

Exploring The Cultural Diversity Of Indonesia Through Traditional Mask Art

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Abstract: This study explores the use of traditional mask art as an educational medium to introduce Indonesian cultural diversity and strengthen cultural identity among children of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research was conducted at Sanggar Sri Muda involving 28 participants selected purposively based on their engagement in an international community service (KKN Internasional) program. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the implementation of interactive and participatory art-based learning significantly enhances students' engagement, cultural awareness, and understanding of symbolic meanings embedded in traditional mask art. Participants demonstrated improved recognition of cultural values such as moral character, identity representation, and local wisdom. Furthermore, the activity fostered a stronger sense of cultural pride and belonging among students who initially had limited exposure to Indonesian heritage. Despite these positive outcomes, several challenges were identified, including limited instructional time, varying levels of prior cultural knowledge, and resource constraints. These limitations indicate the need for more structured and sustainable cultural education programs. Overall, this study highlights the potential of traditional mask art as an innovative and effective pedagogical tool in promoting cultural literacy and reinforcing national identity among diaspora children. The findings contribute to the development of culturally responsive education strategies and support broader efforts in preserving intangible cultural heritage in a globalized context.

Keywords: cultural education, traditional mask art, cultural identity, migrant children, art-based learning, Indonesian diaspora

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1. Introduction

Indonesia is widely recognized as a country with rich cultural diversity, encompassing various ethnic groups, languages, and traditional arts that form a strong national identity. Cultural diversity is considered a valuable asset that contributes not only to social cohesion but also to global cultural heritage preservation. In recent years, global attention has emphasized the importance of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage as part of sustainable cultural development (UNESCO, 2024). Among the diverse forms of Indonesian traditional arts, traditional mask art represents a significant cultural expression that embodies local wisdom, moral values, and historical narratives.

Traditional mask art functions not only as an aesthetic performance but also as a medium of communication, identity formation, and cultural education. Masks are widely used in traditional dances and theatrical performances, symbolizing various human characters and

philosophical meanings. The integration of traditional arts into educational activities has been shown to strengthen cultural understanding and identity, particularly among younger generations (Gymnastiar, 2025). Therefore, traditional mask art can serve as an effective educational medium to introduce cultural diversity in a meaningful and engaging way.

In the context of globalization and migration, the issue of cultural identity becomes increasingly significant, particularly for children of Indonesian migrant workers living abroad. These children often experience limited exposure to Indonesian cultural values, which may lead to identity shifts and weakened national belonging (Sanjaya et al., 2025). Living in multicultural environments also presents both opportunities and challenges in maintaining cultural identity, as interaction with different cultures may influence their sense of belonging and cultural awareness (IJMMU, 2025).

Education plays a crucial role in addressing these challenges by fostering cultural awareness and strengthening identity through both formal and informal learning environments. Previous studies have shown that culture-based education programs in community learning centers can effectively support the development of national identity among Indonesian migrant children (Sihombing & Hardati, 2025). However, most existing studies focus on general cultural education such as traditional dance, music, or civic education, while limited research specifically explores the use of traditional mask art as a medium for cultural introduction in international community service contexts.

This study was conducted at Sanggar Sri Muda, Malaysia, involving 28 students who are children of Indonesian migrant workers. The activity aimed to introduce Indonesian cultural diversity through traditional mask art using interactive and participatory approaches.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to explore how traditional mask art can be utilized as a medium for introducing cultural diversity and strengthening cultural identity among Indonesian migrant children in an international community service (KKN Internasional) program. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of innovative cultural education strategies for Indonesian diaspora communities and support the preservation of cultural heritage in a global context.

2. Literature Review

Cultural diversity refers to the variety of cultural expressions, traditions, and identities that exist within a society and plays a significant role in shaping social values, interactions, and national identity. In the global context, cultural diversity is increasingly recognized as an essential component of sustainable development and cultural preservation (UNESCO, 2024). As a multicultural country, Indonesia possesses a wide range of traditional arts that reflect local wisdom, moral values, and historical narratives, making cultural diversity an important foundation in strengthening national identity.

Cultural identity is closely related to an individual's sense of belonging to a particular culture, which is formed through shared values, traditions, language, and social experiences. This aspect becomes particularly important for children, especially those living outside their home country, as their exposure to native culture may be limited. Previous studies indicate that children of Indonesian migrant workers often experience challenges in maintaining their cultural identity due to the influence of multicultural environments and limited access to cultural education (Sanjaya et al., 2025). As a result, there is a need for effective strategies to reconnect these children with their cultural roots.

One of the effective approaches to strengthening cultural identity is through cultural education using traditional arts as a learning medium. Traditional art is considered a form of intangible cultural heritage that not only serves as entertainment but also functions as a medium for transmitting values, knowledge, and social norms across generations (UNESCO, 2024). Among various forms of traditional arts in Indonesia, traditional mask art holds a unique position due to its symbolic and visual characteristics. Masks are widely used in traditional performances such as dance and theater, representing different characters, emotions, and philosophical meanings embedded in local culture.

The use of traditional arts in education has been widely discussed in recent studies, which highlight that art-based learning can enhance students' engagement, creativity, and cultural understanding (Gymnastiar, 2025). Through interactive and participatory activities, children are able to better understand abstract cultural concepts and develop a stronger emotional connection to their cultural heritage. In addition, informal learning environments such as community centers or cultural studios (*sanggar*) play an important role in delivering culture based education in a flexible and contextual manner, especially for children living abroad (Si-hombing & Hardati, 2025).

Furthermore, children of Indonesian migrant workers often grow up in multicultural settings that provide both opportunities and challenges in shaping their identity. While exposure to diverse cultures can broaden their perspectives, it may also weaken their attachment to their native culture if not supported by proper cultural education (IJMMU, 2025). Therefore, innovative and engaging approaches are needed to introduce cultural diversity in a way that is relevant and meaningful to them.

