

Collaborative and Culturally Grounded Learning in a University Directing Course: Actualizing Tradition and Student Identity Formation

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.46245/ijorer.v7i4.1361>

Sections Info

Article history:

Submitted: January 19, 2026

Final Revised: May 13, 2026

Accepted: May 25, 2026

Published: July 25, 2026

Keywords:

Arts Education; Cultural Traditions; Direction Pedagogy; Collaborative Learning; Cultural Identity



ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to examine how cultural traditions are actualized through collaborative and culturally grounded learning processes in a university-level directing course. It specifically addresses the tension between local cultural values and globalizing influences by exploring the role of arts education in cultural initiation, identity formation, and community engagement. **Method:** A qualitative research design was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with lecturers, students, and local artists involved in the directing course. The data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to collaborative practices, the integration of local cultural values, learning outcomes, and sustainability challenges. **Results:** The findings reveal four main themes: (1) collaborative creative processes between students and local artists; (2) the integration of regional cultural values into directing practice; (3) the influence of culturally grounded learning on students' artistic competence and identity formation; and (4) institutional and logistical challenges affecting program sustainability. Collaboration with local artists enabled students to access living cultural knowledge, deepening their understanding of symbolic meanings, ethical values, and moral philosophies embedded in local narratives. This process strengthened students' cultural identity, social sensitivity, creative confidence, and reflective artistic practice. **Novelty:** This study offers a culturally responsive pedagogical model that positions collaboration with local cultural communities as a core strategy in directing education. It contributes a contextualized framework for integrating living traditions into higher arts education, highlighting its transformative potential beyond technical skill development.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of globalization and digital technology has created unique challenges for arts education in Indonesia. Local cultural values are increasingly overshadowed by the presence of popular culture and the accelerating currents of modernization, resulting in a gradual weakening of cultural rootedness among younger generations (Suharyanto & Wiflihani, 2024). In this context, arts education is not merely a platform for developing aesthetic competence; it also carries a strategic social responsibility to cultivate cultural awareness and strengthen national identity (Suryajaya, 2016; Salam, 2020). Arts learning therefore functions as a dialogic space where local traditions intersect with contemporary realities, and where creative exploration becomes a vehicle for understanding one's cultural identity (Luo, 2024).

The classroom—traditionally viewed as a purely academic environment—has increasingly evolved into a cultural initiation space where processes of cultural transmission, reinterpretation, and transformation take place (Piipponen et al., 2024). Through project-based artistic practices, students are not only introduced to artistic techniques but also encouraged to explore the cultural foundations that shape their identity. Observations from the present study indicate that the classroom serves as the

initial arena for cultivating cultural values. The lecturer applied a project-based learning approach that required students to investigate cultural traditions from their respective regions as the foundation for creating artistic works. This process fostered reflective awareness of local cultural roots within contemporary contexts. Dewey's (1938) experiential learning theory reinforces this idea: learning rooted in direct experience creates deeper connections between knowledge and lived reality. In this sense, the exploration of tradition becomes an experiential and transformative learning pathway, where culture is understood not as a static inheritance but as a dynamic source of creative inspiration.

From Vygotsky's (1978) perspective on social constructivism, the classroom operates as a collaborative arena in which cultural knowledge is constructed socially through interaction among students and lecturers. Group discussion, reflection, and collaborative artistic work become opportunities for students to negotiate their cultural identity while developing critical and aesthetic thinking. Thus, the classroom becomes more than a space that produces artistic outputs; it evolves into a cultural initiation environment that reinforces awareness of local uniqueness and diversity.

Beyond the classroom, the stage serves as a site for cultural actualization. Public performances function not merely as a culminating display of student work but as cultural dialogues where traditional values are reinterpreted in new, contextual forms. In Schechner's (2017) theory of cultural performativity, performance represents restored behavior—cultural acts revived in new contexts to produce fresh meaning. Accordingly, student performances are not mere reproductions of tradition; they are creative reinterpretations that communicate cultural values through artistic expression (Thiel, 2022; Hu et al., 2025). This aligns with Rogers' (1969) humanistic learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of authentic emotional, social, and creative experiences in fostering personal development. Dewey's (1934) concept of *art as experience* further supports this view, underscoring that art connects individual experience with collective social life. Through the stage, students learn that art is not only about aesthetics but also about the human values embedded within cultural expression.

