

“Voice of Heritage: Empowering High School Arts and Culture Teachers in Rembang Regency in Vocal Arrangements of Traditional Songs for Music Education”

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Abstract:

This article discusses efforts to strengthen the competency of arts and culture teachers through training in traditional song vocal arrangements as a strategy to improve the quality of music instruction at the senior high school (SMA) level. The challenges faced by arts and culture teachers in Rembang Regency are limited literacy and skills in vocal arrangement, resulting in monotonous and uninnovative music instruction. This community service program utilizes a participatory approach through outreach, workshops, and mentoring, focusing on basic music theory, harmony, and interlocking techniques adapted from the gamelan tradition. The results demonstrate an increase in teachers' understanding and skills in developing traditional song vocal arrangements for both intracurricular and extracurricular learning, while simultaneously strengthening their role in preserving the Indonesian musical heritage. This article emphasizes that strengthening teacher capacity not only impacts the quality of pedagogy but also contributes to the sustainability of local culture through education.

Keywords: vocal arrangement, traditional songs, teacher empowerment, music education, cultural preservation

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INTRODUCTION

Teacher competence is a determining factor in successful learning, including arts and culture subjects. Arts and culture teachers have the responsibility to not only teach technical skills but also to foster students' appreciation and awareness of the nation's arts and cultural values (Baranovska et al., 2024; Susatya et al., 2022; Utomo, 2013). In music, teachers must master theory,

practice, and pedagogy so that students can develop creativity, aesthetics, and musical abilities. These competencies include arranging, creating innovative learning media, and integrating music with local cultural contexts. Without adequate mastery of these competencies, the learning process will be monotonous and unable to stimulate creativity or a sense of belonging (Ibragimovich & Bakhtior, 2025; Poulter & Cook, 2020).

One of the fundamental problems high school arts and culture teachers in Rembang Regency face is their limited knowledge of vocal arrangements, particularly for traditional songs. Many teachers still rely on existing materials, lacking the ability to develop new arrangements that meet their learning needs. This leads to repetitive, less innovative learning and a lack of space for students' creative exploration. This limitation becomes even more apparent when teachers engage in extracurricular activities such as choirs or vocal competitions, which require more in-depth arrangement skills. Under these conditions, students do not receive an optimal learning experience in recognising and creatively appreciating traditional music (Botirovna, 2025; Stijnen et al., 2023; Urniehius, 2020).

As part of intangible cultural heritage, traditional songs play an important role in building national identity. However, modernisation and globalisation have led to a decline in interest in traditional songs among the younger generation (Pavlović et al., 2019; Fauziah & Rachman, 2017; Good et al., 2020). Formal education, particularly through arts and culture subjects in schools, is a strategic path to reinstalling an appreciation for traditional songs. Teachers have a key role as facilitators in reviving traditional musical heritage through contextual teaching and vocal arrangements.

The younger generation (Julia et al., 2023). Thus, mastering traditional song arrangements improves teacher competence and serves as a concrete effort to preserve local culture through education (Gao & Karin, 2024).

Several previous studies have emphasised the importance of creativity and literacy in music arts learning. Darma Putra et al. (2020) demonstrated that a contextual literacy approach can improve the competence of music arts teachers. Emalisa (2021) examined arranging traditional Rote Ndao songs in a choir format, emphasising the importance of cultural adaptation in arrangements. However, most studies still focus on the arrangement work as a product, rather than on strengthening teachers' competencies as pedagogical agents and cultural preservers. This gap opens up space for studies that emphasise strengthening teachers' capacity in vocal arrangements of traditional songs, using a participatory community service approach. Therefore, this study positions teachers as instructors and creators and preservers of traditional music through pedagogical innovations based on vocal arrangements.

METHODS

This research uses a community-based engagement approach, or participatory community service. This approach was chosen because it positions teachers as the primary subjects and partners in the competency-building process. Hence, activities are not merely a transfer of knowledge from resource persons to students.

Participants, but also based on collaboration, active participation, and joint reflection, to improve the competence of traditional song vocal arrangements while integrating them in the context of music education in secondary schools.

