a creative process that transforms poetry from written text to a performance experience across various mediums, including music and dance. This concept makes poetry not static or bound to the form of text alone but evolves as a dynamic expression brought to life through the bodies of dancers or actors, the sound of music, and the structure of movement. It allows the meaning of the poem to be developed and interpreted by the audience. Tomuş (2023) study found that poetic language can build deep emotional connections with the audience when combined with theatrical and musical elements. Therefore, the integration of dance and poetry in musical performances diversifies the aesthetic structure of the presentation and enhances its ability as a complex, reflective, and meaningful medium of artistic communication.

The staging of musicals in Malaysia after large-scale productions such as *Puteri Gunung Ledang*, *Siddhartha*, *Butterfly Lovers*, and *Jewel of Tibet* prove their success (Loo Fung Ying et al., 2014). The integration of dance in modern Malaysian musicals, as showcased in the production of *Puteri Gunung Ledang*, combines the aesthetics of traditional dance with contemporary choreography techniques, thereby creating a unique movement language that connects cultural heritage with modern artistic innovation. Community musical theatre projects play an important role in enhancing the involvement of young people from various ethnicities, cultures, and religions across borders, unravelling stereotypes, appreciating differences, and building peace between races

(Tan Sooi Beng, 2018). This development shows that musical performances function as a complex and relevant medium of social communication in both local and global cultural aspects. However, the contemporary landscape of Malaysian musical theatre is shaped by global influences.

Although musical theatre theory and various international and local scholarly studies have proven that musical theatre has developed as a legitimate academic discipline with a solid conceptual framework of theory, research methodology, and discourse, practical reality shows that not all artists possess the multidisciplinary ability to organically and balanced integrate the elements of music, acting, dance, and narrative. In the framework of musical theatre theory, the integration of all these elements is emphasized as a cohesive dramatic system, where each artistic component functions together to shape the development of the story, emotions, conflicts, and a comprehensive aesthetic experience. At the same time, the development of local musical performances has also shown significant growth through the integration of local traditional arts with contemporary theatre approaches.

However, in practice, there are still performances that fail to achieve that dramatic unity. The failure to thoroughly integrate artistic elements causes a musical performance to appear merely as a medley or a patchwork of performances that sequentially combine acting, dancing, music, and language without a strong dramaturgical connection. In this situation, each artistic element operates separately and does not function synthetically to build dramatic development and aesthetic unity in the performance.

As a result, the performance loses emotional continuity, narrative strength, and artistic integrity, which should be the main foundation of a musical work. This issue indirectly highlights the significant gap between the theoretical framework and the practical reality in the production of musical performances. In this regard, a true musical performance should not be understood as a collection of various art disciplines within a single performance space, but rather as a creative process that requires conceptual integration, dramaturgical awareness, and technical proficiency that complement each other. In this regard, each element such as music, dance, acting, and language must be harmoniously integrated to form a dramatic structure that is cohesive, meaningful, and impactful to the audience's experience.

This paper aims to critically analyze the structure of the musical dance poetry performance *Mengayau* staged at the Auditorium of the National Department for Culture and Arts (JKKN), Sabah. The analysis focuses on the formation and function of the main elements of the performance such as dance, music, poetry, acting, and stage visual aspects to understand how all these elements are comprehensively integrated in building a cohesive dramatic narrative. This research is important to assess the extent to which the relationship between these artistic elements functions synthetically in producing aesthetic unity and a meaningful performance experience. The paper also elaborates on the cultural values, meanings, and symbolism contained in the dance poetry performance by examining the strategies of integrating traditional and contemporary elements reinterpreted through the medium of musical performance. This study specifically focuses on the representation of cultural identity, the formation of cultural symbolism, and the way traditional elements are re-presented in the form of modern performances. Through this approach, the performance of *Mengayau* is seen not merely as entertainment, but as a medium of cultural expression that reflects the relationship between performing arts, societal identity, and the process of cultural reinterpretation. This paper is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of musical performances as a living, dynamic, and interdisciplinary cultural text. By combining an analysis of performance structure and the interpretation of cultural meaning, this study aims to expand the discourse on the relationship between performance aesthetics, dramaturgy, and cultural representation in the local performing arts scene.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach that emphasizes a deep understanding of the meaning, process, and sociocultural aspects underlying the performance of the musical dance poetry *Mengayau*. This approach was chosen because it is capable of examining the experiences, interpretations, and creative processes that holistically shape a performance. To obtain primary data, the interview method was implemented using purposive sampling techniques involving selected informants or key informants, specifically the performance director and cultural practitioners who have direct knowledge and experience of the performance. The determination of the number of informants in this study is not fixed but rather develops dynamically using the snowball technique. Through

this method, the study seeks to understand the adaptive narrative process, considering the staging of the musical poetry dance *Mengayau*.

The observation method was conducted to examine the structure of the performance, the relationship between the elements of dance, music, poetry, and acting, as well as the dynamics of the body and the use of stage space in shaping the dramatic narrative. This observation helps the study evaluate how these performance elements function synthetically in creating dramatic and aesthetic unity. Document analysis is conducted through reference to written sources such as historical records, academic texts, and documents related to performing arts to support and validate field data through the method of source triangulation. This approach is important to ensure the validity and consistency of the interpretation of the obtained data.