These culturally grounded learning processes have significant cognitive, affective, and psychomotor impacts on students. As Dewantara (1935) argues, arts education should nurture inner beauty, emotional sensitivity, and moral character rooted in national cultural values. When students study regional and national cultures, they internalize not only symbolic representations but also moral, spiritual, and social values. This aligns with Koentjaraningrat's (1985) conception of culture as a system of ideas, actions, and artifacts that guide collective life. Cultural awareness enables students to interpret social reality more critically and contextually, encouraging them to create artistic works that are not only aesthetically refined but also ethically and socially meaningful (Berlian & Huda, 2022; Caliboso et al., 2025). Thus, cultural insight becomes an essential foundation for shaping empathetic, culturally grounded, and socially conscious emerging artists.

Despite growing scholarly interest in arts and cultural integration, existing literature has predominantly examined broad pedagogical implications rather than the specific mechanisms through which higher education arts classrooms function as cultural initiation spaces. Samiya (2025) highlights the importance of embedding cultural dimensions in education to enhance creativity and identity formation, but her

analysis remains at the macro-level curricular sphere. Corbisiero-Drakos et al. (2021) demonstrate the benefits of arts integration for collaborative and creative learning, yet their research focuses on elementary-level education and does not address culturally situated creative practices in universities. Hui et al. (2022) explore how technological innovations enhance engagement but do not examine cultural identity formation through localized artistic experiences. This body of literature collectively underscores the importance of arts integration but reveals a critical gap: the need to understand how higher education arts learning can strategically actualize local traditions, transform the classroom into a cultural initiation arena, and strengthen students' cultural identity through creative practice.

Recent studies have increasingly emphasized culturally responsive and community-based approaches in education. For instance, Fitrianto and Farisi (2025) demonstrate how the integration of local wisdom within 21st-century learning fosters student engagement and cultural identity, particularly in rural school contexts. Similarly, Fang (2024) highlights the transformative potential of Community-Based Art Education (CBAE) in revitalizing marginalized cultures through affective and participatory learning processes. In the field of arts education, Bennett et al. (2023) further conceptualize culturally responsible teaching as a multidimensional practice that connects pedagogy with students' lived experiences and cultural backgrounds. While these studies collectively affirm the importance of cultural integration and community engagement, they primarily focus on primary or secondary education settings and emphasize general pedagogical frameworks rather than the situated practices of artistic production in higher education contexts.

Moreover, existing scholarship on arts learning has begun to move beyond technical skill acquisition toward broader cognitive and epistemic dimensions. Harlan (2023) reveals that artistic critique and exhibition processes contribute to deeper forms of learning, including epistemic cognition, while Peppler et al. (2022) propose a connected arts learning framework that links creative practice with social, cultural, and civic opportunities. However, these studies do not explicitly address how localized cultural traditions are operationalized within structured higher education curricula, nor how collaborative engagement with cultural communities shapes students' identity formation through artistic practice. In addition, methodological discussions such as Themelis et al. (2023) highlight the importance of integrating inductive and contextual approaches, yet they do not specifically engage with culturally grounded arts pedagogy. Consequently, there remains a significant gap in understanding how university-level arts classrooms can function as dynamic spaces for cultural initiation, where living traditions are not only represented but actively enacted through collaborative creative processes.

Responding to this gap, the present study explores learning strategies that actualize cultural traditions within arts education, examines the classroom's role as an initial site for the creation of culturally reflective artistic works, and investigates the impact of cultural actualization on strengthening students' identity as emerging artists. Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research questions: (1) What learning strategies can effectively integrate cultural traditions and perspectives into arts education? (2) In what ways can the classroom function as a foundational space for producing artworks that represent local cultural values? and (3) How does cultural

actualization through arts learning contribute to the formation and reinforcement of students' cultural identity?

Objectives: This study aims to (1) identify and analyze learning strategies that integrate cultural traditions into arts education; (2) examine the role of the classroom as a space for producing culturally reflective artistic works; and (3) evaluate the contribution of culturally grounded learning to students' identity formation as emerging artists.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach, designed to understand the meanings, processes, and lived experiences of participants within the real context of arts learning in the Department of Theatre Education, Faculty of Letters and Culture, Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. This method was chosen because the phenomenon under investigation—arts learning practices embedded with cultural values—is inherently interpretive, expressive, and socially situated. Arts learning in this context is not merely cognitive or technical; it is a culturally charged process that involves social interaction, identity negotiation, and the transmission of local values through creative practice. A case study approach allows for an in-depth exploration of how cultural traditions are actualized through collaborative artistic activities within an academic setting.