The participants were high school arts and culture teachers from Rembang Regency who are members of the Arts and Culture Subject Teachers' Conference (MGMP). These subjects were selected based on the identified need, which revealed that most teachers still have limited literacy and skills in traditional song vocal arrangements. Not all of these teachers come from music education backgrounds, making the diversity of academic backgrounds challenging and a potential opportunity to enrich the collaborative learning process.

The activities are carried out in several systematically designed stages. The first stage is counselling, which focuses on strengthening basic knowledge, including music theory,

understanding harmony, and vocal arrangement. In this stage, participants are equipped with a theoretical foundation to have a common understanding before entering the practical stage. The second stage is a workshop, a practical training in arranging traditional songs using interlocking techniques adapted from the gamelan tradition. This technique was chosen because it can provide a contextual musical experience while encouraging teacher creativity in processing rhythm and vocal harmony. The third stage is mentoring, where participants are guided to apply arrangement skills to intracurricular learning and extracurricular activities.

Such as choirs and vocal groups. The final stage is a presentation of the results, where teachers showcase their vocal arrangements of traditional songs. This presentation is a forum for appreciation and peer evaluation to measure competency achievement.

The evaluation instruments used in this activity included observation, interviews, and teacher portfolios. Observations were conducted to assess participants' active participation during outreach, workshops, and mentoring sessions. Interviews were conducted to explore teachers' perceptions of the benefits of the activities and the challenges faced in the learning process. Meanwhile, teacher portfolios of traditional song vocal arrangements served as the primary indicator for assessing improvements in musical and pedagogical competencies. Data from these three instruments were analysed descriptively and qualitatively to identify patterns of teacher competency development.

The activity took place at one of the partner schools, SMA Negeri 1 Rembang Regency, which was selected based on the availability of supporting facilities and infrastructure, such as audio equipment, a hall, and musical instruments. The program lasted six months, with the time allocated to the preparation, implementation, and evaluation stages. This extended timeframe allowed for intensive training and allowed teachers to apply the training findings to their respective schools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Improving Teacher Competence

The activity results showed a significant increase in the competency of arts and culture teachers, particularly in mastery of basic music theory and vocal harmony. Before the training, most teachers had difficulty reading musical notation, understanding primary and secondary chord structures, and simple harmonic progressions. Through the counselling sessions, teachers understood the relationship between music theory and vocal arrangement practice. This was reflected in the results of the initial and final tests, which showed an average increase in mastery of basic music concepts of 45%. This finding aligns with research by Sulisty (2017), which emphasised that mastery of basic music theory is an important foundation for teachers in designing creative learning.

Furthermore, teachers' skills in applying interlocking techniques to vocal arrangements also significantly improved. This technique was practised through adaptations of gamelan rhythmic patterns, such as the saron, kempul, and gong, which were then applied to the traditional song *Suwe Ora Jamu*. Observations showed that 80% of training participants could correctly apply interlocking in the four-voice vocal format. This finding demonstrates that a local culture-based practice approach effectively builds teachers' creative capacity. Hernandi (2022) stated that tradition-based arrangement innovations not only strengthen musical skills but also connect students with their cultural roots.

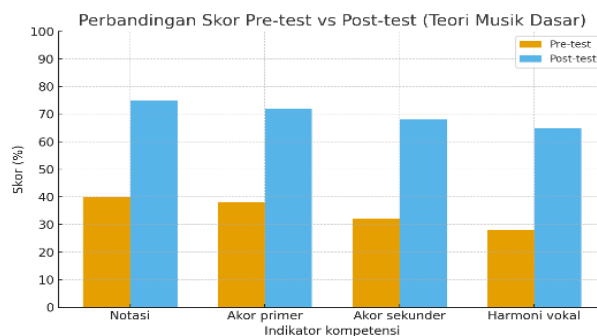


Figure 1. Improving Teacher Competence in Music Theory and Interlocking Techniques
(Source: Rachman 2024)

Impact on Learning

Strengthening teacher competency was clearly visible in the classroom learning process. Before the activity, music lessons tended to be repetitive and reliant on ready-made materials, resulting in less creative experiences for students. After the activity, teachers began developing learning materials with a more creative approach, for example, rearranging traditional songs to suit students' vocal abilities. Interviews with students showed that 75% felt that music learning became more interesting and challenging after teachers implemented the arrangements from the training. This finding is consistent with Fitriani (2014), who emphasised the importance of innovative strategies in music learning to avoid monotony.