However, although previous studies have explored cultural education and identity development among migrant children, most of them focus on general cultural forms such as traditional dance, music, or civic education. Limited research specifically examines the use of traditional mask art as a medium for introducing cultural diversity, particularly within the context of international community service programs. This indicates a research gap that needs further exploration.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the use of traditional mask art as an educational medium to introduce Indonesian cultural diversity and strengthen cultural identity among children of Indonesian migrant workers. By focusing on an international community service (KKN Internasional) setting, this study is expected to contribute to the development of innovative cultural education strategies and support the preservation of Indonesian cultural heritage in a global context.

3. Proposed Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to explore the implementation of cultural education through traditional mask art among children of Indonesian migrant workers. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate as this study aims to understand participants' experiences, responses, and levels of cultural awareness in a natural setting (Creswell, 2021).

The research was conducted at *Sanggar Sri Muda*, Malaysia, involving 28 students who are children of Indonesian migrant workers. The selection of the research site was based on its role as a community-based learning center that facilitates informal education for Indonesian children living abroad. These participants were selected purposively, considering their direct involvement in the cultural learning activities carried out during the international community service (KKN Internasional) program.

The data used in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from participants through observations and interviews, focusing on students' participation, engagement, and responses during the cultural learning activities. Secondary data were collected from relevant documents, activity reports, and supporting literature related to cultural education and traditional arts (Helmi, 2021).

Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted during the implementation of traditional mask art activities to capture students' behavior, interaction, and level of enthusiasm. Interviews were carried out informally with selected participants and facilitators to gain deeper insights into their understanding and perceptions of Indonesian culture after participating in the activities. Documentation was used to support the data through photos, activity records, and field notes.

The data analysis in this study followed the qualitative analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by selecting and simplifying relevant data related to cultural understanding and student engagement. Data display was presented in descriptive narrative form to illustrate the findings systematically. Finally, conclusion drawing was conducted to interpret the results and answer the research objectives regarding the role of traditional mask art in introducing cultural diversity and strengthening cultural identity among participants (Miles et al., 2020).

4. Results and Discussion

The results of this study were obtained through observations, interviews, and documentation conducted during the implementation of traditional mask art activities at Sanggar Sri Muda, Malaysia. The findings focus on students' participation, cultural understanding, and responses toward the introduction of Indonesian cultural diversity through traditional mask art.

The findings show that students demonstrated a high level of enthusiasm and active participation during the learning activities. This was reflected in their involvement in creating and decorating traditional masks, asking questions, and engaging in discussions about the meaning and origin of the masks. The interactive and participatory approach used in this program allowed students to be directly involved in the learning process, making the activity more meaningful and enjoyable. This supports the idea that art-based learning can increase student engagement and motivation (Gymnastiar, 2025).

In terms of cultural understanding, the activity helped students recognize and understand various aspects of Indonesian culture, particularly the symbolic meanings embedded in traditional mask art. Students were able to identify different characters represented by masks and relate them to moral values such as kindness, bravery, and honesty. This indicates that traditional mask art can serve as an effective medium for conveying cultural values in a simple and accessible way, especially for children.

Furthermore, the activity contributed to strengthening students' cultural identity. As children of Indonesian migrant workers living abroad, many participants initially had limited knowledge of Indonesian traditional arts. After participating in the activity, students showed increased interest and pride in Indonesian culture, as reflected in their responses during interviews and their willingness to share what they had learned. This finding aligns with previous studies which state that cultural education plays a significant role in reinforcing identity among migrant children (Sanjaya et al., 2025).

From a social perspective, the activity also encouraged interaction and collaboration among students. Group-based activities such as mask creation fostered teamwork, communication, and mutual support. This not only enhanced the learning experience but also created a positive and inclusive learning environment within the sanggar.

However, several challenges were identified during the implementation. Some students initially lacked basic knowledge about Indonesian culture, which required additional explanation and guidance from facilitators. In addition, limited time and resources constrained the depth of material delivery. These findings indicate that continuous and structured cultural programs are needed to achieve more optimal results.

Overall, the findings suggest that traditional mask art is an effective medium for introducing cultural diversity and strengthening cultural identity among children of Indonesian migrant workers. The use of interactive and participatory methods plays a crucial role in enhancing students' engagement and understanding. These results are consistent with previous studies emphasizing the importance of art-based learning and informal education in cultural transmission (Sihombing & Hardati, 2025; IJMMU, 2025).

5. Conclusions

This study highlights the important role of traditional mask art as an effective medium for introducing Indonesian cultural diversity and strengthening cultural identity among children of Indonesian migrant workers. The findings show that the implementation of interactive and participatory cultural learning activities at Sanggar Sri Muda, Malaysia, successfully increased students' engagement, cultural understanding, and sense of pride toward their cultural heritage.

Through the process of creating and exploring traditional masks, students were able to recognize cultural symbols, understand moral values, and develop a deeper connection with Indonesian culture. This indicates that art-based learning, particularly through traditional arts, can serve as a meaningful and engaging approach in cultural education, especially for children living in multicultural environments.

However, this study also identifies several limitations, including limited time, resources, and the varying levels of students' prior cultural knowledge. Therefore, it is recommended that similar cultural education programs be conducted in a more structured and continuous manner to achieve more optimal results. In addition, collaboration between educators,

community organizations, and stakeholders is needed to support sustainable cultural learning for Indonesian diaspora communities.

In conclusion, traditional mask art has significant potential as a cultural learning medium in international community service programs. This study contributes to the development of innovative cultural education strategies and emphasizes the importance of preserving cultural identity among Indonesian children living abroad in the era of globalization.

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