In this study, the researcher acts as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, as is typical in qualitative inquiry. The researcher was directly involved in conducting in-depth interviews, observing learning processes, and engaging with participants, including lecturers, students, and local artists. Positioned as a non-participant observer, the researcher maintained a degree of analytical distance while remaining sensitive to the cultural and social dynamics within the research setting. At the same time, the researcher acknowledges a degree of contextual familiarity with the academic environment, which facilitated access to participants and a deeper understanding of the cultural nuances embedded in the learning practices. To ensure rigor and minimize bias, reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process by continuously reflecting on personal assumptions, documenting field notes, and cross-checking interpretations with participants where necessary.

Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted in the Department of Theatre Education, Faculty of Letters and Culture, State University of Gorontalo, an academic environment committed to developing creative, culturally literate, and competitive arts educators. Learning activities in this department emphasize three core disciplines—drama, dance, and music—situated within the broader context of regional culture and arts education. The Directing course, which serves as the central site of this research, functions as a key interdisciplinary subject where students integrate music, dance, and theatre into cohesive performance works. Within this course, cultural collaboration projects were incorporated as part of the semester-long learning process, involving active interaction between students and local artists.

Participants in the study included one lecturer responsible for the Directing course, twenty third-semester students who were directly engaged in the collaborative

activities, and several local artists who contributed as cultural partners. These local artists consisted of cultural practitioners, traditional musicians, regional dancers, and community art figures known for their longstanding roles in preserving and revitalizing local cultural heritage. The selection of participants employed purposive sampling to ensure their relevance to the phenomenon under investigation.

This collaborative learning structure created a multigenerational ecosystem in which the lecturer served as an academic facilitator, students functioned as creative agents, and local artists acted as custodians of cultural knowledge. Through sustained interaction in classrooms and performance spaces, the Directing course evolved into a dynamic cultural environment where artistic creation became a medium for cultural communication, the internalization of local values such as collectivism and respect for tradition, and the formation of students' aesthetic and cultural identity.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using three primary techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation.

1. Participant Observation

Participant observation was carried out in classrooms, rehearsal studios, and cultural collaboration sites. The researcher closely observed the students' creative processes, the lecturer's facilitative strategies in implementing project-based learning, and the contributions of local artists in reinforcing cultural elements within student performances. This method enabled the researcher to capture authentic interactions and behaviors within natural learning situations.

2. In-Depth Interviews

Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the lecturer, students, and local artists. The interviews focused on personal experiences, perceptions of cultural values, and the meaning of collaboration within arts education. The findings revealed that the collaborative process not only enriched students' artistic knowledge but also deepened their awareness of cultural identity. Students reported that direct engagement with local artists offered new insights into directing as a socio-cultural practice rather than merely a technical discipline.

3. Documentation

Documentation included photographs, videos, rehearsal recordings, and students' written reflections. These materials served as supporting data to strengthen the study's interpretation and provide visual evidence of the collaboration and creative outcomes.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were analyzed using Miles et al. (2014) interactive analysis model, which consists of three interconnected components: (1) data reduction, (2) data display, and (3) conclusion drawing and verification. These components do not function in a linear sequence; rather, they operate cyclically throughout the research process. Analysis began as soon as the data were collected and continued during interpretation and report writing. Through continuous comparison and synthesis, emergent themes were identified to illustrate how cultural values were negotiated and manifested through the students' creative directing projects.

Data were collected primarily through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide as the main research instrument. The interview guide was developed based on the research objectives and consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and reflections on culturally grounded learning practices. Key themes covered in the interviews included collaborative processes with local artists, the integration of cultural values into directing practices, students' artistic and identity development, and challenges encountered during the learning process.

The interviews were conducted with lecturers, students, and local artists involved in the directing course. Each interview lasted approximately 45–90 minutes and was conducted in a natural setting convenient for the participants to ensure comfort and openness. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and complemented by field notes to capture non-verbal cues and contextual details. During the interviews, probing techniques were employed to elicit deeper insights and clarify participants' responses.

