

Gending Dolanan as a Form of Introduction to Gamelan Learning Based on Local Content

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Abstract:

This reserach aims to examine the role of gending dolanan as a form of gamelan learning based on local content in schools. The background of this study stems from the importance of gamelan as a national cultural heritage that needs to be introduced early on through a simple, enjoyable approach that is appropriate to the cultural context of the students. Gending dolanan was chosen because it has a simple musical structure, repetitive rhythmic patterns, and straightforward lyrics that resonate with children's lives. As such, gending dolanan is considered effective as an initial bridge before students move on to more complex forms of gending. The research method employs a descriptive qualitative approach, with research subjects including music teachers, elementary and junior high school students, and gamelan practitioners. Data was collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using an interactive model through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Triangulation of sources and techniques was used to maintain data validity. The results of the study indicate that the application of gending dolanan in gamelan learning can increase students' interest and understanding of the basics of gamelan. Additionally, gending dolanan contributes to instilling cultural values such as cooperation, unity, and discipline. This learning approach aligns with the objectives of locally-based education, which focuses not only on musical skills but also on strengthening cultural identity. The study concludes that gending dolanan can serve as an effective strategy for introducing gamelan in schools while also contributing to the preservation of traditional culture.

Keywords: gending dolanan, gamelan, music education, local content, culture

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INTRODUCTION

Art education, especially music, has an important role in shaping character, fostering creativity (Tresia Oktari & Desyandri, 2023) , and preserving the nation's cultural values. Traditional music such as gamelan is not only a cultural heritage, but also a learning medium that is rich in aesthetic, philosophical, and social values (Wijayanto & Fidyastuti, 2025) . However, the existence of gamelan as part of local culture often receives less attention in schools (Kholidah, 2023) , especially at the basic education level, so that the younger generation has the potential to lose closeness to their cultural identity.

Gending dolanan is a form of traditional music that is simple, easy to remember, and usually combined with children's games (Herawati, 2015) . The existence of gending dolanan is not only as entertainment, but also a means of value, moral, and social education through music. Its simple lyrics and repetitive melody make gending dolanan very suitable to be introduced to children in music learning (Christinus & Pasaribu, 2022) , especially gamelan. In learning music at school, many teachers still rely on popular songs or modern music as teaching materials. Meanwhile, local content in the form of gamelan and gending dolanan is not maximally utilized. In fact, the utilization of gending dolanan in gamelan learning can be an effective strategy to introduce traditional music in a fun and contextual way to students.

The problem that often arises in learning gamelan in schools is that students find gamelan too difficult to learn (Ramadhani et al., 2025) , both in terms of playing techniques and understanding the musical form. By using gending dolanan, this obstacle can be minimized because the musical structure is simple, the poetry is easy to understand, and the rhythm and gamelan patterns are not too complex. This makes gending dolanan an ideal introduction before students learn more complex music. In addition, gending dolanan is closely related to students' daily lives, especially in Java where the tradition is still maintained (Hardian et al., 2025) . Local content that is close to children's experience will be easier to accept, understand, and internalize in the learning process. Thus, the use of gending dolanan in gamelan learning not only introduces traditional instruments, but also strengthens students' bond with their cultural environment.

Local content-based education emphasizes the relevance of learning materials to the culture and local wisdom of the local area (Alatas et al., 2024) . Through local content, students are invited to understand, love, and preserve traditions (Rahmiati et al., 2025) . Therefore, making gending dolanan as part of local content-based gamelan learning is in line with national education goals that value cultural diversity and strengthen national identity. Furthermore, gending dolanan not only serves as a means of gamelan introduction, but can also train students' musical aspects such as rhythm, melody and harmony. Through singing, playing and drumming activities, students can develop musical skills naturally (Raharjo, 2004) . In addition, this activity can build cooperation, discipline, and a sense of responsibility through the practice of playing gamelan in groups.

Research on the application of gending dolanan in local content-based gamelan learning is expected to answer the need for effective, fun, and educational methods in introducing traditional music to the younger generation. With this approach, gamelan is no longer considered as a complicated or ancient art, but rather as a part of lively, relevant, and meaningful learning for students.

Based on the background that has been conveyed, this research was conducted to examine more deeply how gending dolanan can be used as a form of introduction to local content-based gamelan learning. This research is expected to contribute to the development of traditional music learning models in schools, as well as support efforts to preserve gamelan as an invaluable cultural heritage of the nation.

METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of describing in depth the application of gending dolanan in local content-based gamelan learning (Raharja, 2021) . This

approach was chosen because it is suitable for studying educational phenomena related to cultural contexts and student learning experiences (Anuli & Djafri, 2025) . The research subjects included music teachers, students at Panca Bakti Mulia Special School (SLB) who participated in gamelan learning, and gamelan practitioners who understood gending dolanan. The research location was determined purposively, namely at Panca Bakti Mulia Special School in Surakarta which has integrated local content of gamelan art in its curriculum.

Data collection techniques were conducted through observation, interview, and documentation. Observation was conducted to directly observe the gamelan learning process using gending dolanan, including student interactions, teacher methods, and responses that arise in learning activities (Budi et al., 2023) . Interviews were conducted with teachers, students, and gamelan practitioners to obtain in-depth information about the effectiveness, obstacles, and educational values contained in gending dolanan (Wahyudi et al., 2025) . Documentation in the form of field notes, audio-visual recordings, and learning materials were also collected to strengthen research data (Kalsum, 2024) .

Data analysis was carried out qualitatively interactive with the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Spradley & Huberman, 2024) . Data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation were compared and verified to find patterns, themes, and meanings relevant to the research objectives. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques, so that the research results could be scientifically accounted for. With this method, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the role of gending dolanan in local content-based gamelan learning, and provide recommendations for the development of traditional music learning in schools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted in SLB Panca Bakti Mulia located in Mojosoongo Village, Jebres District, Surakarta City with a strong Javanese cultural environment. The school was chosen purposively because it has set gamelan art as a local content in its curriculum. Although facilities are limited, the school has a set of pelog gamelan used for teaching and learning activities. The school's socio-cultural environment is also supportive, as most students are familiar with dolanan songs inherited from their families and surrounding communities.

The research participants consisted of a cultural arts teacher in charge of teaching local content subjects, a karawitan practitioner who was brought in as a companion, and SLB Panca Bakti Mulia students. Students' initial experience in music varies. Most students are familiar with dolanan songs from home, such as Gundul-Gundul Pacul, Lir Ilir, and Gambang Suling, although only to the extent of memorizing the lyrics. However, almost all students have never played the gamelan formally. This condition provides a basis for research to assess the effectiveness of gending dolanan as a means of introducing gamelan learning.



Figure 1: Learning Gending Dolanan at Panca Bakti Mulia SLB

The teacher implemented the learning in three main stages. The first stage begins with an introduction through singing gending dolanan. Students are invited to sing the song together while being given an explanation of the meaning of the lyrics. This activity is a means of building a familiar and fun learning atmosphere. The teacher uses songs that are closest to the students' experience, so they feel comfortable to start the activity. The second stage is the translation of musical elements through vocals. The teacher teaches simple rhythmic patterns using vocals. The use of rhythmic syllables (ta-ti-ti) also helps students understand duration and beat patterns before transferring to instruments. This method is effective as students can first understand the rhythmic structure concretely through vocals. The third stage is mapping the patterns to the gamelan instruments. The sung dolanan melody is transferred to the saron or demung instrument to play the balungan. The gong instrument is used to mark the end of the phrase, while the drum provides the tempo control pattern. The teacher also introduces kepatihan notation gradually after the students are stable enough to follow the pulse. The instrument rotation strategy is applied so that all students have the opportunity to play different roles in the ensemble.

Observations show that students' motivation increases when learning begins with dolanan songs. They sang enthusiastically, even adding some spontaneous movements. Singing activities make students feel more relaxed and confident before holding a gamelan instrument. The class atmosphere becomes more lively and participatory, far from being rigid or boring. When learning entered the translation stage to the instrument, some students initially showed hesitation. They looked awkward when playing the gamelan because they were worried about making mistakes. However, the teacher overcame this by modeling short patterns that were easy to follow. Students then imitated the pattern in turn until a more stable habit was formed.

Positive responses can be seen from students' facial expressions and comments stating that learning gamelan feels easier when using familiar songs. The level of student engagement increased when the teacher gave them the opportunity to take turns performing in small groups. Confidence emerged when they were able to play the pattern correctly in front of their friends. In fact, some students chose to stay in the practice room during break time to continue playing. This shows that learning with gending dolanan not only fosters interest, but also encourages strong intrinsic motivation. The most obvious progress was seen in the students' ability to keep the pulse and follow the balungan motif. In the beginning, the beats were often not uniform, but after several repetitions, students were able to maintain a more stable tempo. Motor coordination between the right and left hands also developed as the practice progressed. These changes indicate a significant improvement in basic musical skills.

