

From Cultural Heritage to Classroom: Adapting the Panji Laras Mask Dance for Psychomotor and Socio-Emotional Development in Kindergarten

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ABSTRACT

Traditional performing arts have rarely been embedded in early childhood curricula despite their developmental and cultural potential. This study adapted the Panji Laras Mask Dance for kindergarten learners in Malang, Indonesia, to address that gap. Using a descriptive qualitative single-case design, the research involved collaborative workshops with teachers and cultural practitioners, twelve classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Developmental assessments were used descriptively to support qualitative interpretation. Data analysis employed content analysis with iterative verification, and expert validation was obtained through a focus group with Malang mask dance artists and scholars. Findings demonstrated clear gains in psychomotor coordination steadier rhythm, more controlled sequencing, and improved spatial awareness as well as marked socio-emotional growth reflected in sustained engagement, cooperative turn-taking, and increased performance confidence. Teachers reported easier instruction and clearer gesture–meaning links, while cultural practitioners confirmed that symbolic intent remained legible after simplification. As a curricular value, the adaptation provided a coherent package of character-oriented learning objectives, movement-with-meaning materials that connect Panji symbols to embodied experience, and performance-based assessment rubrics that could be operationalized in class. This curricular contribution aligned with Indonesia’s Pancasila Student Profile (P5) projects and offered implementable tools such as session plans, performance indicators, and observation rubrics for replication across kindergartens. Thus, Panji Laras proved to be not only teachable but also curricularly valuable, offering a measurable pathway to integrate culture and character at developmentally appropriate levels.

Keywords: Traditional Dance, Psychomotor Development, Social-Emotional Learning, Character Education, Early Childhood Education, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

In today's increasingly globalized world, preserving cultural heritage within formal education particularly in early childhood settings has faced significant challenges. Early childhood is a formative stage in which children begin to develop identity, social understanding, and foundational motor skills, making it a critical window for introducing cultural values and practices. Traditional performing arts, especially dance, offer opportunities to promote integrated development across physical, social, and emotional domains while simultaneously serving as tools for cultural transmission. Children aged 5 to 6 are at a developmental stage suited for structured, symbolic, and movement-based learning, achieving key milestones in executive functioning, emotional regulation, and both gross and fine motor coordination (Criado et al., 2025; Dimitri et al., 2020; Faber, 2017).

Among the many traditional dances from Malang, East Java, the Panji Mask Dance stands out for its symbolic richness and embedded moral values such as leadership, loyalty, and responsibility (Mustofa, 2023; Nurcahyo,

2021). This study focused on the pedagogical adaptation of the Panji Laras Mask Dance, emphasizing its potential to reinforce character education goals while addressing the psychomotor and socio-emotional needs of kindergarten learners. Embedding cultural heritage in early childhood education has been shown to support national identity, creativity, and character development (Sakti et al., 2024; Wilson & Richards, 2022). Engaging with traditional arts at an early age has also been associated with improvements in motor coordination, emotional expressiveness, and aesthetic appreciation (Rosmalah et al., 2020; Suastini & Sumada, 2022). However, systematic models for adapting and implementing traditional dances in early childhood settings particularly in the Indonesian context remain limited.

Addressing this gap requires collaborative curriculum development that involves both educators and cultural practitioners to ensure authenticity, relevance, and developmental appropriateness (Hartman, 2017; Hegediš et al., 2023). Through such collaborative processes, traditional arts can be meaningfully embedded into classroom practices, offering young learners developmental benefits and a deeper connection to their cultural heritage.

The Concept and Selection of the Panji Laras Mask Dance

Malang City was deliberately chosen as the study site due to its long-standing role as a center for mask dance traditions in East Java (Hadi, 2013). Among the local repertoires, the mask dance is distinguished by its dense symbolic content and strong local identity, making it a suitable candidate for adaptation as culturally meaningful learning material in early childhood education. During the exploratory phase, two repertoires Panji and Beskalan Patih, were examined through preliminary analysis and collaborative workshops with teachers and cultural practitioners. This process resulted in a co-developed adaptation, later named the Panji Laras Mask Dance, which was selected for full classroom integration due to its alignment with character-building objectives, its symbolic clarity for young learners, and its developmentally appropriate choreography that could be scaffolded and paced effectively (Suastini & Sumada, 2022).

