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Application of Indigenous Traditional Songs ‘Sewang’ in Preschool Teaching and Learning

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the application of traditional Orang Asli songs in teaching and learning in preschool education. Traditional songs of the Orang Asli community have significant educational potential in fostering language development, cultural appreciation, and socio-emotional growth among preschool children. Using a qualitative approach, this research uses semi-structured interviews with preschool teachers. This study also uses document analysis of selected traditional songs to support the interview findings. Findings obtained from interviews with preschool teachers show that the application of traditional Orang Asli songs in the classroom has the potential to improve phonological awareness, vocabulary acquisition, and motor skills through group singing and movement activities. Document analysis of the repetitive lyrics and simple melodies of these traditional songs, themed around nature, community, and moral values, contributes to the preservation of the cultural heritage of the Orang Asli community. The implications of this study show that the application of traditional songs in teaching can strengthen children's language, as well as ensure the sustainability of indigenous culture in early education. This study highlights the use and application of traditional Orang Asli songs in enhancing language development, cultural appreciation, and socio-emotional growth of preschool children, which can then contribute to the preservation of the cultural heritage of the Orang Asli community.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's increasingly globalized world, early education is important for preschool children, including those from the Orang Asli community, so that they are not left behind in the development of the country. This is in line with the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG4) which emphasize quality education for all levels of society (Gunawan, 2025). In the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, mastery of language and communication skills enables individuals to compete in the digital and technological world.

Education plays a vital role in empowering and improving the socio-economic status of Orang Asli communities in Malaysia. However, Orang Asli children continue to face significant challenges in the mainstream education system, such as high dropout rates, low academic achievement, and disengagement from school. Issues regarding the education of Orang Asli preschool children need to be highlighted because statistics show that Orang Asli students in Malaysia have poor educational attainment, with approximately 50% not continuing their education in secondary school and only 30% completing secondary school (Sawalludin et al., 2020).

Preschool education is the most important stage where basic skills such as language acquisition, social interaction, and emotional development are nurtured from an early age (Britto et al., 2017; Jetti & Yusuf, 2018). Integrating cultural elements into teaching not only increases engagement but also fosters inclusivity and the preservation of cultural heritage. Traditional Songs, a rich and meaningful element of Orang Asli culture, are traditionally used in rituals and community gatherings. These songs, characterized by their rhythmic and repetitive nature, have the potential to be effective and engaging educational tools (Chan, 2023). Traditional Orang Asli songs like 'Sewang', rich in rhythmic patterns, natural themes, and moral values, have great potential as a tool to assist and support teaching and learning in preschool settings. According to Dumont et al. (2017), recent studies have shown that music can enhance language development, word-sound relationships, children's mathematical abilities and some even enhance children's intellectual abilities.

However, the application of traditional songs into preschool education presents certain challenges. Lack of teacher training, and inadequate educational resources pose obstacles to the effective use of traditional songs (Masnan & Mohamed, 2023). Therefore, this study aims to explore the application of traditional Orang Asli songs in preschool education, focusing on the educational value of preschool children of Orang Asli while at the same time maintaining the cultural heritage and appreciation of Orang Asli communities.

Previous studies have focused more on issues of implementation at the preschool level only and were found to be less in line with the objectives of the researcher's study. However, several previous study findings are seen to be consistent with the requirements of this study. Five activities that can support the achievement of language and communication including children's speech skills, namely interaction and conversation, playing, singing and rhyming language, reading books, and speaking in public.

A study by Nurfitriana et al. (2025) found that using videos of local Jogja culture in early childhood learning successfully increased understanding and tolerance, as the audiovisual format made it easier for children to understand social values such as cooperation and respect for differences. This finding is in line with this study in applying traditional Orang Asli Sewang songs in preschool teaching, which also used local cultural elements as cognitive and affective stimulation tools to instill the values of respect, self-identity, and inclusive social interaction from an early age (Nurfitriana et al., 2025).

