

## EMPTY BENCH IN INDONESIAN PERFORMING ARTS STUDIES: AUDIENCE

Kurnia Rahmad Dhani  
*Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta*  
kurniadhani@isi.ac.id

**Abstrak:** Many Indonesian performing art experts have stated that audience studies were conducted in minimal numbers. However, the exact number of research on performing art audiences in Indonesia remains unclear. The factors that influence it are still not known in detail. This paper used a literature review on seven nationally accredited performing arts journals from art institutes in Indonesia over the past ten years. The results showed that only 3 out of 1034 journal titles focusing on performing art audiences in the last ten years. From these findings, we can conclude that the study on the audiences is so scarce. This research theme is not interesting for performing art experts in Indonesia. Indonesian performing art experts and academicians have left the importance of audience studies. This paper also discusses the factors that influence the negligible of performing arts audience studies in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** audience, performing arts, Indonesia

The audience is a necessary element and even a determinant factor for what we call performing arts. The audience is the "fourth creator" of the performing arts (Braun, 2016, p. 73). Therefore, this element should occupy a large enough portion in the studies of the performing arts. Indonesian researchers and performing arts experts also agree on this. However, after exploring several performing arts journals, we can conclude that there is a tendency to abandon the audience's importance in Indonesia.

Many experts, reviewers, and observers in Indonesia have explained the importance of studying the performing arts audience. Mochtar Lubis (1995, 85) said that to develop the Indonesian performing arts, of course, we need to do studies on the audience. Simatupang (2013, 63) explains that the audience can be considered a measuring tool of success and the goal of performing arts

creation, but unfortunately, audience studies are so rare. Rahman Indra (2016) explains the importance of the performing arts audience. That is, if performing arts organizers able to map their audience, so the performance is successful. Thus the public appreciation of performing arts can be built strategically. Butet Kertarejasa in 2018 also stated the importance of treating the audience well. He emphasized that when the audience is happy, the artist must be happy too. He also explained that performing arts management should not mistreat the audience, understand how important it is for management to have a database of each audience, and implement the strategies of audience management (see Khoiri, 2018). Abdinagoro (2019) conveyed his views on theatre audience from the management and marketing perspective, how strategies to match audience motivation with performing arts "products" are the key in the audience development, and that the

development of performing arts and performing artist organizations must also be able to adapt to the changing characteristics of the future audience.

After examining various sources, we can see that journalists are better at getting to know Indonesia's performing arts audience. However, of course, journalists have limitations to do research and study this theme in more depth. We can see Journalists' limitations from the following example. Mardiani (2014), in his article in *Koran Republika* (national newspaper), discusses the regeneration of the loyal audience for Teater Koma (one of the famous Indonesian theatre groups). She said, "according to a survey, the Teater Koma audience who had been loyal to attend from 1977 to 2010 amounted to about 50 percent of the total number of audience who attended." Unfortunately, she did not mention who the survey conductor, for what purposes, whether the survey was carried out (scientifically) or just a mere assumption. Besides that, Mardiani also only interviewed one audience member. Ekafitrianus (2014), in his writing in the *beritasatu.com* article column, also discusses the Teater Koma's audience. He interviewed a loyal audience who is also the CEO of a large company in Indonesia. In his writing, he only interviewed one person, so it is certainly not enough to depict the show's entire audience. Armenia (2017), in *cnnindonesia.com*, discusses the differences in music festivals audience held indoors and outdoors. However, Armenia only interviewed Djohan Salim as an expert in the field of psychology of music in Indonesia, Armenia did not do field coverage or interviews with the music audience directly.

Furthermore, there are no performing arts groups that have detailed records of their audience. Namely records regarding the number of attendees, gender, age, regional

origin, education, mobile phone number, email contact, political preferences, sexual preferences, economic level, and other databases. Without accurate databases, performing arts (moreover in traditional performing art groups) will be left behind other new media that have taken advantage of technology and database processing. We may conclude that our knowledge of the performing arts audience will not be evidence-based. Furthermore, this will lead to less strategic performing arts development in the future.

The marginalization of the audience's vital role in the study of the performing arts does not occur in Indonesia only. The audience studies in Western countries also suffered a similar fate: the audience was a long-forgotten theme (Pavis, 1998, p. 348). This neglect lasted until the late 1990s and then experienced an extreme turning point since the early 2000s when it then called the era of 'the spectator's revenge'. Since then, the audience theme has flooded into seminars, talk shows, and other publications (Conner, 2013, p. 5; Pavis, 2016, pp. 236–237). So, do these trends and turning points in audience studies also occur in Indonesia?