Data is analyzed using a thematic analysis approach to systematically identify recurring themes, patterns, and meanings. The analysis is reinforced using the Aristotelian dramaturgical framework based on Aristotle's *Poetics* (1996) to evaluate narrative structure, plot division, and the function of performance elements. At the same time, an interpretative approach based on the semiotics of performance is also used to interpret body, movement, and poetry as a cultural sign system that carries symbolic meaning in the performance (Elam, 1980; Fischer-Lichte, 2008). The combination of methodology and analytical framework facilitates the study to be conducted systematically, contextually, and scientifically in understanding the musical performance of the dance poem *Mengayau* as a living, dynamic, and multilayered cultural text.

The Framework of Aristotelian Poetics Dramaturgy

Aristotle's dramaturgical framework (1996) in poetics is a structured and comprehensive system of analysis for understanding the structure, function, and impact of a dramatic work. This framework is not only descriptive but also prescriptive as it outlines the fundamental characteristics that make a drama effective from both aesthetic and moral perspectives.

In this framework, the plot (*mythos*) is prioritized as the core element that drives the entire narrative through cause-and-effect relationships. Aristotle also emphasized the principle of unity of action, which is the focus on a series of interconnected main events to ensure dramatic continuity and coherence.

In addition, the concepts of *hamartia* (character flaw), *peripeteia* (reversal of fortune), and *anagnorisis* (recognition or realization) serve as important mechanisms in building tension and dramatic development. All these elements ultimately lead to *catharsis*, which is the emotional release experienced by the audience. Therefore, Aristotle's framework emphasizes the construction of a drama that is orderly, unified, and effective through a plot development that logically progresses from beginning to middle to end.

Interpretative Approach Based on the Semiotics of Performance

The interpretative approach based on the semiotics of performance refers to Ferdinand de Saussure's theory (1916) that connects the signifier and signified as well as the social context and audience experience. This method is used to analyze a performance as a sign that generates meaning through the interaction of various stage elements. This approach focuses on each component such as body movements, facial expressions, costumes, stage space, lighting, and sound as signs that carry symbolic and cultural meanings. In the aspect of performance, meaning exists dynamically through interpretations involving the actors, text, and audience, making the interpretation process open to various layers. This approach focuses on complex symbolic discourse rich with various cultural and ideological meanings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Sabah Citra Seni Budaya Association (CitSeYa) staged a musical poetry dance performance at the Auditorium of the National Department for Culture and Arts, Sabah (JKKNS). This performance highlights the folk tales of the Iranun community, one of the minority ethnic groups in the state of Sabah, which has its own historical narratives, language, arts, and culture. This musical approach was chosen to showcase a more comprehensive and authentic interpretation by integrating artistic elements into a dramatic and cohesive unity.

Through this performance, the Iranian folk tale can be interpreted through body language, musical composition, poetic dialogue, and symbolic stage design, creating a deeper aesthetic experience for the community.

The Narrative of *Mengayau* in the Iranun Community

Etymologically, the word "*ranun*" in the Iranun language means affection, longing, and so on, which have values of closeness and kinship as a tribe. When "*ranun*" is prefixed with 'I' and becomes "Iranun," it means "the beloved" or "the longed for" or the feeling of longing for the homeland (Datu Bandira Datu Alang, 1992, Smith, 2001: 91-101).

The Iranun community is known for the activity of *mengayau*, which involves travelling from one region to another, either by land or sea using sailing boats. Upon reaching newly explored places, they sometimes settle in those areas, which are referred to as *laugan*. Borneo was referred to as *laugan* by the Iranun sailors until the 19th century.

In the social aspect, Pinjaman bin Haji Hussin (2024) states that a young Iranun must perform *gayau* to elevate their social image. When a boy reaches the age of sixteen and above, especially the Iranun children of noble lineage, they are encouraged to join the group of Iranun sailors who go on raids (Datu Bandira Datu Alang, 1992). This activity is closely related to their way of life and environment. The development of the sociocultural activities of the Iranun community is greatly influenced by that environment, which shapes them into skilled sailors or mariners. This is clearly manifested in Saber's statement (1979: 273) that;

"...They were known in other parts of the Malay archipelago as the Illanun, a name derived from ranao or lanao which means lake, as they used to start their trips overland from Illana bay, hence to distant land..."

The activity of *mengayau* serves as one of the methods to test the bravery of the Iranun children and their skills in navigating the ocean. The success of *mengayau* is measured through the aspect of safe departure and safe return, as well as the experiences gained throughout the journey of *mengayau* (Datu Bandira Datu Alang, 1992). In the 18th century, the active involvement of the Iranun in sailing and trade in the Nusantara was very prominent, earning them several privileges (patronage) among the Malay kingdoms. They moved from Sulu and the Sulawesi Sea to other regions, expanding between the continents of Europe, India, and China, including the areas of Penang, Batavia, and eastern Makasar (Warren, 2002: 5). Due to the prowess and intelligence of the Iranun people in navigation and trade, they were called 'pirates' (Warren, 2002: 5). Their prowess in navigation and trade positioned the Iranun community as an important ethnic group in the traditional maritime economic network, and even shaped their social structure, value system, and life philosophy based on the sea.