The findings of this study state that teachers need to play an important role in providing activities, atmosphere, environment, guidance, and support to ensure that children can achieve their potential. The skills acquired through these support activities can improve language and communication mastery and develop children's speech skills, thereby driving children's success in the future. Through this study, the researcher concluded that teachers need to play an important role in promoting speech among children (Masnan & Mohamed, 2023). Ideally, interactions between teachers and children, and children with other children, should occur throughout the day. When interacting with children after singing activities, teachers can relate the song to the children's existing experiences or knowledge. Therefore, teachers need to use creativity and expertise to plan appropriate activities using language to speak and interact because it helps children master language and communication, as well as helping children's speech development to be better and they will be better prepared with literacy skills when they are in primary school (Ishak & Aziz, 2022).

Meanwhile, in previous research reviewed teacher creativity and issues of education for Orang Asli children in Malaysia. The objective of this study is to identify the suitability of creativity through folk songs as a medium of basic literacy learning for Orang Asli children (Salim et al., 2020). This study uses qualitative methods and interview methods to identify the suitability of creativity in Orang Asli Community Folk Songs as a medium of basic literacy teaching and learning for Orang Asli children. Data were collected from 8 experts, namely Preschool teachers, Malay language teachers, Orang Asli education experts, and Music education teachers. The findings found that several Orang Asli folk songs are suitable for use with several adaptations as a medium for basic literacy learning to meet the educational needs of Orang Asli children. The proposed development of a Basic Literacy Learning module based on Orang Asli folk songs was developed to improve the basic literacy skills of Orang Asli children.

A study by Hidayah & Furnamasari (2025) showed that the use of creative media such as animated videos significantly stimulates the visual expression of preschool children through various drawing styles such as stereotypes, bird's perspective, and visual-haptic forms that reflect their imagination and visual memory. The application of traditional Orang Asli songs such as Sewang, which not only contain cultural elements but also have the potential to act as a creative stimulus equivalent to visual media, in supporting the development of expression, creative thinking and early learning engagement in children (Hidayah & Furnamasari, 2025).

Singing plays an important role in the development of children's language skills, especially in the areas of speech and language comprehension. Through the songs sung, preschoolers will be able to increase their vocabulary while stimulating their readiness to speak and speak (Shaw, 2021). According to a study by Amalia & Hasana (2019), a study was conducted on improving children's early language skills through traditional song singing activities. This study using qualitative methods aims to identify the relationship between implementing singing activities to improve the development of children's pre-reading skills. The findings of this study explain the importance of cultivating students' language skills through singing activities that must be coordinated and nurtured from an early age. In addition, the study findings also state that teachers should develop pre-reading skills through group singing activities. Learning activities using singing methods can also help children satisfy their emotional and developmental needs to interact, practice patience, practice courage and also improve children's language skills. In conclusion, the aspect of pre-reading skills which is a tool for expressing ideas and wishes is an important aspect to discuss.

In addition, according to a study conducted by Politimou et al. (2019), it has explained the relationship between musical and language skills specifically for children in early schooling. A quantitative study was conducted in this study involving a total of 40 children (21 boys) aged 4 to 5 years. In this study, the researcher focused on the effects that occurred on a sample of children who had participated in traditional song singing activities that had been formally implemented on the development of their language skills. In addition, this study also investigated the effects of informal singing activities that occurred at home on the development of children's language skills using the same assessment tool. The study findings stated that, formal education contributes to the development of better language skills in children while informal education contributes to the development of grammar in the children involved. This finding opens a new chapter in the study on the development of specific musical activities for preschool children to support specific areas of language development involving the improvement of children's language, speech and grammar skills in early school age (Dumont et al., 2017; Fiveash et al., 2021).

The use of folk songs influences children's emotions (Blasco-Magraner et al., 2021; Váradi, 2022; Zhou et al., 2024). In this study, the researcher stated that Music can also influence emotions and feelings. The results of the study showed that children who participate in musical activities communicate more with their parents and teachers. Therefore, their parents are more likely to communicate with parents of other children. The use of folk songs can also trigger children's creativity through songs. For example, children are encouraged to perform various creative movements when music is played. Socio-emotional development can also be fostered when teachers teach singing activities, as well as music and movement. For example, children feel excited when the teacher plays the song 'Anak Itik Tok Wi' while in the classroom while carrying out activities with children.