Beyond cultural relevance, the adapted set constituted a teachable package comprising character-oriented objectives, movement-with-meaning motifs, and practical performance indicators aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile (P5), designed for replication across kindergarten settings. This study offered a novel contribution to early childhood education and cultural pedagogy by presenting a co-designed adaptation of the Panji Laras Mask Dance. Unlike previous works that treated traditional dance merely as cultural exposure, this research integrated ethnopedagogical values, embodied learning, and character education into a developmentally appropriate curriculum for kindergarten learners. The study introduced a guardrail-based adaptation model that simplified motifs and movement phrases while preserving symbolic identity markers such as head accent and gaze direction, and validated it collaboratively with teachers and traditional artists. Methodologically, the research established a replicable framework that combined a qualitative case study approach with descriptive developmental indicators, thereby bridging cultural authenticity and classroom feasibility.

Practically, it produced a ready-to-implement curriculum toolkit consisting of lesson sequences, rhythm guidelines, assessment rubrics, and mask-use protocols that could be scaled across kindergartens. This synthesis provided an original pathway for embedding local cultural heritage within psychomotor and socio-emotional learning frameworks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study was grounded in three intersecting strands ethnopedagogy, embodied learning, and early childhood character education integrated into a practice-oriented framework for curriculum design. From an ethnopedagogical perspective, local cultural knowledge is treated as a legitimate curricular resource whose semiotic core must remain intelligible when translated into classroom practice. Within the Topeng Malang tradition, identity markers such as head accents, gaze direction, and salutation sequences are considered non-negotiable during adaptation to ensure their symbolic meanings remain legible (Hadi, 2013; Mustofa, 2023; Nurcahyo, 2021). Empirical work in Indonesia has shown that incorporating local wisdom into education strengthens cultural identity, sustains learner engagement, and supports both moral and performance character. This positions cultural preservation and pedagogical innovation as mutually reinforcing goals (Faridah et al., 2024; Sugara & Sugito, 2022).

Embodied learning further explains why dance is a powerful medium in early childhood: cognition, emotion, and motor systems operate in an integrated manner through purposeful movement. Movement based activities have been linked to improvements in motor proficiency, memory, conceptual understanding, and socio-emotional competence (Helm et al., 2019; Karpati, 2015). In preschool settings, short repeatable phrases, moderated tempo, and brief pauses between movement segments help 5-6-year-olds integrate coordination, attention, and emotion regulation principles that directly informed this study's design, including imitation-friendly cues, rhythmic pacing, and safe spatial pathways (Dimitri et al., 2020; Faber, 2017). Additional evidence from dance education shows that

folk dance training enhances both physical and social development while fostering socio-emotional competencies through body-based interaction (Biber, 2016; Borowski, 2021). School-based research further supports these mechanisms. In a program targeting at-risk preschoolers, teacher-reported DRDP scores increased significantly in classrooms that received dance instruction, especially in the Social Emotional Development domain, where SED1-Integrating scores were 31% higher than in non-dance classrooms (Rajan & Aker, 2020). This study also clarified the DRDP structure and scoring timeline (Fall 2018 to Spring 2019), detailing the targeted SED subscales: identity of self in relation to others, social-emotional understanding, relationships with familiar adults, and relationships with peers.

Beyond single-program findings, a bibliometric analysis of 622 publications (2003–2024) using CiteSpace identified sustained international interest in dance education, with dominant keywords such as “children,” “physical activity,” and “health,” along with calls for longitudinal research and technology-enhanced interventions (Yang, 2025). These trends contextualize the present study’s classroom-based, replicable model within the broader research landscape, while also pointing to needed methodological extensions. The character education strand of this study emphasized how values are internalized through meaningful social practice rather than through declarative instruction. In the adapted Panji Laras repertoire, values such as leadership, responsibility, and empathy were embodied through roles and gestures practiced in structured, scaffolded sessions, allowing children to interpret and perform character within developmentally appropriate bounds (Wilson & Richards, 2022).