This paper departs from a few simple questions, such as whether we, as a performing artist, a researcher, and performing arts academicians in particular, know who our audiences are? Have we put in enough effort, thought, and energy to recognize the real audience of the art we create? Can we love our audience without knowing them? If not for the audience, to whom is this performing arts created? Is there any other effort to understand what appreciation the artist expects and why the appreciation expected has not achieved yet? Many more questions arise when discussing the importance of conducting studies on the performing arts audience in Indonesia.

Before we move on to more complex questions, it is good to start with data analysis. This research specifically intended to measure the frequency of studies on performing arts audiences in Indonesia in the past ten years. This paper is expected to be a starting point in discussing whether the performing arts audience's importance has been seen from the conducted studies. Of course, as a person who lives and loves the performing arts, we must understand every detailed constituent element of this art.

## METHODS

This research is a literature review. The object of this study is seven (7) performing arts journals from seven journal publishing institutes of arts in Indonesia. The journals are as follows: Journal Resital from Indonesia Institute of the Arts Yogyakarta; Journal Mudra from Indonesia Institute of the Arts Denpasar; Journal Ekspresi Seni from Indonesia Institute of the Arts Padang Panjang; Journal Dewa Ruci from Indonesia Institute of the Arts Surakarta; Journal Panggung from Indonesia Institute of the Arts and Culture Bandung; Journal Seni Nasional Cikini from Jakarta Institute of the Arts; and Journal Terob from Wilwatikta College of Arts Surabaya. These seven journals were selected based on representation from all performing arts institutes in Indonesia. Thus, these journals are considered sufficient to represent all Indonesian performing arts institutes. This study examines all journals published in 2010–2020. The data source in this study is the archive of web pages of each journal, which the data is public free. The data then analyzed and categorized into two categories: a) research focusing on performing arts audiences; b) research focusing on the study of non-performing arts audiences. In this study, the library that became the data source

was the Open Journal System (OJS) web archive of each journal, a free access source.

## RESULTS

The results obtained after the categorization process and analysis show that in the last ten year as follows. There are no study of performing arts audience in Journal Resital from Indonesia Institute of the Arts Yogyakarta, Journal Ekspresi Seni from Indonesia Institute of the Arts Padang Panjang, Journal Seni Nasional Cikini from Jakarta Institute of the Arts, nor in Journal Terob from Wilwatikta College of the Arts Surabaya. There is one title of performing arts audience research in Journal Mudra from Indonesia Institute of the Arts Denpasar. There is one title of performing arts audience research in Journal Dewa Ruci from Indonesia Institute of the Arts Surakarta. There is one title of performing arts audience research in Journal Panggung from Indonesia Institute of the Arts and Culture Bandung. Therefore, (only) three paper studies focusing on performing arts audiences from 1034 research titles analyzed. The three studies that examined the audience were: 1) Yogyakarta Community Reception on Radio Drama "Prahara Tegaloreja" (Resepsi Masyarakat Yogyakarta terhadap Drama Radio "Prahara Tegaloreja"), written by Nur Sahid, Marianto, and Purwanto, in Journal Mudra from Indonesia Institute of the Arts Denpasar; 2) The Meaning of Wayang Performance and Its Function in the Life of the Puppet Supporting Society (Makna Pertunjukan Wayang dan Fungsinya dalam Kehidupan Masyarakat Pendukung Wayang), written by Soetarno, in the Journal Dewa Ruci Indonesia Institute of the Arts Surakarta; and 3) "Wayang Kreatif" Performance of Teater Koma and Its Audience, written by Nalan, in Journal

Panggung from Indonesia Institute of the Arts and Culture Bandung.

## DISCUSSION

### **The narrowness of the term *penonton* (audience) in the Indonesian Language**

The word 'audience' has been recognized by many experts as a difficult term and concept (Schechner, 2004, p. 22), problematic (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998, p. 1), blurry, and too loose in the vast sphere of performing arts, which of course has a distinctive difference in position and function as in other branches of arts. Ambiguity in this concept sometimes makes it difficult for the reviewing community to put limits to formulate a different definition. Some experts call it a vexed or annoying concept (Simatupang, 2013, p. 67; Walmsley, 2019, p. 6). After all, every other person's behavior is a 'performing arts,' whenever and wherever, both in full consciousness and unconsciousness (Goffman, 1959). On the contrary, each of us is not an 'audience' and is often forbidden to watch something, "because not everything we watch is a spectacle" (Simatupang, 2013, p. 10).