Students feel more comfortable playing simple rhythm patterns with slow to medium tempo. They tend to focus on memorizing the sequence of notes of the balungan without variation. Some other students caught on more quickly to the patterns and started experimenting with light isen variations on the peking instruments. This shows that there are different levels of musical development that are aligned with cognitive and motor abilities. The difficulty of reading kepatihan notation was initially an obstacle. The numbers in kepatihan seemed abstract to some students. However, after the teacher connected them directly with the dolanan melodies they had memorized, students understood the relationship between numbers and tones more easily. Thus, the process of musical literacy through kepatihan notation can run more naturally.

In addition to musical skills, learning gending dolanan also fosters social and cultural values. Ensemble activities require students to work together, listen to each other, and wait their turn. This creates discipline and a sense of responsibility. Students learn that the harmony of gamelan sounds can only be achieved if all group members work together. The teacher emphasizes the importance of unggah-ungguh in the gamelan room. Students are taught how to sit politely, how to hold the instrument correctly, and how to respect the cues of the music leader. This etiquette is not only relevant in a musical context, but also shapes students' character in everyday life. The awareness to respect rules and procedures is an important part of character education.

The lyrics of gending dolanan also provide moral values that can be learned. For example, Gundul-Gundul Pacul contains messages about humility and leadership. A brief discussion on the

meaning of the lyrics makes students better understand the cultural values that have been passed down. From the interview results, some students could mention two cultural values they learned, such as gotong royong and simplicity. Gending dolanan serves as a bridge between everyday musical experiences and more complex musical practices. The simple and repetitive melodic structure helps students remember patterns easily. The symmetrical musical phrasing also makes it easier for students to understand the song form. Thus, gending dolanan provides a strong cognitive foundation to move into higher stages of gamelan learning.

When students begin to have difficulty playing the gamelan patterns, the teacher again invites them to sing dolanan. This singing serves as an anchor that restores focus and keeps the group synchronized. Through this strategy, the transition from singing to instruments becomes smoother. Students feel less burdened because they always have a familiar melodic reference. Gending dolanan also helps students understand the relationship between rhythm and melody. Through singing, they are already familiar with accents on certain syllables. When they move to the gamelan, the accent is translated into a beat pattern. In this way, students' musical understanding develops gradually and is integrated.

The research also found a number of obstacles in the implementation of learning. One of them is the limited gamelan equipment. The number of instruments available is not proportional to the number of students. As a result, some students have to wait for their turn, resulting in uneven practice time. This condition can reduce the intensity of learning for some students. Another obstacle is the condition of the open practice room. Noises from outside often disturb students' concentration. In addition, the acoustics of the room are not favorable, making it difficult to hear some of the music, especially the drums, clearly. This affects students' ability to follow instructions. The teacher had to repeat the instructions several times for the students to adjust the tempo.

The difference in ability between students is also a challenge. There are students who quickly understand the patterns, while others are left behind. When the learning tempo is accelerated, some students have difficulty following. The local content face-to-face time which is only once a week also makes the practice not optimal. These obstacles are important notes for future learning development. To overcome the obstacles, the teacher implemented a learning station strategy. Students are divided into small groups that take turns doing different activities, such as pattern practice on the instrument, body rhythm practice with a visual metronome, reading notation kepatihan, and reflecting on the meaning of the lyrics. This strategy allows all students to remain active despite the limited number of instruments.

The teacher also uses visual cues in the form of gong or kenong pattern cards. These cards help students understand the entry point of the music without having to always wait for verbal instructions. This method has proven effective in keeping the ensemble organized. In addition, the teacher uses verbal counts to start the pattern simultaneously. Differentiation of learning is also done. More advanced students are given the opportunity to play instruments with more complex patterns, while beginner students are focused on basic balungan patterns. Students who are more skilled are sometimes also asked to help their friends as beat assistants. Thus, the learning process can be balanced according to the abilities of each student. At the end of the cycle, students were asked to perform a short arrangement based on Gundul-Gundul Pacul. The structure of the arrangement consists of an intro with kendang and gong, section A with the main balungan, section B with light peking variations, and closed with a coda in the form of gong beats. The performance was done in groups in front of peers and teachers.

The results of the performance showed that the students were able to play the music quite well. Although there were still minor mistakes, the overall performance sounded harmonious. This performance gave the students confidence and strengthened their motivation to continue learning gamelan. Some students even expressed the desire to continue the activity outside of class hours. Feedback from the principal was very positive. He considered this activity relevant to the school's vision of developing local content. The parents who attended also gave high appreciation. They felt proud to see their children able to play the gamelan and sing traditional music. Some parents even suggested that this activity be featured on school holidays.