Curricular authenticity and developmental alignment were enhanced through co-design between teachers and cultural practitioners, ensuring that classroom feasibility matched cultural integrity (Hartman, 2017; Hegediš et al., 2023; Yücesan et al., 2023). Evidence from Indonesia’s Merdeka Belajar initiative suggests that integrating local arts into teaching materials increases relevance and learner ownership. Previous studies have also linked traditional arts integration to improvements in coordination, emotional expressiveness, and aesthetic appreciation, though detailed, replicable adaptation models remain scarce (Jamilah et al., 2024; Rosmalah et al., 2020; Suastini & Sumada, 2022).

Against this background, the present study advanced a classroom-ready package that included character-oriented objectives, movement-with-meaning motifs, and performance rubrics aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile (P5). It was implemented through a qualitative single-case design with embedded descriptive indicators, enabling triangulation across observations, interviews, document analysis, and expert focus group discussions, without invoking mixed-methods inference (Creswell et al., 2009; Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). By operationalizing ethnopedagogical principles within an embodied learning framework and situating them in a co-designed, values-rich curriculum, this study responded to empirical evidence supporting social-emotional gains from preschool dance programs and addressed broader recommendations for rigorous, scalable design in cultural pedagogy (Rajan & Aker, 2020; Yang, 2025).

METHODS

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative approach within a single-case study design (Yin, 2014) to examine how the Panji Laras Mask Dance was adapted and implemented in kindergarten classrooms. The design was selected to capture classroom processes, the cultural meanings embedded in choreography, and participant perspectives elements essential for integrating traditional arts into early childhood pedagogy (Creswell et al., 2009). The operational aim was to document how specific movement elements were simplified, the pedagogical rationale behind these decisions for 5–6-year-old learners, and how the adapted choreography supported psychomotor and socio-emotional development. Although simple percentage scores were reported to illustrate children’s developmental outcomes (e.g., motor coordination and socio-emotional engagement), these figures served solely as descriptive support to strengthen qualitative interpretation. They were not intended as independent quantitative data or inferential analysis. Thus, the study remained a qualitative single-case design, with numerical data embedded as supplementary evidence.

Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted in Malang City, East Java, a longstanding hub of mask dance traditions. Participants were drawn from multiple stakeholder groups. Key informants included three early childhood teachers each with over 20 years of experience in arts-integrated instruction and four cultural practitioners, all of whom were studio leaders and choreographers in the Malang mask dance tradition. In addition, 108 kindergarten children aged 5–6 years from six different classes participated in the adapted dance program. For in-depth qualitative analysis, a purposive sample of 36 children from two classes was observed intensively to generate detailed insights into

engagement, coordination, peer interaction, and responses to movement adaptations. Participant characteristics are summarized in table 1, including roles, years of experience, and areas of expertise.

Table 1. Participant Demographics and Roles

Code	Role	Experience (Years)	Expertise/Position
ECE1	Kindergarten Teacher	26	Dance-based teaching and curriculum integration
ECE2	Kindergarten Teacher	25	Arts-infused early childhood education
ECE3	Kindergarten Teacher	25	Cultural expression and movement in learning
CP1	Cultural Practitioner	20	Head of Studio A, choreographer
CP2	Cultural Practitioner	27	Head of Studio B, dance artist
CP3	Cultural Practitioner	30	Head of Studio C, dance artist
CP4	Cultural Practitioner	25	Head of Studio D, dance artist

Source: Authors' own work

Data Collection

Data collection followed the adaptation workflow and used multiple sources for triangulation. The process unfolded in three stages, as illustrated in Figure 1: (1) cultural review and identification of motifs too complex for young children, (2) co-design and simplification of movement phrases while preserving symbolic intent, and (3) classroom trials followed by reflective evaluation. Semi-structured in-depth interviews with key informants explored which movements required simplification, how symbolic meaning could be retained through age-appropriate gestures, and the challenges encountered during classroom integration. Twelve non-participant classroom observations were conducted, focusing on indicators such as engagement, motor coordination, cooperative turn-taking, and teacher facilitation (e.g., pacing, modeling, and cueing). Illustrative photographs of classroom activities are presented in Figures 2–4, with additional documentation in the Appendix. Document analysis included lesson plans, instructional materials, reflective notes, and curriculum documents. To ensure expert validation of cultural authenticity, a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted with 6–8 mask dance artists and scholars from Malang. The FGD addressed non-negotiable symbolic elements, acceptable boundaries of simplification, etiquette in mask and costume use, and appropriate musical pacing for young children.