The importance of the choir in ethnic music education (Bennett, 2022; Bond, 2017). They found that singing in groups provides students with an opportunity to develop a more holistic understanding of the technical and cultural aspects of traditional musical singing. It not only involves vocal performance but also helps in learning the history, language, and traditions of an ethnic group through the lyrics and melodies of songs. In this context, choir is not just an artistic activity, but also a holistic and comprehensive learning medium. Teachers play a key role in planning and implementing creative activities such as singing to stimulate children's language and socio-emotional development, including among Orang Asli communities. Involvement in formal and informal musical activities also contributes to students' mastery of grammar, creativity and cultural understanding.

Based on previous studies, most research focuses on the issue of implementing teaching activities at the preschool level in general, but there are not many studies that link the use of traditional Orang Asli songs in the context of preschool learning with language and cultural development, especially in the Orang Asli community. Although several studies such as those conducted by Masnan & Mohamed (2023) state the importance of the role of teachers in providing activities that support language development, no study has specifically examined the use of traditional Orang Asli songs as a medium in improving the language skills and cultural awareness of preschool children. In addition, research conducted focused on the use of Orang Asli folk songs in teaching basic literacy, but there is no emphasis on the specific influence of traditional songs on language and communication development in the context of preschool children (Abd Ghani, 2015). These studies also lack discussion on the integration of traditional songs with children's social-emotional activities and creativity in the learning process.

This study introduces a new approach by focusing on the application of traditional Orang Asli songs in the teaching and learning of preschool education. It not only focuses on improving language skills through songs, but also evaluates the influence of songs in enhancing cultural awareness and socio-emotional development of preschool children. By using qualitative methods involving interviews with preschool teachers and document analysis of traditional songs, this study aims to enrich understanding of the role of songs in shaping cultural identity, language skills, and communication of children from Orang Asli communities. The innovation of this study lies in its comprehensive assessment of the influence of traditional songs in the context of Orang Asli early education, which is still underexplored in the current literature.

2. METHODS

The design of this study uses a qualitative approach to explore the application of traditional Orang Asli songs in preschool education. Two main qualitative methods were used in this study, namely semi-structured interviews and document analysis. These methods were chosen to provide an overview of the educational application of Orang Asli songs and to answer both objectives of the study.

2.1. Semi-structured interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with preschool teachers. Interviews with preschool teachers were to understand the experiences, perceptions and applications of using traditional Orang Asli songs as a teaching tool. Questions focused on the practical application of traditional songs into preschool classroom activities, their effectiveness in enhancing learning, and the support needed by teachers to implement the approach.

2.2. Document analysis

Document Analysis Method to support and further strengthen the interview findings. The main document analysis is the analysis of the lyrics and melodies of selected traditional Orang Asli songs were analyzed to assess their potential and application in preschool education.

The song lyrics were analyzed focusing on identifying the meaning in the lyrics of traditional Orang Asli songs. Each line in the song lyrics provides a meaning that is appropriate for children's learning. The repetitive lyrical characteristics of songs can support language learning. Melodies in Orang Asli Traditional songs show rhythmicity and melodic structure that are assessed for their suitability in preschool activities, such as singing, clapping and traditional dance movement activities. Data from interviews and document analysis were triangulated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the educational value of Orang Asli traditional songs. This approach ensures that the findings are culturally informative and practically relevant, addressing the challenges and opportunities in integrating these songs into preschool education.

2.3. Data analysis methods

The data analysis process in this study focused on systematically interpreting the information collected from interviews and document analysis. The aim was to uncover insights that align with the study objectives to explore the application of Orang Asli traditional songs in preschool education. The analysis was conducted according to the following steps.

2.4. Interview data analysis

Interview Transcription. Interviews were conducted with preschool teachers, (with consent) and transcribed *verbatim*. The transcripts were reviewed to ensure the accuracy of the participants' responses.