The data collection procedure followed several stages: (1) preparation of the interview protocol, (2) participant recruitment and informed consent, (3) scheduling and conducting interviews, (4) audio recording and note-taking, and (5) transcription of interview data for analysis. To enhance data credibility, triangulation was applied by comparing responses across different participant groups and cross-checking key findings with participants when necessary.

Establishing Trustworthiness

To ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings, several verification techniques were employed. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing responses from the lecturer, students, and local artists. Member checking was used to validate interpretations by presenting preliminary findings to participants for confirmation. Additionally, researcher reflection was maintained through field notes, allowing the researcher to critically examine personal perspectives, assumptions, and the actual conditions encountered in the field. These procedures helped strengthen the trustworthiness of the study and ensured that the findings accurately represented participants' experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Collaborative Processes in Arts Learning

Analysis of the interviews with the course lecturer, students, and local artists reveals that collaboration serves as the foundational principle in the directing class. Across all participant groups, collaboration was described not merely as an instructional technique but as a cultural and artistic process that bridges academic knowledge with community-based artistic practice. The course lecturer explained that the collaborative approach was intentionally designed to expand the learning experience by involving students directly with local artists. His objective was not solely to strengthen students' technical skills in directing, but also to deepen their understanding of the cultural contexts from which artistic practices emerge:



"I want students to not only learn directing techniques, but also to appreciate artistic processes rooted in the community. That is why I invited them to work with local artists so they can experience first-hand the cultural dynamics behind the art" (Interview with lecturer, 5 September 2025).

Students also reported a significant transformation in their perception of learning. They described the collaboration as an opportunity to understand art not only as an aesthetic product but as a medium of intercultural communication:

"Usually, we only receive material in the classroom. But this time, we learned how to create a short regional film and how to structure a performance that feels more alive and meaningful" (Interview with student, 10 September 2025).

This indicates that collaboration enabled students to engage more deeply with both the creative process and the cultural dimensions of their work. Students developed a broader understanding of art as a form of cultural expression and communication. Local artists also expressed positive perceptions of the collaboration. They viewed their involvement as recognition of their cultural knowledge and appreciated the opportunity to contribute to the students' creative processes:

"These university students came to consult with us about the cultural elements they wanted to incorporate into their artwork" (Interview with local artist, 12 September 2025).

Their responses highlight the reciprocal nature of the collaboration, where both students and local artists benefit from the exchange of knowledge and experience. Students gain access to culturally embedded knowledge, while local artists are acknowledged as important contributors to the learning process.

Overall, the findings indicate that collaborative practices in the directing class function as a dynamic process involving knowledge exchange, cultural engagement, and creative exploration. This process enables students to connect theoretical learning with real-world cultural practices, resulting in more meaningful and contextually grounded artistic outcomes. A summary of these collaborative processes is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Collaborative Processes in Arts Learning

Theme	Description	Participant Evidence
Collaborative Learning	Collaboration structured between students and local artists	Lecturer
Design		
Experiential Learning	Learning shifts from classroom-based to practice-based	Students
Cultural Engagement	Students interact with real cultural contexts and traditions	Students, Artists
Knowledge Exchange	Mutual sharing of artistic and cultural knowledge	All participants
Reciprocal Benefits	Students learn; artists gain recognition and involvement	Artists

Integration of Local Cultural Values in Directing Practice

Interview data show that cultural integration is not treated as an ornamental element in students' directing projects, but as a central pedagogical process through which students explore, interpret, and internalize the philosophical values embedded in local traditions. Students are required to adapt cultural elements from Gorontalo as well as

other regions represented in the class, allowing them to engage with the diverse cultural backgrounds present among the student body. This requirement encourages them to view culture not merely as a source of aesthetic motifs, but as a reservoir of ethical principles, narrative structures, and symbolic meanings that can inform artistic decision-making.

A student described how the integration of cultural elements prompted a deeper engagement with the moral and philosophical foundations of traditional narratives:

"We tried to present stories from various regions but chose only two for our project. It was not just about performing the story, but understanding the moral values within it – patience, loyalty, respect for elders, and humility" (Interview with student, 13 September 2025).