Figure 1. Flowchart of the Movement Adaptation Process (Stages 1–3: Review → Co-design → Classroom Trials).

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Creswell's content analysis approach (2009) combined with the interactive model of Miles et al., (2014). Interview transcripts, observation notes, documents, and FGD records were inductively coded and categorized into themes reflecting adaptation rationale, classroom implementation patterns, and indicators of psychomotor and socio-emotional development. Thematic matrices linked adaptation decisions to observed classroom outcomes. Conclusions were drawn when findings converged across multiple sources, including classroom observations, interviews, documents, and expert validation. When inconsistencies arose, member checking was conducted and field data were reexamined to ensure analytical alignment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Movement Adaptation Outcomes

To integrate the Panji Laras Mask Dance into the kindergarten curriculum, the choreography was adapted using a guardrail-based approach that balanced developmental appropriateness with symbolic legibility. The original repertoire featured dense, symbol-laden sequences that posed challenges for 5–6 year-olds in terms of force control, bilateral coordination, and sustained attention. Music and phrasing were calibrated to match children's rhythms by maintaining a steady, unhurried tempo and inserting brief, predictable pauses at the end of each phrase. These pauses allowed children to reset their attention and timing before continuing. Phrases were kept short and imitation-friendly, while spatial routes followed half-circular patterns to minimize collision risks in small classrooms. These adaptations reduced motor demands while preserving key semiotic elements of the Panji

tradition especially head accents, gaze direction, and etiquette markers so that the dance remained recognizably Panji Laras to both children and observers (see table 2).

Table 2. Core Comparison of Original and Adapted Dance Movements for Preschool Children

Original Movement	Adapted Form	Purpose
Singget	Sweeping arm motion	Simplify complex sequences
Kencak Gembira	Rhythmic stepping	Improve coordination
Labas	Slow-paced leaping	Enhance spatial awareness
Ngure Rikma	Side arm motion	Facilitate ease of imitation
Supit Urang	"Ngruji" hand shape	Simplify symbolic gestures
Loncatan	Simultaneous jumping	Develop rhythmic timing

Source: Authors' own work

Precision-demanding motifs were restructured into smoother, more rhythmic patterns without erasing their symbolic meaning. For instance, the original Singget sequence, which combined rapid arm articulations with alternating foot lifts, was replaced with flowing arm movements anchored by stable weight transfer and emphasized head gestures. These changes allowed children to maintain vertical alignment and directional focus while enabling teachers to cue timing with short verbal anchors (e.g., "eyes-head-step"). Complex cross-body pathways were simplified into same-side initiations; fast alternating steps were replaced by evenly paced marching; and sharp directional turns were reoriented into semicircular movements. Each modification was made to improve motor accessibility while retaining the movement's original intent.

These adaptation decisions were informed by triangulated evidence from classroom observations, teacher interviews, and an expert focus group discussion (FGD) with mask dance practitioners. Teachers reported that short, repeatable phrases with clear cue words increased on-task behavior and reduced frustration, enabling children to maintain rhythm and posture throughout each phrase. Artists emphasized that identity markers head accents, eye lines, and salutation etiquette were non-negotiable. While force and pathways could be softened, the symbolic sign had to remain intact. Preparatory activities such as mask coloring and making were used as embodied primers to externalize symbolic vocabulary (e.g., jamang, cula) before those symbols were enacted through movement. The result was a coherent movement-with-meaning package that combined rhythmic pacing, phrase architecture, spatial routing, and cueing language to support both psychomotor gains (e.g., steadier rhythm, controlled sequencing, clearer spatial orientation) and socio-emotional development (e.g., turn-taking, cooperative formation, and performance confidence).