2.5. Document data analysis

After conducting an interview session with the selected respondents, the researcher collected all the data obtained during the interview and analyzed the data. The researcher analyzed the data manually by transcribing the interviews based on the answers and also the behavior of the respondents during the interview session. After completing the analysis, the researcher summarized the information obtained. The analysis that had been obtained was arranged according to relevant themes. The themes were based on the objectives of the study that had been set and distributed according to specific themes.

The analysis of both the interview and document data provided an overview of the application of traditional Orang Asli songs in preschool education. The repetitive song lyrics highlighted the educational potential of these songs in the classroom. This approach ensured that the findings were reliable and culturally informed, contributing meaningfully to the field of preschool education.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the repetitive lyrics of traditional songs and simple melodies can increase phonological awareness, vocabulary acquisition, and motor skills through group singing and movement activities. These traditional songs, themed on nature, community, and moral values, contribute to the preservation of the cultural heritage of the indigenous community.

3.1. Application of traditional Orang Asli songs in preschool classrooms

After reviewing the transcripts of interviews conducted with the respondents, the researcher found that there were important quotes stated by the respondents to answer the research questions. R1 say "If I want to use the Sewang orang asli song, I will use it. But it can be said that I will use songs because I want children to sing and move, master the language vocabulary" (R1). R1 stated that he would apply traditional songs if he felt like using songs in a learning session with children. However, he also said that the majority of his learning sessions used children's songs because he wanted to help children with motor skills, creativity and aesthetics and language acquisition.

While R2 said "I will definitely use traditional songs. I like using songs for learning activities because for me, songs are very suitable for use where we can use these songs to teach words, for entertainment, and to create a cheerful atmosphere for children. As teachers, we need to create a conducive atmosphere for children to learn. So I will make sure that children are comfortable by creating fun activities for them" (R2). R2 stated that he would use songs for learning activities with children because he believes that traditional songs are suitable to be applied as an aid to teaching words or language to children. In fact, the role of teachers to create a conducive atmosphere can also be done by using entertainment for children so that they have fun learning.

R3 say "Yes, I use traditional indigenous songs for learning activities. In addition to teaching the Malay language subject, I also teach the Science subject. So for the Science subject, I also use songs. For example, for the song Sewang Babola Babbo there is a song for body

movement. In addition to being able to reveal the object of the ball to children, I can also train children to say the words in each lyric of the song” (R3). R3 stated that he would use traditional songs for learning activities. In fact, he also teaches for Language, namely phonological awareness or letter sounds and applies the use of songs inside and outside the classroom. In addition to being able to introduce body movements to children, it can also train children to speak better.

The application of traditional songs of the Orang Asli Community in teaching and learning sessions in preschool classes has answered the first objective and research question. The application of traditional songs of the Orang Asli Community provides potential in preschool education through phonological awareness or letter sounds, better acquisition of language vocabulary, improving children's motor skills and thus stimulating children's creativity and aesthetics. By using songs as one of the elements in learning, children can learn in a cheerful and comfortable atmosphere.

3.2. Lyrics of traditional songs of the Orang Asli community

The lyrics of the song Sewang from the Semai indigenous community in Malaysia are shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Babula Babbo Sewang song lyrics.

Lyrics of the song Bula	Meaning of song lyrics
<i>babula babo</i>	ball is my friend
<i>babula be miro</i>	friend with the ball
<i>siok kentah bi dalag ha ibola</i>	the upstream side is noisy
<i>siok kenreh bi dalag ha ibola</i>	the downstream side is noisy
<i>ba bula babo</i>	ball my friend
<i>ba bula tok raye</i>	friend with the ball

After examining the lyrics of traditional indigenous songs, interviews were conducted with preschool teachers to confirm the potential of the songs. “Traditional indigenous songs themselves can help children master new words. If teachers expose songs to children frequently, children can master the language while maintaining their cultural heritage” (R1). Based on the interview script, R1 stated that preschool children will be able to master new words if exposed frequently. Such as playing children's song videos during each teaching session. Children will always listen to the songs that are played and to some extent can help children master new words while maintaining their cultural heritage.