The Narrative Structure of *Mengayau* in the Musical Poetry Dance Performance

The folktales of the Iranun community are based on oral traditions, historical records, life philosophies, and the culture of the Iranun, as referenced in the writings of Datu Bandira Datu Alang (1992). The narrative was examined and its sources verified by several cultural practitioners and individuals with in-depth knowledge of the traditional stories of the Iranun. This cross-referencing process facilitates the division and arrangement of the plot in a dramatic manner and the construction of a narrative structure that is more dynamic, layered, and non-linear, in line with the dramaturgical needs of the musical performance.

The narrative structure built in the musical performance of the narrative-based dance poetry *Mengayau* of the Iranun community demonstrates a form of dramaturgical crafting that is not only arranged dramatically but also shows a deep aesthetic and cultural awareness of the function of performance as a medium for representing the collective memory of the indigenous community. The division of the narrative into five main acts illustrates the process of adapting the Iranian folk tale into a stage performance systematically, maintaining a dramatic continuity that is interconnected with one another. The initial act introduces the setting, characters, and premise of the conflict, followed by the development act that showcases the opposition and dramatic dynamics through the strengthening of character relationships and the expansion of the story's motifs. Next, the climax becomes the peak of dramatic tension, showcasing the maximum confrontation of conflict, before entering the falling action that unravels the climax event. Finally, the closing scene that shows the resolution of the narrative and

the reinterpretation of the dramatic experience that has been undergone. Table 1 below shows the arrangement of the narrative and the "mengayau" poetry that have been organized according to the scenes in this dance poetry musical performance.

SCENE	NARRATIVE	POEM
Scene 1 (Beginning)	The Iranun ethnic group is part of the population in this region and is spread across the Malay Archipelago. A nation rich in its own culture has unique customs and taboos passed down through generations. Along with the passage of time and the adoption of Islam as a guiding principle, some customs and traditions have begun to be abandoned.	<i>Bpangilai sa gugud a rampunan a bangsa Salad salad dsalekaten su sadiara ian Magawa' la laugan sumangur sa laugan niparak den sikiran Miiangilai sa inged inumbal iran a pusaka'</i> <i>Bangsa a Iranun Tumatardu sa adat makadiadiaga sa bangsa Kakal makakapet sa ukit a mapia Di' gkaagir sa lupa' aya Sa kadadapu'an ta</i>
Scene 2 (Development)	The life of the Iranun community is close-knit. Their lives are harmonious and full of brotherhood spirit, even though they come from different places. The word IRANUN refers to the meaning of affection, which pertains to the value of love that binds kinship, creating a spirit of brotherhood through cooperation, mutual assistance, and communal work. Their bond of brotherhood is accompanied by love and affection even without blood ties, in line with their sacred words that they hold dear, "Spirit of one nation, we are the Iranun people." The strength of their national bond makes them complement each other in social, economic, and political aspects. However, this relationship is shaky with the presence of colonizers who have divided the region according to political boundaries. As a result, it has damaged the original system to the extent that the social mobilization of the local population was hindered and created a divide among this ethnically similar nation.	<i>"Tindeg sa isa a bangsa, sikitanu Iranun!" Gianan i kakapetan saumur jaman Ilut su kabpagaria' di' den gkanukel Mapuru' i limu' Kapagisa-isa gianan i adimat a kabager Sakaginawa den su kapiaan ian</i> <i>Miakauma su marata' bpagagau sa lupa' Mbagi'-mbagi'en iran ka gketed sa kawasa Bpangua'en su.lupa' iran Na bpakaulad den su kabpekapeka Miabinasa den su aturan paganai Bpagada' sa aked a bangsa</i>
Scene 3 (Climax)	The presence of Spanish colonizers in the Philippines forced the Iranun community to migrate to Borneo. During their time in the Philippines, the Spanish colonizers seized many rights from the indigenous people and provoked a significant reaction among the Iranun tribe in Mindanao. The presence of colonizers in the Malay Archipelago in the 15th century left a negative impact and created suspicion among each other. European powers prevented the Iranun community from trading freely, and the attacks and seizures against their people, that inhumane forgetfulness forced the Iranun to engage in piracy and raiding activities. The Spanish colonization of the Philippines and subsequently the Americans caused society to fight to defend their homeland. The colonizers called them pirates or bandits until it became a mockery.	<i>Peribumi, tidak lagi bersatu Su tau.kandiri di' den bpagisa-isa Di' kabpapatatia i bpakawatan sa kanpagaria' Rigadu i pakabinasa sa kapiaan agu' su limu'</i> <i>Kagia mautu! Mbubuat kanun gumbilaan Su aked yu pangenianyu Bperang sa kaludan su bpamangatu di' matau malek Gerar a 'lanun' sukur bu' utu</i> <i>Su ridu' miakabinasa Miakauma su masap, su bulkanu nimbetu na makabinasa Anda pen bpalagui Pun di' makalaug Sa Borneo lupa' a madaya</i>