'Audience' has an awful lot of paradoxical roles: as the target, guests, donors, passive audiences, active participants, co-creators, consumers, critics (Walmsley, 2019, p. 9), also enlivened in current terms such as 'followers or fans,' 'haters' and anti-fans. That complexity and paradox turn out not accommodated by the concept of *penonton* (audience). There are limitations of vocabulary that can include the whole essence of the 'audience' of the performing arts. The concept of the words 'penonton' in both English words 'audience' and 'spectator,' as well as in Indonesian *penonton* and *pemirsa*, cannot encapsulate

the complex demands of performing arts: passive-active, positional, reciprocal, and dynamic roles. By definition, a *penonton* is the person who watched the show, the person who only sees (Kamus Bahasa Indonesia, 2008, p. 1725). This word is synonymous with a few words: first *audiensi* (loan word from English: audience), i.e., audience, visitor or listener (in a lecture, performance, etc.) (Kamus Bahasa Indonesia, 2008, p. 101); secondly with the word 'pemirsa' (from word *pirsa* in the Javanese language) that is the audience, people who watch (especially television broadcasts) (Kamus Bahasa Indonesia, 2008, p. 1146); third with the word 'spektator' (loan word from English: spectator) which meaning is the same as 'penonton' (Kamus Bahasa Indonesia, 2008, p. 1499).

That complexity is more pronounced when discussing the performing arts of 'non-human audiences' (there is no limit to who and what is entitled to be an audience). Whether the word 'audience' can accommodate performances in which the 'audience' is Gods, ancestral spirit, or other transcendental beings as in the ritual performance tradition (Schechner, 2004, p. 22). As the music concert performance was held recently at Barcelona's Liceu Opera House on June 22, 2020, which invites 'nature.' Nature was represented by houseplants as the audience (Castilleja, 2020).

There are at least two solutions to this problem. First, adjust the research to the limits of the audience predicate with its specific position and function on specific types of performing arts. Previously, we had to understand that certain limitations make a person function as an audience. One of the limitations is the existence of 'awareness' as an audience, which is characterized by focus attention (Murgiyanto, 2018, p. 20), or in

other words, with an element of willful intention (Simatupang, 2013, pp. 10–11). Thus, we can categorize firmly between the performing arts real audience with the person who just saw while walking and passing by casually, to the audience who sits on the audience bench but is too busy on his cell-phone.

We can scrutinize the blurring boundaries of the presenter's position and the audience's role. The audience, no matter how active in a show, its active participation remains temporary, limited, and still will return to its position: the audience bench. Although the concept of audience is a broad term in its role (passive-active), and in many cases, the audience also the co-creator, but the audience is the audience. That there is a fixed role and position: audiences separate from the performer (Schechner, 2004, p. 22). Of course, the audience does not participate from the beginning of creating the ideas, training phase, pre-production, performing art group management, marketing, post-production evaluation, and even the sense of dissatisfaction with the performance staged.

The word audience should be juxtaposed with its position and function in specific performing arts. Murgiyanto (2018, p. 30) explains the position and function of the audience into three broad categories: first, in a game show (play), the audience can position and function relatively free, in which the audience and participants are inseparable, involved, and actively determine and make rules mutually during the play. The primary purpose of this type of show is mutual pleasure. Second, in the ceremonial performances (rituals), human audiences are also participants of rituals that strictly must adhere to the rules that made and perform their functions according to the ceremony's rules. In this type of performance, the main audiences are Gods, ancestral spirits, or other

transcendental beings (Schechner, 2004, p. 22). This type of performance is for strengthening, solicitation, transformation, cancellation, and other spiritual expressions. Third, performances in the form of spectacle activities such as sports games and art performances. In this show category, audiences are among the first and second categories, being relatively slicing between game activities and rituals. The purpose of this third category is to be flexible and blurred between mutual pleasure and ritual.

The second solution is to create new terminologies, a separate and distinct word concept to refer to each specific audience concept. Complex concepts certainly require complex language so that the whole nature and essence of the concept can be correctly communicated (Fischer 1999; Massip-Bonet and Bastardas-Boada 2013). It takes more in-depth study and dialogue to offer a new terminology to 'replace' the word 'audience' with a more accommodating but still specific and efficient term. If there is not, of course, we must be patient enough with this existing word.

### **Audience studies in the Indonesian arts institute education curriculum**

The art institutes in Indonesia, focusing more on the performing artists' training and the artwork's creation. It seems a closer approach to vocational training. It makes arts institutes more focused on the preparation of the arts workers and to produce artworks. This condition also affects the curriculum development at art institutes in Indonesia. Thus, this fact is in line with what Reinelt (2014) has explained, in that there is a 'methodological gap.' That Indonesian arts institute does not offer training in the social sciences techniques used to research the audience in depth. Although there is a general research methods course that includes ethnographic and field studies, it does not

cover quantitative or qualitative approaches to research audience or spectators (reception or post-production).