Classroom Implementation

The adapted program was implemented within the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) module over twelve sessions, integrating Panji stories, traditional instruments, and costumes. Preparatory activities such as mask coloring and making linked symbolic meaning to movement and served as fine-motor warm-ups prior to dance practice (see figures 2–3). The classroom was transformed into a studio-style environment where students explored cultural heritage through artistic expression. These entry activities introduced embodied role-play before full movement phrases were practiced. A child-centered, exploratory approach guided the introduction of simplified sequences, which were reinforced through micro-practices during circle time, outdoor play, and storytelling.



Figure 2. Preparatory activities: mask coloring (studio-style classroom).

Source: Authors' own work



Figure 3. Mask Making : linking symbols to movement (2025)

Source: Authors' own work

By the final practice sessions (Figure 4), children demonstrated confidence in dancing, internalized rhythm and spatial patterns, and expressed character through gesture and expression. Interview data highlighted how teachers sustained children's attention using alternating blocks of listening, coloring, and movement; relied on stable cue vocabulary (e.g., "eyes-head-step"); and employed playful, locally rooted calls to maintain group focus. The school headmaster noted that program feasibility was supported by school-level scheduling and partnerships with local studios. Experts recommended moderate musical pacing with short inter-phrase pauses and cheerful tonal qualities to reduce anxiety around mask use. Overall, classroom feasibility was ensured by teacher strategies and institutional support.



Figure 4. Final practice: simplified sequencing and pacing (2025).
Source: Authors' own work

Developmental Outcomes

Teachers reported high levels of engagement and emotional investment during dance and role-play sessions. Observational data indicated increased on-task behavior, richer expressive movement, and more consistent collaborative turn-taking, aligning with the study's socio-emotional goals. Children incorporated dance-related vocabulary during discussions and rehearsals, signaling deeper cultural understanding and internalized learning. Interview data revealed that typically shy children began volunteering for roles after narrative warm-ups normalized stage presence. Playful motifs such as "Cindaras's chicken" facilitated expressive risk-taking while preserving gesture control. Children used vocabulary such as *jamang* and *cula* in context, reflecting parallel growth in motor and cultural competencies.

Over the course of the program, children exhibited progressively steadier rhythm, smoother sequencing, and clearer spatial awareness. Gesture control evolved from effortful imitation to confident, intentional action. Head accents and gaze direction became more precise during salutation and character gestures. Socially, children moved from parallel play to coordinated cooperation, taking turns, guiding peers into formation, and helping one another with masks and positioning. Expressive confidence grew as role-based narratives normalized performance behaviors. Previously reluctant children began volunteering and sustained attention through short, well-cued practice sessions. Teachers noted clearer gesture meaning connections and calmer pacing. Experts affirmed that symbolic legibility was preserved despite simplification. These patterns confirmed that the adapted dance supported psychomotor fluency and socio-emotional growth in ways that were developmentally appropriate, culturally meaningful, and pedagogically feasible.

Evidence from Collaborative Workshops (Feasibility)

As detailed in Figure 1 (Methods), the three-stage adaptation workshops yielded strong evidence of feasibility. Teachers reported simplified instruction, sustained engagement, and clearer gesture-meaning links following the adaptation. Classroom trials confirmed that the pacing and sequencing were manageable for children aged 5–6. Interviews identified concrete heuristics from the co-design cycle: rehearsing entrances and salutations separately preserved etiquette while reducing cognitive load; maintaining short, consistent pauses helped sustain attention; and using semicircular spatial pathways ensured safety in small classrooms. Artists described these principles as "guardrails": reduce force but preserve symbolic signs, and adjust tempo while retaining the core accent. While some teachers initially preferred faster pacing, classroom trials showed that a moderate tempo with a two-beat pause provided better stability and symbolic clarity.

Validation from In-Depth Interviews

Interviews with key informants validated the adaptation process through three consistent themes: (1) developmental fit children could follow the beat and repeat short sequences without frustration; (2) symbolic integrity the Panji character remained recognizable even with simplified counts; and (3) instructional workability

phrase transitions became easier to cue and manage in class. Teachers also identified practical solutions to classroom constraints: limited space was managed through semicircle formations and shorter phrase blocks; attention span was supported through modality shifts and consistent cueing; and mask handling was facilitated by a simplified safety protocol. These classroom micro-practices contributed to improved feasibility without raising instructional complexity.