	War causes the ecological system of their settlement to suffer damage and destruction. Natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions added to the suffering of this ethnic group and caused many residents, especially children, to be killed. This forced them to spread throughout the Borneo Archipelago and its surrounding areas.	
Scene 4 (Decrease)	Due to their raiding activities combined with trade and piracy, the Iranun people exerted significant and substantial pressure on the Europeans in the Southeast Asian region. Their prowess in overthrowing colonizers has caused significant damage to European trading centers. These Iranun people also received cooperation and protection from the locals who admired and feared their bravery. Their exceptional skills in navigation and weaponry earned them the title "Lord of the Eastern Seas." Through this headhunting activity, mixed marriages also occurred between the locals in the areas they visited.	<i>Miangayau sikiran sii</i> <i>Rumiapas sa kaludan da' kalek iran</i> <i>kabpelayag-layag gita' iran, ka dtidawa' da'</i> <i>ban rikiran</i> <i>"Lord of the eastern seas" makawasa sa</i> <i>kaludan</i>
Scene 5 (End)	After a long journey, the Iranun people returned to their homeland with a wealth of experience, success, and victory. Those who went raiding have passed the test, and their masculine image can no longer be questioned.	<i>Sa tampasuk miakadungku'</i> <i>Kilid a ragat a maulad makakayat</i> <i>Kurmat sa raja</i> <i>Mbalui a rayat na miakalintad-lintad</i> <i>Gkakalimu'i</i> <i>Pinjaman a kauyag iran Iranun da'</i> <i>rimbang ian</i>

Table 1 Arrangement of Iranun Folktales and Poetry in the Musical Performance of Dance Poetry *Mengayau*

The integration of oral traditions, history, and cultural symbols into a structured dramatic performance demonstrates that the performing arts serve as an important arena for negotiating cultural memory, social identity, and the continuity of the Iranian community's heritage in the contemporary context. The development of dramaturgy requires the formation of conflict, emotional rhythm, and clear scene continuity so that the work is not flat, but rather capable of creating a vibrant and dynamic aesthetic experience (Wibowo et al. 2023). Aristotle (1996) through the concept of unity of action and causality emphasizes that every event in the plot must develop logically and influence each other, resulting in a comprehensive dramatic effect. This principle becomes an important foundation in the construction of contemporary performance structures because the progressive dramatic arrangement allows emotions, conflicts, and meanings to unfold layer by layer before reaching a dramatic resolution that impacts the audience.

In the staging of this musical dance poetry, the five-act structure not only serves as a technical arrangement of the performance but also becomes an important process for integrating elements of music, dance, poetry, and language into a coherent dramatic unity. Each act progresses according to an increase in dramatic intensity, which directly allows the elements of sound, body movement, and narrative to develop gradually until they reach an emotional climax. In line with Geoffrey Benjamin's (2022) view, which explains that performances in the Malay world cannot be understood merely as entertainment but also serve as an aesthetic space that connects emotional experiences, cultural symbols, and the collective consciousness of society through the interaction of sound, body, and performance rituals. At the same time, Ismaliza Ishak (2024) explains that the integration of music, dance, and drama in theatrical performances also demonstrates the hybrid and adaptive nature of traditional arts, which continuously evolve according to contemporary forms without severing their cultural roots. The reconstruction of traditional arts in the form of modern performances is often carried out through processes of dramatic adaptation and choreography to ensure that cultural values can be translated to contemporary audiences in a more communicative and aesthetic manner (Amirudin, 2024).

The use of the *Mengayau* Iranun story, referenced through the writings of Datu Bandira Datu Alang (1992), which has been refined into the main narrative source, also shows that this performance serves as a medium for cultural archiving and the transfer of social memory of the Iranun community. This approach shows that the process of creating the performance is not done purely imaginatively, but rather through cultural verification methods to ensure the accuracy of the meanings, symbols, and traditional values being highlighted. Each element of traditional performance contains cultural signs that cannot be separated from the social experiences of the community that created it (Erlinda, 2025).

The processing of traditions based on oral traditions shows how modern performing arts function as a space for cultural transformation. Folktales that were originally oral and passed down communally are reinterpreted into a more visual, theatrical, and layered stage form. This transformation process aligns with Nina Farlina's (2024) study, which explains that contemporary traditional performances undergo a process of cultural remix and reinterpretation without losing the fundamental symbols of the original culture. Shahriffudin bin Zainal (2024) argues that the musical performance of the Iranun dance poetry demonstrates an effort to maintain the spirit of traditional culture while adapting it to a more dramatic and communicative modern performance style for contemporary audiences. This makes the performance also function as a discourse on cultural education, preservation of intangible heritage, and strengthening the collective identity of the Iranun community in Sabah, not merely as a medium of aesthetic entertainment.

Dramatic Design of the Musical Poetry Dance Performance "*Mengayau*"

To achieve a cohesive climax in the staging of this dance poetry musical *Mengayau*, the creators practiced a single-cone dramatic design structure instead of a double-cone. The choice of a single cone dramatic structure in the musical performance of the *Mengayau* dance poetry of the Iranun community demonstrates a clear dramaturgical awareness of the need to build a consistent and integrated dramatic focus. In the aspect of performing arts, a single cone refers to a pattern of dramatic development that moves linearly through a main conflict until it reaches a dominant climax before entering the resolution and closing phase (Murgiyanto, 1983; Larasati & Syefriani, 2024; Rahmadani & Syefriani, 2024). This approach shows that all elements of the performance are directed towards building an emotional and dramatic experience that peaks in a controlled and progressive manner.