Generally, performing art reviewers in Indonesia use the theory and approach of Kowzan and Pavis, emphasizing the analysis of the art from the production process (creation) point of view. We can understand that many performing art reviewers missed the post-production study that is more audience-oriented. As a post-production study, audience study is a theme that is forgotten, left behind, and not done specifically (Murgiyanto, 2018, pp. 18–38). Or, "maybe the matter of performing arts is limited to how the creator and the player create and performs the show alone" (Simatupang, 2013, p. 63)? If that is the case, then it is not wrong if the education curricula in the art institute focus only on pre-production.

The solution to this can be implementing new courses focusing on the study of the performing arts audience. Alternatively, the audience study can be integrated into an event management course, marketing strategy, etc. However, then it lies back to each art institute's policies concerned in assessing whether the study of performing arts audience is an important thing or as less meaningful in the course system. If it is not possible to open a new course, art institutes need to open interdisciplinary dialogues that discuss audience studies. The scientific dialogues should be wide open by inviting the public broadly in the effort of collaborative studies. No one seems to doubt that the performing arts study is a multidisciplinary field, so of course, we can also flexibly (and humbly) accept the view of other disciplines to study the performing art audience. Every scientific field that is 'borrowed' by the study of performing arts – be it anthropology, sociology, psychology, physiology, fine arts,

political science, literature, or other disciplines— certainly has a unique perspective and conceptual framework in its approach to studying the audience, and so really enriches the study of the performing arts. Research collaboration among various scientific fields is a common practice. However, it seems that this is rarely done in the performing arts audience studies in Indonesia.

### **Supporting institutions (sponsors) and the government**

Loose definitions result in loose operationalization and elaboration. It is not easy to measure a progression from a loosely defined concept. The difficulty in evaluating the target progress makes many sponsors retreat to fund performing arts activities, mostly to fund research on performing arts audiences. As the sponsors is an economic institution, they want marketing communication spending on clear and measurable targets. The goal of sponsors to spend funds is to avoid ambiguous and difficult or immeasurable things. Sponsorship activities demand clear terms, target audience, media or communication channels, target activities, and the event's period (Shimp & Andrews, 2013, pp. 214–215). Companies and other sponsoring institutions generally deal with performing arts groups only to organize a performance contract. There is almost no sponsorship support explicitly aimed at the performing arts audience, especially the traditional performing arts audience. Of course, this is understandable because this kind of research cannot promise straightforward economic returns.

The ambiguity and leniency of the concept actually make it difficult for the government to formulate policies related to performing arts, implement them efficiently, and evaluate them appropriately. This

complexity seems to have exhausted the government in formulating policies that are more precise, effective, efficient, and inclusive of the performing arts. Besides, it is also affected by the government's inability to see and respond to the complexity and breadth of this concept, and there may even be some deliberate policy ambiguity (Walmsley, 2019, p. 8).

The audience research theme becomes unattractive to be funded because it appears to be not directly related to the performance work creation process. The audience research and other theoretical research themes will always be inferior to a performing art show's proposals. Unlike a show, research submissions are not attractive to be funded by either private sponsors or government institutions. Maybe because the studies and research are generally limited to academics and reviewers, they cannot offer display space for company logos or government institutions' names. They get no more than one or two gratitude notes on the back of an academic paper.

Government support in developing the performing arts is numerous. Government support generally includes support for *paguyuban* (traditional art group management), providing staging venues, support for participation in cultural missions and events, documentation and inventory of cultural activities, research, and the creation of new performance models that are more compatible with tourism development goals (Puguh & Utama, 2018). It seems that there is not much government support for fundamental studies, at a higher level of abstraction, the development of indigenous culture theories, in which the benefits are fundamental but not directly or visually connected. This condition is understandable because, in general, basic research requires a relatively long time and high-cost funding.

So it is often considered ineffective and inefficient because the benefits are not immediately apparent. Also, of course, it is not compatible with the Indonesian government budgeting system. Thus, it is not surprising that more funding for applied studies or the creation of the artwork shows results faster, simpler in budgeting, so the results report is visible in a relatively short period. To address this gap, of course, it requires various parties' willingness to "invest" in the long term basic studies on arts and culture without demanding instant results.

## CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions from the research and discussion that we have discussed together are quite simple. First, many writings emphasize the importance of studying the performing arts audience. Second, there are only three studies out of 1034 paper journals from the reviewed data. This finding implies that the "audience bench" is still empty in performing arts studies in Indonesia. Third, the factors that influence the lack of performing arts audiences studies including the ambiguity of the audience's concept, the lack of audience research discourse in the art institute's educational curriculum, and the support of sponsoring institutions and government. Fourth, there are some strategies to bridge the difficulties of conducting the performing arts audience study. Fifth, this discussion leads to a follow-up question: if this symptom persists after many writings that remind us of the importance of research on performing arts audience and there are solutions that very often discussed on various occasions, is this deliberate negligence?

## Research Limitations and Further Research Suggestions

This data review certainly has several limitations. First, in data collection, several volumes or editions cannot be accessed from the related journal webpage (because of a flawed filing system), so even though the number of un-accessed papers is tiny, there is still a possibility that journal papers discussing performing art audience missed. Second, this research aims to present the frequency of studies published in research journals that focus on performing art audiences in the last ten years (2010-2020). We know that there are many instruments for reporting and distributing other research results, such as unpublished studies of educational strata requirements (undergraduate thesis, master thesis, and doctoral dissertation), books or chapters in collective writing editions, scientific conferences, seminars, and other media. Thus, this research is more of a reflection and an evaluation. Further research is needed to reach a complete understanding.

## REFERENCES

- Abdinagoro, S. B. (2019). *Memelihara Penonton Teater*. <https://portalteater.com/memelihara-penonton-teater/>
- Abercrombie, N., & Longhurst, B. (1998). *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination*. Sage Publications.
- Braun, E. (2016). *Meyerhold on Theatre*. Bloomsbury.
- Castilleja, L. F. (2020). Serenading plants: Barcelona opera reopens with unusual concert. *The Jakarta Post*. <https://www.thejakartapost.com/life/2020/06/23/serenading-plants-barcelona-opera-reopens-with-unusual-concert.html>
- Conner, L. (2013). *Audience Engagement and The Role of Arts Talk in The Digital Era*.
- Ekafitriyanus, T. (2014). *Suka Nonton Pentas Teater* - *BeritaSatu*. <https://www.beritasatu.com/figur/179548-suka-nonton-pentas-teater>
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Anchor Books.
- Indra, R. (2016). *Menghindari Seni Pertunjukan Tanpa Penonton*. CNN Indonesia. <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/hiburan/20161022053019-241-167167/menghindari-seni-pertunjukan-tanpa-penonton>
- Kamus Bahasa Indonesia. (2008). *Kamus Bahasa Indonesia*. Departemen Pendidikan Nasional Indonesia.
- Khoiri, A. (2018). "Sandungan" Dunia Seni, Nasi Kotak sampai "Bambu Cirebon." <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/hiburan/20180213122432-241-275842/sandungan-dunia-seni-nasi-kotak-sampai-bambu-cirebon>
- Lubis, M. (1995). *Mochtar Lubis Bicara Lurus: Menjawab pertanyaan wartawan* (R. K. Hadimadja (ed.)). Yayasan Obor Indonesia.
- Mardiani, D. (2014). *Koma yang tak Mengenal Titik* \_ *Republika Online*. <https://republika.co.id/berita/nf7wpz22/koma-yang-tak-mengenal-titik>
- Murgiyanto, S. (2018). *Pertunjukan Budaya dan Akal Sehat*. FSP Institut Kesenian Jakarta.
- Pavis, P. (1998). *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, concepts, and analysis*. University of Toronto Press.
- Pavis, P. (2016). The Routledge Dictionary of Performance and Contemporary Theatre. In *The Routledge Dictionary of Performance and Contemporary Theatre*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315721156>



- Puguh, D. R., & Utama, M. P. (2018). Peranan Pemerintah dalam Pengembangan Wayang Orang Panggung. *Jurnal Sejarah Citra Lekha*, 3(2), 133–153. <https://doi.org/10.14710/jsc1.v3i2.19961>
- Reinelt, J. (2014). What UK spectators know: Understanding how we come to value theatre. *Theatre Journal*, 66(3), 337–361. <https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2014.0099>
- Schechner, R. (2004). Performance Theory. In *Performance Theory*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203426630>
- Shimp, T. A., & Andrews, C. J. (2013). Advertising, Promotion, And Other Aspects of Integrated Marketing Communications. In *Integrated Marketing communications* (9th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Simatupang, L. (2013). *Pergelaran: Sebuah Mozaik Penelitian Seni-Budaya* (1st ed.). Jelasutra.
- Walmsley, B. (2019). *Audience Engagement in the Performing Arts: A Critical Analysis*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-26653-0>