Expert Validation via FGD

An expert focus group with Malang-based mask dance artists and scholars reinforced the findings from interviews and observations. Three central themes emerged: (1) symbolic integrity and narrative coherence experts confirmed that the adapted dance remained recognizable as Panji, provided that head accents and gaze direction were preserved; (2) pedagogical feasibility and safety experts endorsed moderate pacing and short phrase pauses to support attention and coordination; and (3) cultural etiquette experts emphasized maintaining salutation order, mask handling protocols, and brief cultural explanations prior to use. Experts also endorsed the narrative-first approach to reduce performance anxiety and reinforce meaning. Teachers modeled etiquette explicitly to prevent cultural drift. Together, these measures ensured that cultural literacy was strengthened not diluted through adaptation.

DISCUSSION

This study demonstrated that a deliberately adapted version of the Panji Laras Mask Dance can function as a developmentally appropriate, culturally legible, and instructionally feasible component of early childhood education. Classroom evidence including improvements in rhythm, controlled sequencing, spatial orientation, cooperation, turn-taking, and expressive confidence aligns with broader research identifying traditional arts as catalysts for holistic growth in preschool settings (Georgios, 2017; Khong et al., 2025; Yetti & Crie Handini, 2022). By embedding movement within a narrative and symbol system that children could interpret and perform, the program supported both psychomotor development and socio-emotional learning, while also strengthening cultural identity. Participation in the dance activities enhanced gross-to-fine motor coordination, balance, rhythm, and spatial awareness outcomes consistent with research on the motor benefits of dance education (Venetsanou & Kambas, 2004) and parallel to gains reported in traditional Indian (Raghupathy et al., 2022) and Greek (Kapodistria & Chatzopoulos, 2021) dance contexts.

The design decisions such as shorter movement phrases, moderate tempo, brief inter-phrase pauses, and semicircle formation routes reflected core principles of embodied learning. These features offered imitation-friendly cues that reduced motor load while preserving symbolic meaning. Teachers and cultural practitioners independently validated these adaptations, affirming that identity markers (e.g., head accents, gaze direction, salutation etiquette) remained intact even as movement pathways and force requirements were simplified. Beyond motor coordination, the adapted choreography also acted as a scaffold for socio-emotional development. Children progressed from parallel participation to coordinated group interaction, took initiative to support peers, and engaged in shared meaning-making through gesture and expression. These findings resonate with existing literature that links dance participation to enhanced empathy, cooperation, and emotion regulation (Biber, 2016; Gripton et al., 2022; Harvey et al., 2023; Karpati, 2015). The program's playful and culturally grounded tone achieved through narrative-based entry points, character-driven movement (e.g., Panji and Cindelas), and joyful musical elements helped reduce performance anxiety and encouraged expressive risk-taking. Teachers observed clearer gesture-to-meaning connections and calmer pacing, while experts confirmed that the simplified movement phrases retained symbolic legibility.

In addition to developmental outcomes, the program reinforced pride in local heritage. Children used cultural vocabulary such as *jamang* and *cula* appropriately during practice, and their enthusiasm during performances reflected a meaningful connection to the stories and symbols of the Panji tradition. These results support arguments that early childhood education should reflect cultural diversity and affirm learners' identities (Hidayatulloh et al., 2020; Jamilah et al., 2024; Jayadi et al., 2022). They also echo findings that cultural identity formed during the early years plays a central role in shaping inclusive, multicultural learning environments (Niu et al., 2024). From an ethnopedagogical perspective, preserving the "readable sign" was essential. Identity markers such as head accent, gaze direction, salutation order, and character posture functioned as non-negotiable cultural elements. The guardrail-based approach employed in this study balanced the need for developmental appropriateness with the imperative to preserve cultural integrity ensuring that simplification did not result in symbolic erasure.

