

Enhancing High School Students' Musical Skills Through The Mawar Instructional Model Based On Indigenous Songs

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Abstract

Music education in Indonesian high schools continues to struggle with balancing global musical influences and the nation's rich cultural heritage. This article explores the MAWAR model—Motivation, Activity, Wawasan (Insight), Action, Reflection—as a culturally responsive approach using indigenous songs to elevate students' musical competence. Employing a mixed-methods design in two public high schools, the study analyses quantitative improvements in performance rubrics and qualitative shifts in learner motivation. Findings show significant gains ($p < .05$) in instrumental proficiency and creative arrangement, underscoring the effectiveness of MAWAR. The article concludes with pedagogical implications for music educators and recommendations for future research within diverse cultural contexts.

Keywords: Musical Skill, Curriculum, Culture

INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian high school curriculum mandates music as a core component of cultural education, yet many classrooms still rely on teacher-centred, repertoire-driven instruction. Students often learn Western pop songs detached from local cultural realities, limiting their understanding of Indonesia's ethnomusicological diversity.

Indigenous songs carry linguistic, historical, and moral values vital for cultural continuity. Integrating these songs into music classes can promote cultural pride while fostering musical craftsmanship. However, successfully embedding local repertoire demands instructional models that go beyond mere song transmission.

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The MAWAR model emerged from action-research projects across several junior high schools and has shown promise for scaffolding creative and reflective learning processes. Its sequence—Motivation, Activity, Insight, Action, Reflection—is rooted in socio-constructivist principles that nurture student agency.

This study addresses three research questions: (1) To what extent does MAWAR improve high school students' musical performance skills when applied with indigenous songs? (2) How do students perceive learning through MAWAR compared with conventional methods? (3) What challenges and enabling factors influence the model's classroom implementation?

By focusing on senior high school learners, the study extends previous MAWAR investigations centred on middle-school populations, providing empirical data for curriculum developers and teacher-training programmes.

The article proceeds with a theoretical review, outlines the methodological framework, presents key findings, and discusses their implications for cultivating culturally grounded, skill-oriented music education.

Music Education in the Indonesian High School Context

The 2024 National Curriculum Guidelines for Indonesian secondary schools emphasize the importance of arts education in developing holistic learners. Specifically, music is intended to nurture creativity, aesthetic appreciation, emotional intelligence, and cultural identity. Despite these progressive aims, music education in many Indonesian high schools still struggles with inconsistent implementation.

Several systemic issues underlie this gap. First, standardized assessment systems place disproportionate weight on cognitive achievement, marginalizing creative disciplines. Music classes often become ancillary, with reduced time allocation or non-specialist instructors. Second, curriculum delivery is often oriented toward rote reproduction of existing songs, typically from Western or commercial genres, neglecting students' lived cultural contexts.

A nationwide audit of arts education by the Ministry of Education in 2023 revealed that over 60% of high schools lacked access to contextualized learning materials for regional music. This disconnect results in students acquiring superficial musical competence with limited opportunities to express cultural meaning, depriving them of an avenue for identity formation and cultural agency.



In this context, a pedagogical shift is needed—one that foregrounds student-centered, culturally rooted instruction while maintaining academic rigor and musical excellence. The MAWAR model responds directly to this need.

Indigenous Songs as Cultural Capital

Indigenous or “lagu daerah” songs represent more than musical artifacts—they are embodied repositories of local knowledge systems, spiritual cosmologies, and social ethics. These songs are often transmitted orally through generations, encompassing elements such as regional dialects, symbolic metaphors, and community values.

From a sociocultural perspective, these songs serve as cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), enabling learners to connect with their heritage and gain social recognition within and beyond their communities. Their pedagogical potential lies in their familiarity and emotional resonance, which foster intrinsic motivation, especially when contrasted with foreign music genres that may feel alien or imposed.

Integrating indigenous music in education promotes cultural empathy, strengthens intergenerational continuity, and fosters aesthetic authenticity. Studies by Sedyawati (2019) and Latif (2022) have shown that students who learn and perform regional songs demonstrate greater musical expressiveness, lyrical sensitivity, and cultural confidence.

Moreover, in multicultural nations like Indonesia, indigenous music serves as a bridge across ethnic groups, enhancing social cohesion and national identity. Rather than being relics of the past, these musical forms become dynamic platforms for creative expression and dialogue.

MAWAR Instructional Model

The MAWAR model was developed through iterative cycles of action research in response to the need for a culturally responsive and process-oriented music learning framework. Rooted in constructivist learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978), the model integrates experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and Bloom’s revised taxonomy, guiding learners from comprehension to creation.

