

## Cultural Identity Transmission through Jaranan Dance Education among Indonesian Diaspora Students in Malaysia

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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:**  
Traditional Dance,  
Jaranan,  
Cultural Identity,  
Diaspora,  
Embodied Learning

*Traditional arts education plays a crucial role in sustaining cultural identity among diaspora communities. This study examines Jaranan dance education as a medium for cultural identity transmission among Indonesian diaspora students in Malaysia. Employing a qualitative case study approach, the research was conducted at Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL) and involved participant observation, documentation, and reflective field notes. Data were analyzed using interpretive thematic analysis. The findings reveal that Jaranan learning functions as an embodied cultural practice through which students internalize discipline, collective values, and emotional attachment to Indonesian cultural heritage. The learning process fosters cultural awareness, social belonging, and a sense of pride among students who grow up in a transnational environment. Rather than functioning solely as an aesthetic activity, Jaranan operates as a pedagogical medium that enables students to experience cultural identity through bodily engagement and collective practice. This study contributes to discussions on arts education and diaspora studies by demonstrating how traditional dance can serve as an effective tool for cultural transmission and identity formation in diaspora contexts. The findings underscore the importance of integrating traditional arts into educational programs for sustaining cultural continuity among overseas communities.*

### INTRODUCTION

Arts education in the context of globalization and transnational mobility, diaspora communities increasingly face challenges in maintaining cultural identity, particularly among younger generations who grow up outside their country of origin. For Indonesian diaspora communities, formal and informal educational institutions abroad play a crucial role in transmitting cultural values and sustaining a sense of national and cultural belonging. However, cultural education in diaspora contexts often prioritizes cognitive knowledge over embodied cultural practices, resulting in weakened connections to lived cultural experiences, especially traditional dance, has been widely recognized as an effective medium for cultural transmission because it involves bodily engagement, emotional expression, and collective participation. Dance functions not only as an aesthetic practice but also as a form of embodied knowledge through which cultural meanings, values, and identities are internalized (Hanna, 1987; Smith, 1998). In diaspora settings, traditional dance education offers a unique opportunity to reconnect young generations with their cultural heritage through experiential learning rather than symbolic representation alone.

One of Indonesia's traditional performing arts that embodies strong cultural, historical, and symbolic meanings is Jaranan, a traditional dance originating from East Java. Jaranan is characterized by dynamic movements, rhythmic musical accompaniment, and the use of horse-shaped props, reflecting values of discipline, collectivity, resilience, and cultural spirituality. While Jaranan has been extensively studied within local Indonesian contexts, its role as an educational medium for cultural identity formation among Indonesian diaspora communities remains underexplored.

Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL), as an Indonesian formal educational institution abroad, serves not only as a center for academic learning but also as a strategic site for cultural transmission among Indonesian children living in Malaysia. Students at SIKL are exposed daily to multicultural and transnational environments, predominantly influenced by Malay culture and global popular culture. This situation places Indonesian students in a vulnerable position where cultural assimilation may gradually distance them from their ancestral cultural roots. Consequently, structured cultural education becomes essential to reinforce cultural identity and foster a sense of belonging to Indonesian heritage.

Traditional dance education at SIKL, particularly the introduction of Jaranan, represents an intentional effort to transmit Indonesian cultural identity through embodied learning. Unlike conventional classroom-based cultural instruction, learning Jaranan involves bodily discipline, rhythmic coordination, collective movement, and symbolic interpretation. These elements allow students to experience culture not merely as information, but as lived practice embedded in movement, emotion, and social interaction. Such processes align with theories of cultural transmission that emphasize practice-based learning and intergenerational knowledge transfer (Herskovits, 1948; Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman, 1981).

Despite the growing importance of diaspora education and cultural sustainability, empirical studies focusing on traditional dance as a medium for cultural identity formation among Indonesian diaspora students are still limited. Existing research on dance education often centers on local or national contexts, while diaspora-based cultural learning remains marginal in academic discourse. This gap highlights the need for in-depth qualitative studies that explore how traditional arts function as identity-forming practices in transnational educational settings.