This response shows that students actively interpret cultural narratives and extract ethical meanings that inform their artistic decisions. The process involves selecting, analyzing, and transforming cultural content into performance, rather than simply reproducing it. The lecturer reinforced this orientation by emphasizing the importance of tracing the philosophical meanings behind cultural stories before transforming them into performance:

"I always ask students to explore Indonesian folklore, to trace its meaning before creating their artwork. Do not simply take it without understanding the philosophical values behind it" (Interview with lecturer, 5 September 2025).

This pedagogical stance aligns with principles of *experiential and interpretive arts education*, where learning involves not only doing but also critically engaging with the cultural roots of artistic forms. By encouraging students to examine the cultural logic behind traditional narratives, the lecturer acts as a facilitator of cultural inquiry, bridging academic analysis with creative practice. Local artists expressed appreciation for students' enthusiasm for learning about the symbolic and sonic dimensions of local traditions:

"Students did not only ask about the culture, they also asked what musical elements would be appropriate. I see this as a good step for preserving cultural heritage" (Interview with local artist, 14 September 2025).

This interaction demonstrates that students rely on local artists as cultural references in shaping both the conceptual and technical aspects of their performances. The integration process therefore involves continuous dialogue between students and cultural practitioners.

Overall, the findings show that integrating local cultural values in directing practice involves a multi-stage process, including cultural exploration, value interpretation, artistic adaptation, and consultation with cultural sources. A summary of these processes is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Integration of Local Cultural Values in Directing Practice

Process Stage	Description	Participant Evidence
Cultural Exploration	Students explore folklore and cultural materials from various regions	Lecturer, Students
Value Interpretation	Identification of moral and philosophical meanings within narratives	Students
Artistic	Transformation of cultural elements into performance and directing	Students



Process Stage	Description	Participant Evidence
Adaptation	concepts	
Cultural Consultation	Engagement with local artists for validation and enrichment	Students, Artists
Aesthetic Integration	Incorporation of music, symbols, and performative elements	Artists

Impact of the Learning Process on Students' Identity Formation and Competence Development

The collaborative, culturally grounded learning process demonstrated a significant influence on students' personal, artistic, and professional development. The interview data reveal that engagement with local cultural practices not only strengthened students' technical competencies in directing but also shaped their sense of identity and cultural consciousness as emerging art educators. One student described this experience as a rediscovery of self through local artistic traditions:

"I felt like I found my identity through regional arts. Our culture is rich with values that can inspire art education" (Student Interview, 15 September 2025).

This statement suggests that involvement in culturally embedded artistic practices enables students to reconnect with their cultural roots while developing a sense of pride and belonging. In addition to identity formation, students also experienced a shift in how they understood their role as directors. Rather than focusing solely on technical coordination, they began to view directing as a process that involves understanding cultural meanings and values:

"Directing is not just about arranging performers, but understanding the cultural background and the values embedded within it" (Student Interview, 10 September 2025).

This indicates that students began to perceive directing not only as a technical activity but also as a process that involves interpreting cultural meanings. From the lecturer's perspective, changes in students' learning behavior were also observed:

"Students became more reflective. They started writing scripts based on their own experiences and cultural backgrounds. Some of them even volunteered to assist middle and high school students in preparing for national arts competitions" (Lecturer Interview, 18 September 2025).

This statement shows that students demonstrated increased reflection in their creative work and extended their engagement beyond classroom activities. The key impacts identified from these interview responses are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Observed Impacts of the Learning Process

Impact Area	Description	Source
Identity Awareness	Students reflect on and connect with their cultural background	Student
Conceptual Shift	Directing understood as cultural interpretation, not only technical skill	Student
Reflective Practice	Students develop scripts based on personal and cultural experiences	Lecturer
Extended Engagement	Participation in activities beyond the classroom (e.g., mentoring)	Lecturer

Challenges and Strategies for Ensuring Program Sustainability

Despite the positive outcomes of the collaborative directing project, the interview data indicate several challenges that could affect the continuity and long-term sustainability of the program. One of the most prominent issues concerns time constraints and scheduling difficulties, particularly given the varied commitments of local artists. As one student noted:

"The challenge is related to time and schedules. Sometimes the artists have their own activities, so rehearsals must be flexible" (Student Interview, 11 September 2025).