Furthermore, teachers are also able to adapt the materials to suit the students' context. Teachers with limited music school backgrounds, for example, might create simple two-voice arrangements, while teachers at schools with more comprehensive facilities can develop more comprehensive arrangements.

A four-voice arrangement with complex harmonies. This demonstrates the pedagogical flexibility that arises from improved teacher skills. Darma Putra et al. (2020) refer to this as contextual literacy practice, where teachers adapt learning strategies to students' needs and potential.



Figure 2. Score resulting from a simple four-voice arrangement of the song Suwe Ora Jamu
(Source: Community Service Documentation)

Cultural Implications

An important implication of this activity is reintroducing traditional songs into the classroom. Songs such as Suwe Ora Jamu and Gambang Semarang, previously rarely used in lessons, are now being reintroduced through vocal arrangements. Teachers feel that integrating these traditional songs is an effective strategy for instilling cultural pride in students. This finding aligns with research by Aisara & Widodo (2020), which confirms that local culture-based activities in education can strengthen student identity while preserving cultural heritage.

Furthermore, teachers transform into agents of cultural preservation through the musical works they create. With their arrangement skills, teachers deliver material and produce new, contextual works for learning needs.

And extracurricular activities. A. Alam & Zuama (2019) and S. Alam & Zuama (2019) emphasise that the professionalism of arts and culture teachers must be oriented towards a dual

role: as educators and cultural preservers. This is evident in this activity, where the teachers' arrangement of work became a medium for revitalising traditional songs in schools.



Figure 3. Documentation of teacher presentations
(Source: Rachman 2024)

Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce previous research and offer new perspectives. Darma Putra et al.'s (2020) study demonstrated that contextual literacy can improve the competence of music teachers, while Emalisa (2021) emphasised the importance of cultural adaptation in traditional song arrangements. However, these studies focused on developing learning strategies or analysing musical products. This study fills this gap by placing teachers at the centre of pedagogical innovation, where their competence is directly enhanced through traditional vocal arrangements.

From a cultural sustainability perspective, this activity demonstrates that music education can serve as a strategic pathway to maintaining the sustainability of local culture. UNESCO (2021) emphasises that education is

One effective medium for preserving intangible cultural heritage. Thus, traditional vocal arrangement training is relevant in a pedagogical context and has global implications for cultural preservation. This makes this research important as a model for music education-based community service practices that can be replicated in other regions.

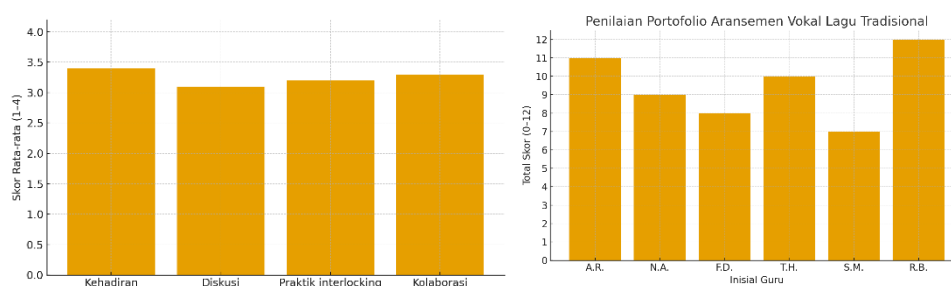


Figure 3. Comparison graph of teacher competency before and after training.
(Source: Rachman 2024)

CONCLUSION

Traditional song vocal arrangement training has proven effective in improving the pedagogical competence of arts and culture teachers, particularly in mastering basic music theory, harmony, and practical skills in interlocking-based arrangement techniques. This improvement has directly impacted the quality of music arts instruction in schools, which, while previously tending to be monotonous, is now more creative, contextual, and capable.

Stimulates active student participation. In addition to strengthening pedagogical aspects, this program contributes to local cultural preservation efforts, as traditional songs are re-taught and recreated in the classroom through teachers' arrangements. Thus, strengthening teachers' capacity as educators and cultural preservers is a crucial strategy in music education in the global era, not only for transmitting musical knowledge but also for ensuring the sustainability of the nation's cultural identity through formal education.

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