This single-cone structure has a close relationship with the principles of classical Aristotelian dramaturgy, which emphasize continuity of cause and effect, unity of action, and a plot development that does not branch excessively (Irianto et al., 2023; Fadhilah & Manesah, 2025; Marsh, 2015). Through this approach, each scene, dance movement, music, and dialogue do not function separately, but support and complement each other in building dramatic intensity towards a main climax that becomes the center of the performance's meaning. The linear dramatic structure remains an important foundation in contemporary performances because it allows the audience to follow the emotional and conflictual presentation more clearly, purposefully, and deeply, especially in works that are culturally and symbolically narrative in nature. The single cone design is structured based on Aristotle's triangular structure as shown in Figure 1 below.

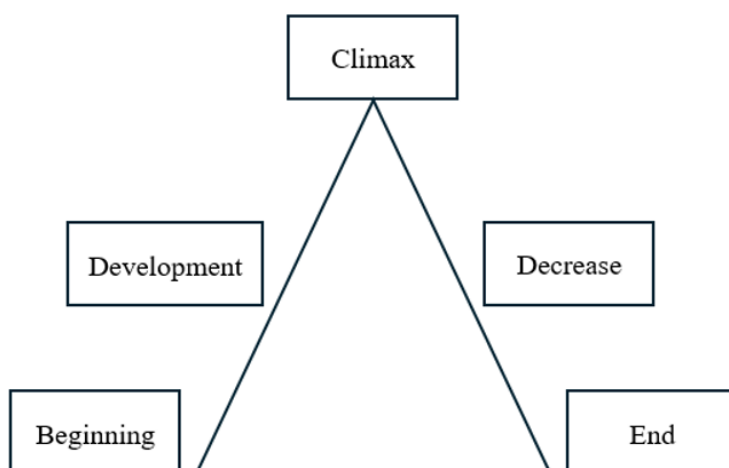


Figure 1 Single Cone Drama Musical Performance Poetry Dance *Mengayau*

In the musical performance of the dance poetry *Mengayau*, the main conflict is progressively driven through the integration of music, dance, and language that interact with each other as a dramatic unity. The development of conflict does not only occur through verbal storytelling, but is also built through musical rhythms, the intensity of body movements, and gradual visual changes on stage. This shows that the single cone structure is not only a dramatic arrangement that is textual in nature but is also translated kinesthetically and musically. This approach aligns with Brown's (2024) view, which emphasizes that the strength of contemporary musical performances lies in the triadic harmony between music, movement, and storytelling in shaping a comprehensive dramatic experience. In this framework, music serves as an emotional driver, dance becomes a bodily manifestation of conflict, while the narrative binds the entire dramatic experience into a cohesive structure of meaning. Therefore, the increase in musical tempo, the density of choreography, and the strength of vocal expression in the performance of *Mengayau* are dramaturgical strategies designed to move the audience towards a more meaningful and impactful climax experience.

This single-cone approach also demonstrates the creator's effort to maintain the focus of the performance so that it does not get divided into various conflicts or climaxes that could weaken the overall dramatic effect. Additionally, Mellēna-Bartkeviča (2022) explains that contemporary hybrid performances typically open space for non-linear dramatic structures through various points of conflict (double cone) or experimental anti-climaxes. This approach risks causing the audience to lose the emotional core and dramatic continuity if not carefully controlled. Arthur Darren (2024), a creator in this performance, chose to maintain a single conical structure to ensure that the presented cultural narrative continues to move in a focused manner and possesses clarity of meaning. According to Mr. Suhaimi Magi (2024), this action or decision is important because the *mengayau* narrative carries historical symbolism, identity, and the collective experiences of the Iranun community, which require a focused and unified dramatic presentation.

Additionally, the gradual dramatic increase manifested through the tempo of the music, scenography, lighting, and choreography indicates that this performance employs the principle of cumulative tension in the dramaturgy of the presentation. According to Ramzah bin Dambul (2024), although the pressure of conflict or tension is not very pronounced, dramatic tension is gradually produced through the increase in visual and auditory intensity until it reaches the main climax before being slowly brought down to the resolution phase. This shows that the single-peak dramatic structure in traditional dance and theatre serves to ensure that emotional development occurs organically and in a controlled manner, thereby allowing the audience to experience the climax more deeply. In this musical performance of the dance poem "*Mengayau*," this strategy is important because each theme and form of social conflict highlighted requires a gradual buildup of emotions so that the dramatic experience can be collectively felt by the audience. Because of that, the gradual changes in music, movement, and visuals do not occur randomly, but become part of the dramaturgical design that systematically organizes the aesthetic experience.

In this regard, the most important aspect is the use of a single cone in this performance, which demonstrates the relevance of traditional dramatic structures in the production of interdisciplinary contemporary performing arts. According to Azifshah bin Amat (2024), one of the creators, although this work combines several art elements such as music, poetry, dance, and theatre in a hybrid manner, the principle of dramatic unity is still maintained to ensure that the integration of these elements does not lose its narrative direction. This indirectly shows that innovation in performing arts does not necessarily require a complete breakdown of the dramatic structure; instead, it can be achieved by strengthening the relationships between performance elements within a clear dramatic framework. Fadhilah & Manesah (2025) explain that effective contemporary dramaturgy is one that can balance aesthetic experimentation with narrative structure clarity so that the performance experience remains communicative and emotional for the audience.