Effectiveness of Gending Dolanan as an Entry Point

The results show that gending dolanan has high effectiveness as an entry point for gamelan learning. Dolanan songs have been known by students since childhood, so they do not feel unfamiliar when singing them. This familiarity is an important factor because students do not need to adapt to new material from scratch. In other words, the existing musical experience becomes the foundation for further learning. In addition, the simple and repetitive structure of gending dolanan allows students to remember patterns more easily. This is in contrast to classical gamelan music, which usually has a complex form and requires a higher level of skill. The simplicity of dolanan makes students understand the basic rhythms and melodic patterns more quickly, so learning feels lighter and more enjoyable.

Using gending dolanan as an entry point also helps to reduce student anxiety. Many students initially feel afraid of making mistakes when playing the gamelan. However, when they realize that the song used is a familiar one, their confidence increases. This psychological condition is very important because motivation and confidence are the keys to success in the process of learning music.

Alignment with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Local Content

Gending dolanan-based learning is in line with the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy, which links subject matter to students' experiences and cultural identities (Purbasari, 2015). By presenting songs born from the traditions of Javanese society, students feel that their culture is recognized and valued in the classroom. This strengthens the sense of belonging and strengthens local cultural identity.

The implementation of gending dolanan as local content also contributes to cultural preservation efforts. Children who are accustomed to singing and playing dolanan will grow up with a love for traditional musical heritage (Christina et al., 2025). Thus, this learning is not only for academic purposes, but also serves as a medium for cultural transmission from one generation to the next. In addition to preserving culture, the use of local content in gamelan learning increases the relevance of education. Students feel that what they learn is not detached from their daily lives, but rather part of their community identity. This situation makes the learning process more meaningful as it connects new knowledge with real experiences in students' social and cultural lives.

Dolanan-based gamelan learning reflects the principle of constructivism, where students construct knowledge through direct experience. They not only hear the teacher's explanation, but also experience the process of singing, drumming and coordinating with their friends. Thus, musical knowledge is formed through real meaningful activities. This learning provides an opportunity for more advanced students to help their friends who are still struggling. For example, students who quickly understand the beat pattern are given the role of beat assistants to support other friends.

The cooperative aspect is also evident in gamelan ensemble playing. Each instrument has a complementary role, so the success of a performance depends on the cooperation of all members. Through this activity, students learn to work in groups, appreciate the contributions of others, and understand the importance of synchronization in achieving a common goal. This cooperative value has important implications for students' social character building.

Integration of Orff-Kodály Method

The learning strategy that begins with singing, continues with body movement, and then moves to instruments shows compatibility with the principles of Orff Schulwerk (Muqri et al., 2025). This approach emphasizes that music can be learned through enjoyable experiences, starting with vocals and movement before moving on to instruments. In this study, gending dolanan serves as teaching material that fits the framework. In addition, the use of simple rhythmic syllables

resembles Kodály's approach that focuses on solmization and song-based music literacy. However, the difference is the use of kepatihan notation as the main notation system instead of Western block notation. This shows that Western methods can be contextually adapted to local traditions without losing their pedagogical essence.

The results confirm that the combination of Orff-Kodály principles with local idioms can accelerate students' musical understanding. They not only learn to play the beat patterns, but also internalize the musical structure aurally first. This integration proves that the development of music learning methods needs to be flexible by accommodating the learners' cultural context.

Music Literacy (from Aural to Kepatihan Notation)

Students' journey from aural experience to musical literacy is an important process in learning (Mahdi & Wicaksono, 2024). Initially, students had difficulty understanding kepatihan notation because the numbers seemed abstract. However, after the teacher linked the number symbols to the dolanan melodies they sang, understanding improved. The relationship between numbers and sounds became clearer because they had auditory experience as a reference. Learning with the aural approach first provides an advantage because students can feel the sense of music before reading the symbols. For example, they understand that the gong always comes at the end of a phrase because they are used to hearing that accent in singing. In this way, musical literacy is not imposed abstractly, but built on concrete musical experiences. The results showed that students who initially often misplaced the gong began to be more precise in placing the beats after they internalized the patterns from the chants. Common mistakes, such as preceding the gong or playing the pattern too fast, decreased. This proves that the aural path to literacy is more effective than starting directly from written notation.

Resource Management and Differentiation

Instrument limitation is a major challenge in gamelan learning. However, teachers managed to overcome this problem by implementing a learning station strategy. By dividing students into small groups that take turns, all students are still involved in musical activities even though not all of them hold instruments simultaneously. This strategy ensures more even learning time for each student. The use of visual cue cards is also a creative solution to minimize confusion during practice. Cards containing gong or kenong symbols are shown to students to indicate when to play. This visual approach condenses the teacher's instructions and makes it easier for students to follow the flow of the game. It also trains students' sensitivity to nonverbal cues, which is very important in ensembles.