This study aims to examine how Jaranan dance education functions as a medium for cultural identity transmission among Indonesian diaspora students in Malaysia, using Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur as a case study. Specifically, the research seeks to explore (1) the learning processes involved in Jaranan dance education, (2) the cultural values and identities transmitted through embodied practice, and (3) students' experiences and interpretations of Jaranan as part of their cultural self-understanding. By situating traditional dance education within a diaspora context, this study contributes to broader discussions on arts education, cultural transmission, and identity formation in transnational communities.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore how traditional dance education functions as a medium for cultural identity transmission among Indonesian diaspora students. A qualitative design was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of cultural practices, meanings, and lived experiences within a specific social and educational context. The case study approach is particularly appropriate for examining complex cultural phenomena embedded in real-life settings, such as arts education in diaspora communities.

## Research Site

The research was conducted at Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL), Malaysia. SIKL is a formal educational institution established to serve Indonesian children living abroad and functions as both an academic and cultural space. Beyond its role in delivering national curriculum content, SIKL plays a strategic role in maintaining Indonesian cultural identity among students who grow up in a transnational environment. The selection of SIKL as the research site was based on its unique position as a cultural bridge between Indonesia and the host country, Malaysia.

## Participants

The participants of this study consisted of Indonesian secondary school students at SIKL who took part in Jaranan dance learning activities. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on students who had limited prior exposure to East Javanese traditional dance. This sampling strategy enabled the researcher to capture authentic learning experiences and identity-related responses emerging from first-time engagement with Jaranan. In addition, teachers and instructors involved in the dance learning process were included as supporting informants to provide contextual insights into the instructional design and cultural objectives of the program.

## Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through multiple qualitative techniques to ensure depth and credibility.

### 1. Observation

The researcher was directly involved in observing the Jaranan dance learning process, Participant including movement training, group coordination, and student interactions. Observations focused on bodily engagement, discipline, emotional expression, and collective dynamics during practice sessions.

### 2. Documentation

Visual documentation in the form of photographs and video recordings was used to capture learning activities, movement patterns, and performance outcomes. These materials supported the analysis of embodied learning processes and provided contextual evidence of cultural practice in the diaspora setting.

### 3. Reflective Field Notes

Reflective notes were written throughout the learning process to document instructional strategies, student responses, and situational dynamics. These notes functioned as interpretive data, allowing the researcher to connect observed practices with broader cultural and educational meanings.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis followed an interpretive thematic analysis approach. The process involved several stages:

- 1) data familiarization through repeated reading of field notes and documentation materials;
- 2) coding of recurring patterns related to cultural identity, learning experiences, and embodied practices;
- 3) categorization of codes into broader themes such as cultural awareness, sense of belonging, discipline, and collective identity; and
- 4) interpretation of themes in relation to theories of cultural transmission and identity formation. This analytical process emphasized meaning-making rather than measurement, aligning with the study's qualitative orientation.

### **Trustworthiness of the Study**

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied strategies of credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Data triangulation was conducted by comparing observations, documentation, and reflective notes. Prolonged engagement in the field enabled deeper understanding of the learning context, while peer discussions with fellow educators supported analytical reflexivity. These strategies strengthened the reliability of interpretations and minimized researcher bias.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, and all participants were informed about the purpose of the study. Personal identities were anonymized to protect participants' privacy. The research was conducted in alignment with ethical standards for educational research involving minors in institutional settings.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on qualitative observations, documentation, and reflective field notes, this study identified four major themes that describe how Jaranan dance education functions as a medium for cultural identity transmission among Indonesian diaspora students at Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur.

### **1. Jaranan as a New and Unfamiliar Cultural Experience**

For most participants, Jaranan was a new cultural experience. The majority of students had limited prior exposure to East Javanese traditional dance, particularly Jaranan, and were more familiar with Malay cultural expressions or global popular culture. Initial encounters with Jaranan movements, music, and properties revealed curiosity mixed with uncertainty. Students often expressed surprise at the physical intensity, rhythmic patterns, and symbolic elements embedded in the dance.

Despite this unfamiliarity, repeated engagement gradually transformed initial hesitation into growing interest. Students began to recognize Jaranan not merely as a dance form, but as a representation of Indonesian cultural heritage distinct from their daily cultural environment in Malaysia. This shift marked the early stage of cultural awareness and recognition.