The selection of a single-cone dramatic design in the staging of the musical dance poetry "*Mengayau*" by the Iranun community demonstrates a form of dramaturgical strategy that pays attention to focus, continuity, and aesthetic unity in the construction of the dramatic experience. Through the progressive integration of all artistic elements, the entire musical performance moves purposefully towards a main climax that becomes the center of emotion and narrative meaning. This approach can ensure that the cultural narrative of the Iranun community can be conveyed more clearly, deeply, and effectively in the form of contemporary performances.

Music Arrangement

The music used to accompany the musical is newly created music that is adapted and continuous with the dramatic narrative and traditional sounds of the Iranun community. The use of new music specifically composed for the musical performance of the dance poem "*Mengayau*" by the Iranun community demonstrates an artistic approach that is contextual, dramaturgical, and interdisciplinary. The music produced does not simply repeat or quote traditional sounds literally, but rather through a process of creative adaptation that aligns traditional elements with the dramatic demands of contemporary stage performances. This approach demonstrates that the music has been created and arranged into a narrative component that moves in tandem with the development of the plot, choreography, and emotional intensity of each scene. In the theory of musical staging, the integration of music, drama, and dance is considered the main foundation for creating aesthetic unity because each element reinforces the others in producing a comprehensive dramatic experience. The strength of a musical lies in the ability of music to act as an emotional driver and a dramatic structure that connects stage actions with the audience's affective experience (Bian, 2025). In this performance of *Mengayau*, the music acts like a "sewing machine" that stitches together the connections between poetry, dance, and acting, allowing the entire performance to develop organically and cohesively.

Samsul bin Malawi (2024) explains that the music, arranged based on the dramatic curve of each scene, demonstrates the creator's awareness of the function of sound dramaturgy in the performing arts. The music is crafted in stages according to the development of conflict and emotion, starting from the formation of the initial atmosphere, the increase in dramatic tension, the climax of the conflict, and finally to the resolution phase. This process shows that music functions as a dramatic structure that controls the emotional rhythm of the entire performance. In a musical performance, music cannot be separated from the body of the performer and the dramatic action, as sound, movement, and stage expression simultaneously shape meaning (Magalhães, 2022). Therefore, in this musical performance, the use of music not only supports the dance movements but also determines the dramatic tempo, emotional pressure, and visual intensity of the performance. This relationship is evident when there are changes in tempo, sound dynamics, and vocal layers used to enhance dramatic tension and control transitions between one scene and another.

At the same time, the involvement of dancers as musicians directly on stage shows that this performance adopts a holistic performance concept that requires mastery of various artistic functions among the performers. Usually, in the performance traditions of indigenous communities, especially in Southeast Asia, there is no absolute separation between dancers, musicians, and actors because all these elements complement each other in a collective ritual and dramatic experience. Benjamin (2022) explains that in Malay cultural performances, sound, body, and movement function as an inseparable sensory experience, instead moving collectively to produce cultural meaning. In this *mengayau* performance, this approach further strengthens the relationship between music and dance because both originate from the same source of the performance body.

Furthermore, the integration of traditional Iranun sounds and contemporary dramatic approaches also demonstrates a process of cultural reinterpretation that is adaptive without severing its original heritage roots. Traditional music reinterpreted in a more dramatic form can help the cultural identity of the Iranun be conveyed to modern audiences in a more communicative and aesthetic manner. This process aligns with the views of Esegbe & Oboho (2025), who explain that contemporary performing arts that incorporate elements of cultural heritage serve as a medium for strengthening collective identity and transferring traditional values to new generations. In this regard, music becomes an important instrument in preserving the cultural memory of the Iranun community through sounds, rhythms, and musical structures rooted in local traditions. This approach is very important because the process of modernizing performing arts always risks separating the work from its original cultural form if traditional elements are only used cosmetically or symbolically. However, in this Iranun musical performance, traditional sounds are substantively processed and continuously integrated into the dramatic structure of the performance, thereby ensuring that cultural identity remains the core of the work.

In addition, the organic relationship between music, poetry, and dance in this performance also shows that music functions as a channel of symbolic communication that helps clarify the narrative meaning and emotions conveyed through the performance's poetry. In the art of musical performance, music could expand the meaning of the text through sound color, rhythm, and vocal expression that cannot be achieved through verbal language

alone. This explanation is reinforced by Brown (2024) that music in dramatic performances acts as emotional architecture that unconsciously builds emotional connections between the performers and the audience. Thus, when poetry is delivered solo or chorally, music serves to support and strengthen emotional resonance, creating a dramatic atmosphere and connecting the audience with the symbolic experience being staged.

The use of new music in the musical performance of dance poetry by the Iranun community demonstrates a form of artistic elaboration that unites dramaturgy, cultural identity, and performance aesthetics within a cohesive framework. Music also acts as a dramatic structure, an emotional medium, a channel for symbolic communication, and an instrument for cultural preservation. Based on this organic integration, the performance can showcase contemporary performing arts as a space for cultural transformation that preserves the roots of the Iranun community's heritage, while also adapting it to aesthetic and dramatic sensitivities in the current context.