The model consists of five distinct yet interrelated phases:

1. **Motivation:** Teachers use culturally embedded stories, local videos, or traditional rituals to spark curiosity. This aligns with emotional priming, activating learners’ affective domains to increase attention and receptivity.



2. Activity: Students collaboratively explore melodic and rhythmic elements of an indigenous song. Techniques include group rehearsal, peer feedback, and call-and-response exercises. This phase enhances kinesthetic and auditory intelligence (Gardner, 2011).
3. Insight: Guided analysis tasks lead students to investigate the cultural origins, lyrical content, and musical structure of the piece. They compare it with contemporary genres, fostering cross-genre literacy and critical cultural thinking.
4. Action: Students engage in arrangement, reinterpretation, or performance of the piece, integrating their own style and understanding. This empowers learners as musical decision-makers rather than passive reproducers.
5. Reflection: Students document their learning journey through reflective journals, group discussions, or video blogs. This phase enhances metacognition, helping students internalize learning and recognize its broader significance.

The cyclical structure ensures continuity and depth while remaining adaptable across different cultural and instructional contexts.

Musical Skill Indicators

For the purpose of this study, musical skills are conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, encompassing technical, expressive, and collaborative competencies. Drawing on performance assessment frameworks by NAfME (National Association for Music Education) and adapted for local contexts, the study identifies four core dimensions:

1. Instrumental Technique – The ability to play local or modern instruments accurately and expressively, including fingering, articulation, and tone control.
2. Vocal Expression – Proficiency in pitch accuracy, phrasing, diction (especially in local languages), and emotional delivery.
3. Ensemble Coordination – Collaborative performance with peers, demonstrating synchronization, listening sensitivity, and spatial awareness.
4. Creative Arrangement – Ability to modify, combine, or innovate musical elements while respecting the source material's cultural integrity.

A 24-item rubric instrument was developed to evaluate these dimensions. The rubric ensures consistency and fairness in assessment and is complemented by peer feedback and self-evaluation forms, encouraging reflective musical growth.



Supporting Learning Theories

The MAWAR model is grounded in a triangulated pedagogical framework that synthesizes:

5. Constructivism – Learning is an active process of constructing knowledge based on previous experiences. MAWAR's phases are aligned with this principle, enabling learners to build on cultural familiarity.
6. Project-Based Learning (PBL) – Each musical task in MAWAR is framed as a mini-project involving inquiry, planning, collaboration, and public performance, thus reflecting the core tenets of PBL.
7. Multiple Intelligences Theory (Gardner, 2011) – The model taps into linguistic, musical, interpersonal, and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences. By doing so, it validates diverse learner strengths and encourages holistic participation.
8. Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017) – Rather than assimilating students into dominant musical cultures, MAWAR affirms their identities and promotes cultural regeneration. This pedagogy positions students not just as learners, but as cultural stewards and creators.

By interweaving these theories, the MAWAR model offers a transformative educational experience—one that cultivates both musical competence and cultural consciousness.

METHODS

A convergent mixed-methods design combines quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test measures with qualitative case studies. This approach triangulates statistical trends against nuanced classroom realities.

Two public high schools from South Sulawesi participated. A total of 92 eleventh-grade students (aged 16–17) were assigned to experimental (MAWAR) and control (traditional) groups. Four music teachers underwent a two-day MAWAR workshop prior to implementation.

Quantitative data were collected using a 24-item performance rubric ($\alpha = .89$) covering technique, accuracy, expression, creativity, and collaboration. Student perceptions were gauged via a 15-item Likert questionnaire ($\alpha = .91$). Semi-structured interviews captured teacher insights.

The treatment spanned eight 90-minute sessions over four weeks. Experimental classes followed the MAWAR sequence with the South Sulawesi song 'Anging Mamiri' and the Torajan lullaby 'O Mama'. Control classes employed teacher demonstrations followed by individual practice.



Paired-sample t-tests evaluated within-group gains, while ANCOVA controlled for initial differences across groups. Qualitative data underwent thematic coding supported by NVivo 14, ensuring trustworthiness through member checking and inter-rater reliability.

RESULTS

The study involved a pre- and post-intervention analysis of student musical performance using a standardized rubric. In the experimental group employing the MAWAR model, students exhibited a statistically significant increase in their mean scores, from 65.4 (SD = 7.1) to 82.7 (SD = 6.3), marking a 26.5% relative improvement. By contrast, the control group, which followed traditional instructional strategies, improved only marginally, from 66.1 (SD = 6.8) to 70.2 (SD = 7.0), accounting for a modest 6.2% increase.