In addition, the teacher applies learning differentiation by dividing roles according to ability level (Andajani, 2022). Beginner students are given simple balungan patterns, while more skilled students try basic peking or kendangan patterns. This strategy keeps all students feeling challenged according to their individual capacities, without feeling excessive difficulty. This kind of differentiation is very relevant to maintaining positive classroom dynamics (Suwanjal & Apriani, 2023). One of the interesting findings is the emergence of the condition when students play the gamelan. It happens when the challenge is balanced with the ability, so that students are immersed in the activity with full concentration and a happy race. For example, when the gamelan patterns are challenging but can still be mastered, students seem to enjoy playing without realizing the time.

Teachers deliberately design learning in stages by adding complexity little by little. Once the balungan pattern is stable, the teacher introduces peking or light kendangan variations. This strategy keeps students challenged, but not overwhelmed. The dynamics of motivation are maintained because students always feel a small success before moving on to the next challenge. Maximum conditions are also seen when students practice in small groups. They showed high concentration, even when the practice room was quite noisy. Cheerful facial expressions and spontaneous comments such as fun or exciting indicate that the learning experience is not only academically valuable, but also provides emotional satisfaction. This reinforces the students'

interest to continue practicing gamelan outside of class hours.

Curricular and School Governance Implications

The successful implementation of gending dolanan in gamelan learning emphasizes the importance of structural support from schools. The local content curriculum needs to provide sufficient space for learning to take place consistently (Nurkayati, 2009). Without adequate time allocation, traditional music learning tends to be marginalized by other subjects that are considered more important. Support also needs to be provided in the form of facilities, such as adequate practice rooms and complete gamelan instruments. Schools that provide these facilities will be able to implement learning more optimally. In this study, although instruments were limited, support from the school and collaboration with gamelan practitioners made the activities run well. In addition, the provision of performance opportunities at school events provides additional motivation for students. Performing in front of parents and the community makes them feel valued. This kind of activity is also a real form of integration of learning with socio-cultural life, so that the value of education does not stop in the classroom, but continues into the public sphere.

Research limitations and future agenda

This study has limitations, especially because it was only conducted in one school. The results of this study certainly cannot be generalized widely without further study in other contexts. For example, urban schools with a more heterogeneous cultural background may show different results than rural schools. In addition, this study was qualitative in nature, emphasizing description over quantitative measurement. Aspects of students' musical skill development were observed rather than objectively measured. Future research should add quantitative evaluation instruments, such as rubrics for rhythm assessment, accuracy of playing, or retention of patterns after a certain time lag. The next research agenda could also explore the differences in effectiveness between gending dolanan. It is possible that the structure, tempo and meaning of the lyrics affect student engagement. Further research could also integrate technology, such as visual metronome applications or digital kepatihan simulations, to support students' independent practice outside the classroom.

Overall, this research proves that gending dolanan is very effective as a transitional medium to introduce gamelan to students. Through the song-movement-tool pathway, students can understand the musical basics without feeling overwhelmed. The use of gending dolanan also fosters motivation, strengthens cultural identity, and teaches social and ethical values in a musical context. This success is inseparable from the teacher's adaptive strategies in managing resources, implementing differentiation, and maintaining the dynamics of student motivation. With consistent curricular support and collaboration with local cultural communities, this learning model can be replicated in other schools. This is in line with national education goals to integrate local content in the curriculum as an effort to preserve the nation's cultural heritage.

An important implication of this discussion is that gamelan learning need not always start with complex classical music. Instead, through simple gending dolanan, students can build a strong musical foundation while fostering a love for traditional music. Thus, gending dolanan is worth recommending as one of the local content-based gamelan learning models in schools.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that gending dolanan has a significant role as an introductory medium for local content-based gamelan learning. Its simple musical structure, repetitive drumming patterns, and easy-to-understand lyrics make it an effective means of familiarizing students with the basics of gamelan before moving on to more complex music. In addition to practicing musical skills, gending dolanan is also able to instill cultural values such as togetherness, mutual cooperation, and a sense of love for traditional heritage, thus supporting the goals of local wisdom-based education while strengthening students' cultural identity. Music teachers are advised to make

gending dolanan the main material in the introduction of gamelan, by developing creative learning methods that combine singing, playing, and gamelan practice. Educational institutions are expected to provide support in the form of gamelan facilities, strengthening the local content curriculum, and special time allocations so that learning is sustainable. In addition, further research can be conducted to examine the effectiveness of gending dolanan compared to other gendings, or see its impact on student character building in the long term, so that the contribution of gending dolanan in traditional music education is more comprehensively tested.

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