The success of the program was grounded in participatory curriculum design. Co-design workshops with artists and teachers, followed by classroom trials and reflective cycles, enabled the refinement of instructional language,

spacing, and spatial organization. This process exemplifies best practices in culturally responsive pedagogy and inclusive curriculum development (Hartman, 2017; Schupp, 2015, 2022; Wang et al., 2024). Teachers also requested supplementary resources such as movement cards keyed to narrative beats, short instructional videos, and simplified music tracks which align with calls for sustained professional learning in arts integration (Guilarte et al., 2023) and findings that embedding local culture enhances learner engagement and identity pride (Saribas & Coskun, 2024).

Viewed within a global context, traditional arts programs have been consistently associated with socio-emotional maturity, cultural understanding, and ethical development (Alhosani, 2022; Gorshkova, 2023; Müller et al., 2019). Preschool adaptations of traditional Malay dances emphasize similar goals of movement literacy and cultural transmission (Zain et al., 2024), while broader dance education literature highlights improvements in emotional expression, self-regulation, and reflective thinking (Borowski, 2021). Within Indonesia, the Panji narrative embodies moral values such as leadership, empathy, and responsibility that are suitable for enactment by young learners through gesture and role-play (Wulandari, 2024). Comparable findings from the Japanese *Bon* dance also point to increased well-being and intergenerational social bonding (Yamada & Kawano, 2021). The contribution of this study lies in offering a classroom-ready, replicable model that preserves symbolic richness while meeting the developmental needs of kindergarten learners.

Methodologically, the use of a qualitative single-case design with descriptive indicators embedded enabled transparent interpretation without invoking mixed-methods inference. Observational data, interviews, documents, and expert validation were triangulated, reinforcing the credibility of findings. Teacher reports of improved pacing and clearer instructional cues aligned with classroom observations and expert recommendations. Children's use of cultural vocabulary and collaborative behaviors echoed both narrative framing and phrase architecture. Descriptive indicators functioned as a transparency layer, clarifying what changed and how, while retaining a qualitative interpretive lens.

For schools, the findings suggest a feasible integration model: a 10–12 session program with moderate tempo and short phrase pauses; a performance rubric assessing rhythm, sequencing, spatial awareness, cooperation, turn-taking, and expression; and a mask protocol that introduces symbolic meaning, respects cultural etiquette, and ensures safety through semicircle formations. Sustainability can be anchored through designated “culture project” blocks in the school timetable, partnerships with local dance studios, and short orientation sessions for non-arts staff.

Future research should investigate long-term retention of movement patterns and values, comparative studies across multiple school contexts, and the incorporation of instrumented motor assessments to complement teacher ratings. Parallel studies may also explore the adaptation of other *Topeng* or Nusantara dance traditions using the design heuristics established in this research.

CONCLUSION

Adapting the Panji Laras Mask Dance for kindergarten learners through a collaborative design process, classroom implementation, and expert validation proved to be both feasible and developmentally beneficial. The adapted choreography preserved essential symbolic meaning while aligning with the psychomotor and socio-emotional capacities of children aged 5–6 years. Teachers reported sustained engagement, improved classroom management, and clearer gesture-to-meaning connections throughout the program. Observational and interview data indicated consistent improvements in motor coordination such as rhythm, sequencing, and spatial orientation as well as socio-emotional skills, including cooperation, turn-taking, and expressive confidence.

Beyond developmental outcomes, the Panji narrative contributed to character education by embedding values such as leadership, responsibility, and empathy in an embodied, age-appropriate format. These values were reinforced through storytelling, gesture, and role-play, allowing children to enact moral concepts in meaningful ways. Practically, the study offers a replicable and scalable pathway for culturally responsive curriculum design that integrates traditional performing arts into early childhood education. The approach demonstrated how symbolic integrity can be maintained through thoughtful simplification and how instructional feasibility can be achieved without compromising cultural meaning. Future research should explore longitudinal retention of both movement and values, comparative implementations across multiple school contexts, and the use of standardized motor assessments to complement qualitative findings. By refining tools and expanding implementation, this model can contribute to national and regional efforts to embed cultural heritage meaningfully within early childhood learning frameworks.