A one-way Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was employed to control for pre-test differences. The results revealed a significant main effect of the instructional model on post-test performance scores, $F(1, 89) = 34.67$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .28$, indicating a large effect size. These results suggest that the MAWAR model significantly enhances student musical skill development compared to conventional approaches. The statistical power of the test ($1 - \beta = .95$) affirms the reliability of this conclusion.

Furthermore, subgroup analyses indicated no significant gender-based differences in score improvement, suggesting the model's broad applicability across diverse student populations.

The rubric used in the assessment included five key musical skill components: creative arrangement, ensemble coordination, instrumental technique, vocal expression, and rhythmic accuracy. Among these, creative arrangement showed the highest gain of +23%, followed by ensemble coordination (+19%), instrumental technique (+16%), and rhythmic accuracy (+14%). While vocal expression recorded the smallest gain (+12%), it remained statistically significant ($p < .05$).

These findings highlight the MAWAR model's particular strength in fostering creative autonomy and collaborative musicianship. The "Wawasan" and "Action" phases of MAWAR—where students are encouraged to arrange and perform songs—appeared instrumental in promoting creative arrangement abilities. During the "Activity" stage, emphasis on small group work helped refine ensemble coordination and synchrony.

Interestingly, improvements in vocal expression, although lower in percentage terms, were still critical, as many students began the intervention with high levels of vocal self-consciousness. Progress in this area suggests enhanced self-efficacy and willingness to explore



new vocal techniques, likely due to the culturally familiar and emotionally resonant nature of the indigenous songs used.

To complement the objective performance data, student perceptions were gathered through a 15-item Likert-scale questionnaire and triangulated via semi-structured interviews. Quantitatively, students in the experimental group reported high engagement ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.44$) and cultural appreciation ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.39$).

Qualitative feedback from interviews revealed deeper emotional and cognitive connections to the learning process. Students repeatedly mentioned “feeling proud to perform songs from our own region,” and “being able to express our identity through music.” One student stated, *“I used to think our traditional music was outdated, but now I see how rich and beautiful it is when we arrange it in our own style.”*

Many students also appreciated the shift in classroom dynamics, noting a stronger sense of ownership and collaborative spirit. The “Reflection” phase was particularly impactful, allowing students to critically assess not only their performances but also their understanding of the cultural meanings behind the songs. These insights support the theory that culturally responsive pedagogies increase both affective and cognitive engagement.

Despite the clear benefits, several implementation challenges were noted. Teachers identified time limitations within the standard school timetable as a significant barrier. The MAWAR model, especially its “Insight” and “Reflection” phases, demands adequate class time for meaningful discussion and critical thinking, which was difficult to accommodate within 45–60-minute sessions.

Additionally, the scarcity of accessible, well-documented indigenous music—particularly those with notations and contextual background—posed difficulties. Many teachers expressed the need for institutional support to compile and digitize regional songbooks. Some teachers also faced initial difficulty shifting from teacher-centered instruction to more facilitative roles. However, most adapted well after training and ongoing reflection.

Interestingly, a few students initially struggled with the unfamiliar melodic structures or languages of certain indigenous songs. Nevertheless, these moments became rich opportunities for peer teaching and cultural learning.

To ensure data reliability and validity, the study implemented several measures. The performance rubric and student survey instruments were subjected to expert judgment and pilot testing, yielding high internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.89$ for performance rubric, 0.91 for the perception survey).



Peer observers conducted blind evaluations of group performances using the rubric. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen's kappa and ICC, with a final inter-observer agreement of 0.82, indicating strong consistency. Survey items also underwent item-total correlation analysis, all exceeding the minimum accepted value of 0.30.

In interviews, member checking procedures were employed to validate thematic interpretations with participants. Observational data were coded using NVivo with intercoder agreement above 85%. Together, these strategies bolster the credibility, dependability, and transferability of the findings.

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Findings

The observed improvements in students' musical proficiency—particularly in creative arrangement—support the premise that constructivist learning environments foster deeper engagement and skill acquisition. Within the MAWAR framework, learning is not passive but rooted in active meaning-making, where students connect new content to prior cultural and musical knowledge.

This model aligns with Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which posits that learners can achieve higher cognitive performance with structured support. In this case, indigenous songs served as familiar cultural scaffolds that enabled students to transcend mere reproduction of music toward innovative expression and reinterpretation. These findings affirm that culturally situated learning fosters both cognitive flexibility and musical fluency.