While R2 say “To help children master new words, teachers can use children's songs by using songs as induction sets. The song lyrics shown may be able to help children read and master new words” (R2). R2 stated that simple, repetitive children's song lyrics can help children master new words. However, teachers need to expose the songs to children. Therefore, G2 recommends that teachers use songs as an induction set before starting learning. He stated that the song lyrics shown can help children master the language.

R3 said “Maybe teachers can play this Babola Babbo song repeatedly. If children always listen, they can quickly remember words or sentences. It would be fun to see children remember the lyrics of the songs they listen to” (R3). R3 also stated that teachers need to play children's songs repeatedly for children to listen to. This is intended to help children hear the words many times so that they can remember the lyrics and practice pronouncing the words.

Every learning activity should begin with an induction set. Respondents often suggested using songs during the induction set. Apart from exposing children to new vocabulary words, it can also motivate children to learn. These movement and singing activities can also improve

children's gross motor skills and creativity as well as preserve the heritage and culture of the indigenous people so that they do not fade away with time.

The findings of this study show how these traditional songs can be applied and function as teaching tools that enrich preschool education while preserving the heritage of the Orang Asli community. The findings of this study clearly show that traditional Orang Asli songs such as Sewang not only function as entertainment or cultural heritage, but also play an important role as a holistic teaching aid in preschool education. The preschool teachers interviewed admitted that they use these songs to help with vocabulary mastery, develop phonological skills, and stimulate gross motor skills through singing and movement activities. This approach can foster a learning environment that respects and incorporates cultural diversity.

The main characteristics of songs such as Babola Babbo-with simple and repetitive lyrics directly support the findings of Hidayah & Furnamasari (2025) who stated that the melodic structure and simple lyrics in traditional songs help enhance children's visual expression and imagination through forms of creativity such as stereotyped drawings and visual styles. This shows that traditional songs not only influence linguistic aspects, but also children's cognitive and expressive arts. More interestingly, singing activities can support pre-reading skills, promote social interaction, and stimulate emotional and moral development (Amalia & Hasana, 2019; Gordon et al., 2015; Idris et al., 2024). Songs like Sewang, which are themed around nature and noble values-such as cooperation and community identity-clearly align with the findings of Nurfitriana et al. (2025) who emphasized the use of local cultural elements through video media to increase tolerance and social understanding among children.

According to interviews with teacher experts, children easily remember words and phrases through singing and repetition. In addition, social and emotional development is also achieved through singing and physical movement activities by increasing children's self-confidence. The simplicity and rhythmic repetition make the songs attractive and easy to follow by preschool children, especially in a group setting. Local cultural elements are also used as cognitive and affective stimuli to form values of respect, identity, and inclusive social interaction from an early age. Vygotsky's theory of Social-Constructivism supports this finding because traditional songs create a social context in which children learn collaboratively with teachers and peers (Carroll, 2017). Group singing activities open up spaces for interaction, communication and emotional sharing that are important in social and language development.

In addition, findings from teacher interviews indicate that the application and use of traditional song lyrics in preschool classrooms has great potential and needs to be further developed. It cannot be denied that there is a lack of teacher training and teaching resources and materials. Parents support the use of these songs, recognizing their dual role in education and cultural preservation. Community Leaders' input emphasizes preserving the authenticity of the songs while adapting them for educational use.

This study suggests that preschool teachers not only act as learning facilitators, but also as custodians of cultural heritage through creative and inclusive activity planning. The application of traditional songs not only helps language development, but also revives the narrative of the identity of the Orang Asli community that is often marginalized in education, which has the potential to be a creative stimulus comparable to visual media in supporting the development of self-expression, creativity and children's involvement in preschool learning (Hidayah & Furnamasari, 2025).