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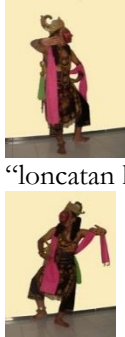


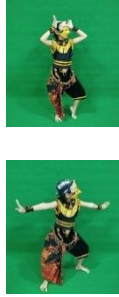


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APPENDIX

Appendix Table S1. Detailed side-by-side visual mapping of original versus adapted movements

Movement Name	Original Malang Mask Dance Movement	Adapted Panji Laras Mask Dance Movement for Preschoolers	Description
Singget	 <p>“gejroh” <i>(rapid transitional and angular gestures)</i></p>  <p>”guwak buri”</p>  <p>“nggunting “</p>  <p>“tanjek mapan”</p>	 <p>“gejug” <i>(sweeping arm motion)</i></p>  <p>“nggunting”</p>  <p>“tanjek mapan”</p>	<p>The original Singget involved sharp, angular arm movements and complex transitions, including quick foot lifts, which were challenging for young children. The adaptation replaced these with flowing arm movements and reduced leg complexity, maintaining the stylistic integrity while improving accessibility.</p>
Kencak Gembira Step	 <p>“penthangan nggembira”</p>  <p>“ngrawit gembira”</p>	  <p>“ngrawit”</p>	<p>The original step required rapid weight shifts and coordination. The adaptation simplified the footwork while preserving the energetic and joyful tone, allowing children to move in rhythm without excessive complexity.</p>
Labas		 	<p>The original tempo and transitions were too fast for preschoolers. The adaptation halved the speed and added playful jumps, making it more expressive and developmentally appropriate.</p>

Loncatan	 <p>“loncatan kanan”</p> <p>“loncatan kiri”</p>	 <p>“gejug”</p> <p>“loncatan kanan”</p> <p>“tanjek mapan”</p>	<p>The original synchronized jumping required precise timing and stamina. The adapted version introduced slower, playful bouncing to develop rhythm while ensuring safety and balance.</p>
Ngure rikma			<p>The symbolic meaning was retained, while the tempo and complexity were reduced to support upper-body coordination and balance.</p>
Hand gesture modification	 <p>“supit urang tertutup”</p>	 <p>“ngruji/ngrayung”</p>	<p>The original gesture required fine motor precision. The adaptation used a more natural open-finger position to ensure consistency and ease for young learners while preserving expressive intent.</p>

Source: The data in this table is synthesized from movement elements adapted from the traditional Beskalan Patih mask dance (Minarto, 2008) and the researcher’s documentation compiled during the workshop on the preparation of the work in December 2024.

Appendix Table S2. Triangulation Matrix Linking Key Claims to Data Sources

Key Claim (Design Heuristic)	Observations (Classroom)	Interviews (Teachers/Headmaster)	Documents (Lesson Plans, Notes)	Expert FGD (Artists/Scholars)	Sample Coded Quotes
Moderate tempo and brief pauses improve coordination and attention	Steadier rhythm; fewer breakdowns in movement	Calmer pacing; easier cueing	Lesson notes emphasize beat count and pause structure	Experts recommend moderate pacing	“Two-beat pause settled the group” (Teacher S); “Keep moderate, not rushed” (Artist EC)

Short, repeatable phrases reduce motor load and enhance symbolic clarity	Phrases consistently reproduced	Easier to model and maintain	Phrase cards/checklists used	Repetition supports clarity	“Short counts, clear cue words” (Teacher B1)
Semicircle formation routes enhance safety and spatial management	Fewer collisions; improved spacing	Practical in limited space	SOP emphasizes semicircle path	Supported as child-safe	“Hall small → semicircle works” (Teacher B1)
Identity markers must be retained (head accent, gaze, salutation)	Visual consistency in performance	Modeled explicitly by teachers	Notes highlight etiquette modeling	Deemed non-negotiable	“Keep the sign even if force is soft” (Artist EC)
Story-first entry reduces anxiety and deepens meaning	Increased volunteerism and expressiveness	Greater willingness to perform	Storyboards and sequencing used	Endorsed as framing strategy	“Story before mask = calmer starts” (Headmaster)
Toolkit (music tracks, movement cards, micro-videos) supports instructional fidelity	Smoother lesson transitions	Requested by teachers	Track lists and cue visuals prepared	Validated for scaling	“Cards keyed to beats help” (Class B5 Teacher)