This finding underscores the complexities inherent in university-community partnerships, where differing professional rhythms, responsibilities, and organizational structures can hinder smooth collaboration. In addition to scheduling issues, the data also suggest the need for more structured coordination to support ongoing collaboration. Despite these challenges, both students and local artists expressed a strong interest in continuing the program. A local artist stated:

"If possible, this activity should be conducted regularly. Collaboration with us local artists, even across cultural traditions, is meaningful. We as a cultural community want to synergize with the university" (Artist Interview, 14 September 2025).

This statement reflects a positive perception of the collaboration and a willingness from community members to sustain the partnership. From the lecturer's perspective, efforts toward sustainability include documenting the outcomes of the collaborative projects and integrating them into future learning practices. The lecturer emphasized that documentation can serve as a reference for developing similar culturally grounded learning activities in subsequent courses. The key challenges and proposed strategies identified from the interview data are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Challenges and Strategies for Program Sustainability

Aspect	Description	Source
Time Constraints	Difficulty aligning schedules between students and local artists	Student
Coordination Issues	Need for more structured planning and communication	Student, Lecturer
Community Interest	Strong willingness of local artists to continue collaboration	Artist
Documentation Efforts	Archiving student work and processes for future reference	Lecturer
Program Continuity	Intention to integrate collaboration into ongoing curriculum	Lecturer

Discussion

Collaborative Learning as a Mechanism for Cultural Engagement

The findings demonstrate that collaboration with local artists functions as a central mechanism in transforming arts learning into a culturally grounded process. Evidence from the interviews shows that students experienced directing not merely as a technical activity but as a process of understanding "the cultural background and the values embedded within it" (Student Interview, 10 September 2025). This shift reflects a movement from procedural learning toward meaning-oriented engagement.

This pattern supports Dewey's (1938) view that meaningful learning emerges through direct interaction with real-life contexts. The involvement of local artists further reinforces this process, positioning them as active contributors rather than passive cultural references. This aligns with Rogers' (1969) humanistic learning theory,

where learning becomes significant when it involves emotional, social, and experiential dimensions.

In addition, the reciprocal nature of collaboration—evidenced by artists’ willingness to engage and students’ active consultation—confirms that such partnerships create mutual benefits. This finding extends Corbisiero-Drakos et al. (2021), who highlighted the value of school–artist collaboration, by demonstrating how these dynamics operate more intensively in higher arts education contexts.

From a sociocultural perspective, the interaction between students, lecturers, and artists reflects Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of socially mediated learning. Cultural knowledge is not transmitted but co-constructed through dialogue and shared practice. This explains why students perceived their performances as more “alive” and meaningful, as they were actively involved in reinterpreting cultural expressions, consistent with Schechner’s (2017) concept of restored behavior.

Cultural Interpretation and the Development of Critical Cultural Literacy

The findings also show that students did not merely incorporate cultural elements superficially but engaged in interpreting their ethical and philosophical meanings. This is evident in students’ reflections on values such as patience, respect, and humility derived from traditional narratives (Student Interview, 13 September 2025).

This indicates that cultural narratives function as sources of ethical knowledge, supporting Koentjaraningrat’s (1985) view of culture as a system of meaning guiding social life. The lecturer’s insistence that students “trace the meaning before creating their artwork” further reinforces this interpretive process, ensuring that artistic production is grounded in cultural understanding rather than imitation.

Such findings align with Dewey (1934) notion of art as reflective meaning-making, where creative expression emerges from critical engagement with experience. Moreover, the involvement of local artists as cultural informants strengthens this process by providing access to tacit knowledge, enabling students to engage in what can be described as a living cultural dialogue.

These results extend previous studies by Samiya (2025) and Hui et al. (2022). While prior research emphasizes the importance of cultural integration, this study demonstrates the micro-processes of interpretation, showing how students actively analyze, negotiate, and transform cultural meanings within artistic practice.

Identity Formation and Competence Development through Cultural Engagement

The impact of culturally grounded learning on identity formation is strongly supported by empirical evidence. A student explicitly stated, “I felt like I found my identity through regional arts” (Student Interview, 15 September 2025), indicating that engagement with local culture facilitated self-reflection and identity awareness.

Additionally, students’ reconceptualization of directing—as involving cultural understanding rather than mere coordination—demonstrates a shift in both cognitive and professional orientation. This is further supported by the lecturer’s observation that students became “more reflective” and began creating scripts based on personal and cultural experiences (Lecturer Interview, 18 September 2025).