## **2. Embodied Learning through Movement and Discipline**

The learning process of Jaranan emphasized embodied engagement, requiring students to internalize cultural values through bodily discipline rather than verbal instruction. Foundational movements such as *tanjak*, *mendhak*, and coordinated footwork demanded physical endurance, balance, and concentration. Through repetitive practice, students learned to synchronize body posture, rhythm, and spatial awareness.

This embodied learning process cultivated discipline and attentiveness. Students became increasingly aware that accuracy in movement was linked not only to technical performance but also to maintaining the cultural character of Jaranan. Bodily discipline thus functioned as a gateway for understanding cultural norms embedded in the dance, reinforcing the idea that cultural knowledge is learned through practice and experience.

## **3. Collective Practice and the Emergence of Social Identity**

Jaranan learning activities were conducted primarily in group settings, emphasizing coordination, mutual awareness, and collective responsibility. Students learned that individual movement quality was inseparable from group harmony. Mistimed movements or lack of coordination directly affected collective performance, encouraging peer support and collaborative adjustment.

This collective learning environment fostered a sense of belonging and shared identity. Students began to perceive themselves as part of a cultural group connected through movement and rhythm. The group-based nature of Jaranan practice strengthened social bonds and reinforced cultural identity as a collective experience rather than an individual attribute.

## **4. Emotional Engagement and Cultural Belonging**

As learning progressed, students demonstrated increased emotional engagement with Jaranan. Expressions of enjoyment, pride, and excitement became more visible during practice sessions and informal reflections. Performing movements associated with Indonesian cultural heritage generated a sense of connection to their country of origin, despite physical distance from Indonesia.

Several students articulated feelings of pride in being able to perform a traditional Indonesian dance, particularly when imagining presenting it to broader audiences. This emotional connection suggests that Jaranan functioned as a medium for cultural belonging, enabling students to experience Indonesian identity as something lived and embodied rather than abstract or symbolic.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study demonstrates that Jaranan dance education functions as an effective medium for cultural identity transmission among Indonesian diaspora students when approached as an embodied and collective learning practice. The findings indicate that cultural identity is not transmitted through abstract knowledge alone, but through lived experiences that engage the body, emotions, and social interaction. This supports the view that identity is continuously constructed through cultural practice rather than inherited as a fixed attribute (Hall, 1990).

## **Jaranan and Cultural Identity in Diaspora Contexts**

The results reveal that students initially perceived Jaranan as an unfamiliar cultural form, reflecting their everyday immersion in a multicultural and transnational environment dominated by host-country and global cultures. This condition aligns with diaspora studies that describe identity among migrant communities as fluid, negotiated, and shaped by multiple cultural influences (Vertovec, 2009). Through repeated engagement with Jaranan, students gradually developed cultural awareness and recognition, indicating that traditional dance education can serve as a mechanism for reconnecting diaspora youth with their cultural roots.

Hall (1990) emphasizes that cultural identity is not a static essence but a process of becoming, shaped by history, culture, and representation. The learning of Jaranan at SIKL illustrates this process clearly: students did not merely “learn” about Indonesian culture but actively performed it, allowing identity to emerge through practice. This suggests that traditional dance education in diaspora settings plays a crucial role in transforming cultural identity from symbolic affiliation into lived experience.

## **Embodied Learning and Cultural Transmission**

The embodied nature of Jaranan learning highlights the importance of bodily practice in cultural transmission. Movements such as *tanjak*, *mendhak*, and rhythmic coordination required students to internalize discipline, endurance, and attentiveness through repetition. This finding resonates with Herskovits’ (1948) theory of cultural transmission, which emphasizes that culture is transmitted through patterned behavior and social practice rather than through verbal instruction alone.

Furthermore, the findings support theories of embodied learning, which argue that knowledge is produced and understood through bodily engagement and sensory experience (Hanna, 1987; Smith, 1998). In this study, students’ understanding of Jaranan developed not through textual explanation but through physical enactment, demonstrating how traditional dance serves as a form of embodied cultural knowledge. Such learning processes are particularly relevant in diaspora contexts, where direct exposure to cultural practices in everyday life may be limited.