Among the implications obtained from this study is that it can maintain the educational value of traditional Orang Asli songs Language Development. This is due to the repetitive and

simple lyrical structure that facilitates phonological awareness and vocabulary acquisition among children. Song lyrics make it suitable for teaching indigenous cultural values in the classroom. This study also opens up space for the development of a learning module based on traditional songs as a pedagogical innovation that can be expanded not only within the Orang Asli community, but also to the multi-ethnic community in Malaysia within the framework of early childhood education that is inclusive and intercultural.

Although the results of the study show that the use of songs from the Orang Asli community can spark interest and improve the achievement of preschool students from various aspects, there are still shortcomings that can be addressed in the future. Therefore, further research that is proposed and can be done is also based on the study data and analysis conducted, including developing a structured and systematic module. This is because the development of a structured and systematic module requires a careful approach based on appropriate theoretical references. At the same time, this module must emphasize various elements that exist in the Orang Asli community, so collaboration with the Orang Asli community in documenting their traditional songs can help form an effective teaching module. Through this collaborative approach, it shows that community involvement in preserving cultural heritage for the education of future generations is very important. Identity of a community has been instilled and practiced in individuals since an early age, both formally and informally (Karjalainen, 2020). Indirectly, a complete guideline for reference by teachers can also be developed. These guidelines can integrate elements of traditional Orang Asli songs into various forms of teaching such as storytelling, singing and acting activities, as well as across various curriculum elements.

In addition, the adaptation of traditional Orang Asli songs into the teaching and learning of preschool students does not only depend on efforts to preserve lyrics or melodies, but also requires a teaching approach that is capable of providing a deep understanding of cultural heritage to future generations. Therefore, further research suggestions that need to be implemented are to provide more intensive training for teachers by professional bodies that focus on cultural competence, improving their knowledge and skills. This training can be implemented in various forms such as implementing professional development programs, workshops, seminars and others. This is to enable teachers who are inexperienced or lack knowledge and understanding of the use of traditional Orang Asli songs to implement the learning process more effectively.

Direct experience with traditional Orang Asli songs can provide a deeper and more comprehensive understanding than just through reading. In this regard, this study also recommends the active involvement of Orang Asli communities such as Orang Asli musicians, cultural leaders and elders who are experienced in traditional songs in designing their educational curriculum. In addition, responsible parties such as the Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Division can plan and hold cultural exchange programs (Idrus et al., 2023). This is to raise awareness while providing opportunities for the community and educators to delve into and understand the traditional songs of the Orang Asli community more comprehensively. This can therefore help the community of a country in recognizing their identity and culture, as well as increase awareness of the preservation of their respective cultures.

Therefore, it is important for curriculum development that emphasizes local heritage and culture. Responsible parties need to develop innovative resources to preserve the traditional songs of the Orang Asli community. The development of these resources can be preserved in various forms, including transcript documentation, recording and song analysis. Documentation through the creation of multimedia materials such as printed materials

(songbooks), audio recordings and teaching videos, is an important source that can convey information. This can indirectly help and facilitate the community, educators or any party to access the traditional songs of the Orang Asli community. Without this documentation effort, the traditional musical heritage of the Orang Asli community is at risk of being lost and extinct in today's increasingly rapid modern technological currents.

4. CONCLUSION

This study outlines the application of traditional songs applied in the teaching and learning of preschool education. As a result of the research, there are challenges that have been identified including limited teaching mediums and resources, lack of teacher readiness, lack of use of approaches that are appropriate to the culture and background of the Orang Asli community. Therefore, the recommendation for future research is to develop a structured and systematic teaching module based on traditional songs of the Orang Asli community, and implement training for preschool teachers. The application of traditional Orang Asli songs in preschool education provides a unique opportunity to improve the learning of preschool children while preserving the cultural heritage of the Orang Asli community. These traditional songs have been proven to help with language development, promote social and emotional growth, physical development and foster cultural appreciation among Orang Asli preschool children. Thus, the objectives and research questions have been answered. By integrating traditional songs into preschool pedagogy, this study advocates a culturally responsive approach to early childhood education that benefits all Orang Asli preschool children in particular and helps improve the national education system in general.

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6. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. This research paper is the author's original work and is free of plagiarism.

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