Creation of Poetry in Performance

The creation of poetry specifically for the musical performance of the dance poem "*Mengayau*" by the Iranun community shows that the text in this performance becomes a dramaturgical component that actively drives the entire narrative. The poetry produced by Mabulmaddin (2024) is based on a dramatic structure arranged according to the progression of scenes, simultaneously demonstrating an organic relationship between language, conflict, and the emotional development of the performance. In musical theatre, the text of poetry or lyrics has a broader function than mere verbal communication. This is because it becomes a dramatic medium that unites music, movement, and stage action to form a comprehensive aesthetic experience. The strength of dramaturgy in musical theatre lies in the ability of the lyrics to serve as a bridge between character emotions, musical structure, and dramatic actions, so that meaning is not constructed through a single medium but through the simultaneous interaction of various performance elements (Bian, 2025). In the staging of this musical dance poetry, poetry becomes the narrative core that organizes the development of conflict and shapes emotional resonance throughout the dramatic journey of the performance.

The use of the Iranun language in the creation and delivery of poetry raises a high awareness of the function of language as a marker of cultural identity and the collective memory of indigenous communities. Language in performing arts contains a symbolic system, cultural values, and the worldview of a community. The use of the Iranun language lends authenticity to the performance because the cultural narrative being staged is conveyed through a language that originates from the social experiences of the Iranun community itself. Blanariu (2019) explains that performing arts function as a space for articulating community identity with linguistic and symbolic signs that encourage a cultural group to express their existence, history, and collective experiences. The use of the Iranun language in this musical poetry serves as a strategy for preserving the language and heritage of the Iranun community in the form of contemporary performing arts, as well as overcoming the pressures of globalization and the reduction of its usage space in modern life. Through stage performances, traditional language can be revived as a medium of artistic expression with strong aesthetic value and identity.

Poetry delivered in the form of dramatic declamation and singing shows that the creator understands the relationship between prosody, rhythm, and emotion in the construction of aesthetic experience. The delivery of the poem varies according to the mood and intensity of the scene, helping the text to move dynamically alongside the dramatic development of the performance. There are parts of the poem that are recited slowly and contemplatively solely to build a deep emotional atmosphere, while others are sung in a choral and high-intensity manner to enhance the dramatic tension. In musicals, speech, singing, and movement are not separate elements, but rather form a hybrid system of expression that mutually reinforce each other (Magalhães, 2022). In this regard, poetry does not only function as a text that is heard, but also becomes the sound, rhythm, and emotional movement that influence the overall experience of the performance. This relationship makes poetry a part of the musical and kinesthetic structure that brings the dramaturgy of the performance to life in a more layered manner.

At the same time, the integration of poetry with music and choreography shows that the meaning in this performance is built through the simultaneous interaction between verbal and nonverbal elements. The dancers' body movements, vocal intonations, musical rhythms, and visual stage arrangements complement each other in expanding the meaning contained in the verses of the poem. Aesthetic experiences in traditional and contemporary performing arts are usually formed through a multisensory relationship between sound, body, and

cultural symbols (Geoffrey Benjamin, 2022). In this *Mengayau* performance, the poetry delivered dramatically becomes a meeting point between linguistic elements and bodily experience, thus creating a performance experience that is also felt emotionally and sensorily by the audience.

Additionally, the creation of poetry structured according to the development of scenes also shows that the poetry text in this performance has a clear narrative function and is not episodic or ornamental in nature. Each stanza of the poem contributes to the development of conflict, character formation, and the strengthening of the dramatic atmosphere, as well as demonstrating a close relationship between the structure of the poem and the overall dramatic structure of the performance. This approach is often associated with the concept of performative text, which is a text that is not only read or heard but realized through stage actions, sound, and body movement. The text in modern musical performances functions as an emotional script that guides the audience through emotional changes and dramatic tension throughout the performance (Brown, 2024). Therefore, the poetry in this modern musical dance drama serves as a dramatic driver that helps the audience understand the emotional changes, conflicts, and cultural meanings contained within the narrative of the performance.

The creation of poetry in the musical performance of the dance poem "*Mengayau*" by the Iranun community explains a form of dramaturgical processing that unites language, music, dance, and cultural identity within a cohesive performance framework. Poetry serves as a dramatic structure, a channel of emotion, and a means of cultural preservation that strengthens the overall narrative of the performance. Using the Iranun language, diverse prosodic delivery, and organic integration with music and choreography, this performance demonstrates that contemporary performing arts can revive the cultural heritage of indigenous communities in a dramatic, meaningful, and relevant manner in the current era.

Cultural Values of the Iranun Community

Several cultural values of the Iranun community can be identified as central in the dramatic presentation crafted through narrative, poetry, music, and choreography. Among them are the values of bravery and heroism, community solidarity, adherence to customs and leadership, as well as respect for heritage and ethnic identity.

The Iranun community is traditionally known as a maritime society with a hierarchical social system based on the leadership of sharifs and datu, as well as a strong culture of heroism, including the tradition of *mengayau*, which in the past was understood as a symbol of bravery, honor, and political power (Warren, 1981; Datu Bandira Datu Alang, 1992). Through this musical, the performance reinterprets the narrative of *mengayau* as a symbol of the ethos of heroism and the formation of a collective identity rooted in the social history of the Iranun.

Additionally, the values of solidarity and togetherness of the Iranun community are also manifested through collective imagery in certain scenes, particularly through group dance performances and integrated vocal poetry recitations. The structure of the performance, which showcases the unity of movement and voice, reflects the concept of collective identity that is always associated with the Iranun community, which relies on social cooperation and family networks for their survival (Lokman & Asmiaty, 2012), in line with the core values and philosophy of life of the Iranun people themselves. These values are further strengthened and integrated through the use of the Iranun language in poetry and dialogue, which serves as a symbol of the preservation of linguistic heritage and ethnic identity, in line with research findings that indicate that language in performing arts acts as a vehicle for the empowerment of minority cultures (Blanariu, 2019).