These findings align with Banks’ (2015) perspective that multicultural learning fosters identity development and cultural awareness. At the same time, the observed changes in students’ behavior—such as mentoring younger students—reflect the

emergence of professional dispositions consistent with Schön's (1983) reflective practitioner framework.

Furthermore, the development of empathy, cultural sensitivity, and collaborative skills indicates that learning extends beyond technical competence. This supports Liubalina (2025) and Eisner (2002), who argue that arts education contributes to socio-emotional and interpretive capacities. The transformative nature of these experiences also resonates with Mezirow's theory of transformative learning, where new cultural encounters reshape individuals' perspectives and self-understanding.

Sustainability of Culturally Grounded Arts Learning

While the findings highlight the benefits of collaboration, they also reveal practical challenges, particularly related to time constraints and coordination. As noted by a student, scheduling conflicts with local artists required flexible rehearsal arrangements (Student Interview, 11 September 2025). This indicates that sustaining collaboration requires adaptive management strategies.

Despite these challenges, strong commitment from both students and local artists suggests significant potential for long-term sustainability. The artist's statement expressing a desire for regular collaboration reflects a shared vision of ongoing partnership.

These findings align with Liubalina (2025), who identifies logistical constraints as common barriers in community-based arts education. At the same time, the expressed commitment from stakeholders supports Matarasso's (2019) concept of cultural partnerships, where mutual engagement fosters sustainable collaboration.

The lecturer's emphasis on documentation as a strategy for sustainability further strengthens this model. By archiving creative outputs and learning processes, the program builds a foundation for institutional continuity. This aligns with Darling-Hammond's (2020) notion of institutional memory in curriculum development.

Moreover, sustaining such initiatives requires alignment with institutional policies and support systems. As highlighted by Bowen and Kisida (2019) and Fahy and Kenny, (2023), long-term success depends on structured frameworks, funding, and consistent collaboration mechanisms.

This study contributes to the field of arts education by demonstrating how culturally grounded collaborative practices function as integrated mechanisms for cultural transmission, creative development, and identity formation within higher education. Unlike previous studies that focus on general pedagogical benefits, this research provides a process-oriented and context-specific understanding of how cultural learning is enacted through directing practice.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Findings

This study demonstrates that collaborative directing projects involving lecturers, students, and local artists function as a culturally grounded pedagogical model in higher arts education. The evidence shows that students not only developed technical directing skills but also experienced a shift toward reflective and meaning-oriented learning, as indicated by their engagement with cultural values and their articulation of identity formation through artistic practice. Cultural elements were not treated as supplementary features but operated as core components shaping students' creative

processes, ethical understanding, and artistic identity. More importantly, the findings confirm that collaboration with local cultural practitioners transforms the classroom into a space of cultural initiation, where knowledge is co-constructed through dialogue, interpretation, and creative enactment. This reinforces the central argument of this study that culturally grounded, collaborative learning is a critical pathway for integrating tradition, identity formation, and artistic competence in higher arts education.

Implications

The findings highlight the importance of embedding culturally responsive and community-engaged approaches within arts education curricula. Integrating collaboration with local artists can enhance the relevance of learning, strengthen students' cultural awareness, and support the preservation and transmission of local traditions. At the institutional level, the study suggests the need for structured support systems, including sustained partnerships with cultural communities, flexible scheduling mechanisms, and systematic documentation of learning outcomes. Such efforts can ensure the continuity and scalability of culturally grounded pedagogical practices while reinforcing the role of universities as active contributors to cultural sustainability.

Limitations

This study is limited to a single directing course within a specific institutional and cultural context, which may restrict the transferability of the findings to other settings. Additionally, the qualitative design prioritizes in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and does not provide measurable or generalizable outcomes across larger populations. The relatively small number of interview participants also limits the breadth of perspectives represented in the study.

Future Research

Future research should explore the application of this collaborative model across different artistic disciplines and cultural contexts to assess its adaptability and broader relevance. Comparative studies may provide insights into how culturally grounded pedagogies function in diverse institutional environments. In addition, longitudinal research is needed to examine the long-term impact of such learning experiences on students' professional development, cultural engagement, and sustained involvement in community-based artistic practices.

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