## **Collective Practice and Social Identity Formation**

Another significant finding is the role of collective practice in shaping social identity. Jaranan learning required students to coordinate movements, maintain group rhythm, and adjust individual performance for collective harmony. This process fostered a sense of belonging and shared responsibility, reinforcing identity as a social construct rather than an individual possession. This aligns with sociocultural perspectives that view identity formation as inherently relational and situated within group interaction (Hannerz, 1992).

The collective dimension of Jaranan practice allowed students to experience Indonesian identity as something enacted together, strengthening emotional and social bonds within the diaspora community. In this sense, traditional dance education functions not only as cultural transmission but also as social integration, reinforcing communal identity among students living outside their country of origin.

## **Emotional Engagement and Sense of Belonging**

The emotional responses observed during Jaranan learning – such as enjoyment, pride, and excitement – indicate that affective engagement plays a central role in cultural identity formation. Emotional attachment to cultural practices has been identified as a key factor in sustaining identity among diaspora populations (Cohen, 1997). In this study, emotional engagement emerged as students began to associate Jaranan with national pride and cultural belonging.

This affective dimension suggests that traditional dance education can counteract cultural detachment often experienced by diaspora youth. By engaging emotions alongside bodily practice, Jaranan becomes a medium through which students experience cultural belonging in a tangible and meaningful way.

## **Implications for Arts Education in Diaspora Settings**

The findings of this study contribute to broader discussions on arts education by demonstrating that traditional dance can function as an identity-forming pedagogical practice rather than merely an aesthetic or extracurricular activity. In diaspora educational contexts, integrating traditional dance into cultural education programs can strengthen cultural continuity, reinforce national identity, and support students' emotional and social development.

By positioning Jaranan as a form of embodied cultural pedagogy, this study extends existing research on arts education and diaspora studies, highlighting the importance of practice-based and experiential learning approaches for sustaining cultural identity in transnational contexts.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study aims to analyze the influence of ideology dynamics in Kampus Merdeka's Magang dan Studi Independen Bersertifikat Program (MSIB) (Independent Campus's Internship and Certified Independent Study Program) on the competence of design students. With a qualitative approach supported by bibliometric analysis, this study has succeeded in identifying and understanding the relationship between the ideologies applied in MSIB and the development of student design skills. Based on the results of a literature review from sources obtained through Google Scholar and Scopus, it was found that although MSIB provides great opportunities for students to develop practical skills through internship experiences and independent study, the influence of educational ideologies in the program on design education has not been widely discussed in the existing literature.

The results of the bibliometric analysis showed that the literature associated with MSIB focused more attention on the development of students' professional skills in the context of internships and independent study, while the influence of ideology on student design competencies was less frequently raised. This suggests a gap in existing research, where ideological aspects in design education through MSIB have not been extensively explored in depth. This study successfully fills in the gap by illustrating the importance of understanding the dynamics of ideologies applied in MSIB, as well as how these ideologies can influence the development of students' design skills, both in technical aspects and in creative and critical aspects.

The study also reveals that although MSIB gives students the opportunity to access the industrial world and develop practical skills, the lack of a clear understanding of ideology in the context of design can hinder the development of thinking skills critical and creative are essential in professional design practice. Therefore, this study suggests the importance of clarifying the integration of ideologies in MSIB programs, in order to make a more significant contribution to the competencies of design students that are more holistic and relevant to the demands of the industry.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that higher education managers and policy makers within the education sector design curricula that are more based on the development of ideologies appropriate to the design discipline. This will enable students to develop design skills that are not only technical, but also creative and reflective, which will better prepare them for the challenges of the working world. This research also made an important contribution to the development of design education theory and practice, as well as suggesting for further research that could explore the student experience of undergoing the MSIB program in more depth. Overall, the study shows that although MSIB brings a lot of potential to enhance the competencies of design students, a clearer and integrated approach regarding the educational ideology in the program is needed, in order to ensure that design students do not simply develop skills practical, but also critical and creative thinking skills necessary in a dynamic and competitive world of design.

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