In addition, the value of obedience, along with traditional customs and leadership structures, is also detected through authoritative characters and sinographic symbols that refer to the Iranun customary system. In the Iranun community in Sabah, customs, honor (dignity), and social status play an important role in regulating social relationships and the legitimacy of power (Datu Bandira Datu Alang, 1992; Musli, 2009). Through this performance, these values are translated through a dramatic structure that showcases conflict, loyalty, and resolution based on cultural norms.

The musical performance of the dance poem "*Mengayau*" showcases an aesthetic adaptation of folklore, simultaneously highlighting the symbolic core values of the Iranun community such as bravery, solidarity, dignity, leadership, and the preservation of cultural identity. These values are crafted through a hybrid

combination of music, dance, and poetry. Traditional and contemporary performances serve as spaces for negotiating cultural identity, connecting collective history with contemporary reality in the form of vibrant and meaningful artistic expression.

CONCLUSION

The study elucidates the entire dramatic structure of the performance by applying the Aristotelian dramaturgy theory framework and the semiotic approach to performance. This study also demonstrates that the musical performance of the dance poem "*Mengayau*" is a form of creative adaptation that holistically and integratively incorporates elements of performing arts. Unlike the medley or montage approach, which merely arranges artistic elements sequentially without a strong dramatic connection. On the contrary, this performance demonstrates an organic unity between dance, music, poetry, and acting, arranged according to a clear dramatic structure. The use of a single conical structure based on Aristotelian dramaturgy allows the narrative to unfold progressively, starting from the initial scene, development, climax, descent, and ending in a coherent and orderly manner. In line with Aristotle's assertion on the importance of unity of action and continuity of cause and effect in the construction of an effective dramatic plot. In this paper, it is found that the musical poetry dance "*Mengayau*" can bridge the gap between theory and practice, which often poses a challenge in contemporary performing arts.

This study also proves that the integration of dance in performances is not merely a decorative element, but dance plays a crucial role as an important dramatic language in conveying narrative, emotion, and conflict. Through Gennaro's theory, it is explained that dance in the performance of the musical poetry of the dance has simultaneously performed various functions, such as exploring character psychology, serving as a narrative tool, a medium for character development, and a visual metaphor that enriches the meaning of the performance. The choreography crafted not only depicts physical movements but also brings layers of symbolic meaning that connect the character's internal experiences with the outside world. The use of traditional Iranun dance integrated with contemporary choreography techniques demonstrates artistic wisdom in preserving cultural authenticity while empowering modern expressive power.

From the aspect of language and poetry, this paper finds that the creation of poetry specifically for this musical performance has demonstrated an awareness of the function of poetic language as a complex dramatic medium. The poetry created in the Iranun language and delivered either through dramatic recitation or singing has served as a bridge between literal and symbolic meanings, as well as strengthening the ethnic identity and linguistic heritage of the Iranun community. In this regard, the concept of transcreation is relevant to practice, as poetry is not static as merely a written text, but evolves into a dynamic performance experience through the bodies of dancers, the sound of music, and the structure of movement. The use of minority languages in contemporary performance aspects has demonstrated a commitment to preserving cultural heritage and strengthening the collective identity of the Iranun community. This proves that performing arts function as a space for articulating community identity through a unique linguistic sign system.

In addition, the musical composition specifically created for this performance has proven that music in musicals is not merely accompaniment, but becomes a dramatic element that progressively builds mood, tension, and emotion according to the development of the scenes. Music based on the traditional sounds of the Iranun community is dramatically arranged to support the narrative. In a musical theatre, music must be integrated with drama and dance within a framework of interconnected and sustainable expression. Moreover, the involvement of dancers as musicians who also play the music live on stage demonstrates the diverse functions of the performance and emphasizes comprehensive collaboration in the creative process.

Through the aspect of cultural values, the musical performance of the dance poem "*Mengayau*" successfully showcases the core values of the Iranun community such as bravery, heroism, community solidarity, adherence to customs and leadership, as well as respect for heritage and ethnic identity. These values are manifested through a hybrid combination of dramatic structure, choreography, music, and poetry that creates a profound aesthetic experience. In terms of history, the Iranun community is known as skilled sailors and navigators with a culture of heroism.

Overall, the musical performance of the *Mengayau* dance poetry is a significant artistic achievement in the contemporary Malaysian performing arts landscape. It not only succeeded in elevating and empowering the cultural narrative of the Iranun community, which is often overlooked in the mainstream, but also demonstrated the potential of musical theatre as a medium for heritage preservation, identity building, and effective social communication. This performance proves that local musical theatre can achieve a high level of artistic integration by combining local cultural traditions with contemporary performance techniques, thereby creating a unique, authentic, and relevant form of cultural expression for modern audiences.

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Interview

1. Mr. Abd Naddin bin Shaididin. (2024). Iranun Culture Researcher.

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2. Mr. Arthur Darren. (2024). Choreographer of the Musical Performance "Puisi Tari Mengayau.
 3. Mr. Azifshah bin Amat. (2024). Choreographer of the Musical Performance "Puisi Tari Mengayau."
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