The statistically significant results not only quantify growth but reflect a shift in learning orientation—from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered exploration. Students not only learned to play or sing songs, but internalized a broader understanding of musical narrative, cultural heritage, and personal expression.

Indigenous Songs as Pedagogical Bridges

This study confirms the efficacy of indigenous music as a pedagogical medium, not only for musical instruction but for cultural dialogue. Unlike standard instructional content that often privileges Western musical forms, the use of local songs embedded students within a cultural continuum, connecting ancestral traditions to contemporary expressions.

Students exhibited pride in engaging with music “from their roots,” and their performances often included spontaneous innovations—adding local instruments, harmonizing in



new ways, or blending genres. This recontextualization demonstrates that tradition, when treated not as static heritage but as living culture, can be a source of creativity rather than constraint.

The MAWAR model provided a structured yet adaptable vehicle for this bridging process. For example, in the “Insight” phase, students compared indigenous and global music styles, allowing them to critically evaluate form and function. In the “Action” phase, they used this analysis to reimagine local songs with modern textures, evidencing higher-order musical thinking.

This fusion of tradition and modernity reaffirms the value of culturally sustaining pedagogy, which affirms and extends students' cultural resources rather than replacing them with dominant paradigms.

Comparison with Previous Studies

While previous studies have explored music learning using culturally relevant materials, most were qualitative in nature and lacked a robust experimental design. This research addresses that gap by employing quantitative instruments, statistical analysis (ANCOVA), and triangulated qualitative data, thus contributing empirical evidence to support the integration of indigenous content in formal music curricula.

In contrast to studies that merely measured student motivation or engagement, this study demonstrates actual skill acquisition in core musical domains—creative arrangement, ensemble coordination, and vocal technique. Furthermore, the findings add weight to calls from educational theorists such as Paris and Alim (2017), who argue for culture-as-content rather than culture-as-context.

This research also builds upon Indonesian scholarship advocating the revitalization of local wisdom in education (kearifan lokal). While previous initiatives emphasized cultural preservation, MAWAR emphasizes both preservation and productive transformation, where culture becomes both object and tool of learning.

The model may therefore serve as a prototype for future comparative studies across other regions or even countries with similarly rich musical heritages, offering a scalable framework adaptable to diverse cultural settings.

Implications for Teachers and Institutions

The outcomes of this study hold significant implications for teacher training, school leadership, and policy formulation. Firstly, teacher professional development must go beyond



pedagogical methods and include ethnomusicological literacy. Teachers need resources, time, and mentorship to confidently teach, contextualize, and co-create indigenous music with students.

Secondly, schools should consider developing regional music resource libraries, both physical and digital, that catalog indigenous repertoire along with teaching guides, lyric translations, notations, and performance recordings. These banks would be invaluable for novice teachers or those working outside their home region.

Thirdly, educational leaders and local governments can facilitate artist–educator partnerships, inviting traditional musicians into schools for live performances, co-teaching sessions, or community-based projects. Such collaborations not only enrich instruction but strengthen school–community ties.

Lastly, curriculum designers should allow flexibility in assessment structures to accommodate creative processes, group arrangements, and reflection, rather than rigidly adhering to technical proficiency alone. The holistic impact of the MAWAR model demands a rethinking of how we define and evaluate “success” in music education.

Limitations

While the results are compelling, several limitations must be acknowledged. The study was geographically restricted to two schools in South Sulawesi, which may limit generalizability across Indonesia’s vast ethnolinguistic and educational contexts. Variations in student background, teacher experience, and institutional support could influence the model’s effectiveness elsewhere.

Moreover, the duration of implementation—four weeks—may not fully capture long-term learning outcomes such as skill retention, sustained motivation, or cultural attitudes. Longer intervention periods or follow-up assessments would provide richer insights into the durability of impact.

In terms of methodology, while the mixed-methods approach adds depth, some data sources such as teacher journals and peer observations may still be subject to interpretive bias. Future research could include control-class ethnographic observation for better comparison or employ video analysis to corroborate observational claims.

Lastly, while ANCOVA controlled for pre-test differences, random assignment was not feasible due to school constraints, and as such, causality cannot be asserted with absolute confidence, though the evidence is strongly suggestive.



There are several promising avenues for future inquiry. Firstly, the development of a national digital platform to curate and disseminate indigenous music would support teachers across Indonesia. Such a platform could feature modular lesson plans, multi-language lyrics, audio/video archives, and user-generated arrangements—a collective effort in cultural education.

Secondly, future research could explore the integration of the MAWAR model into other disciplines such as dance, theater, and visual arts, to investigate how multi-modal approaches amplify cultural learning. Cross-disciplinary projects might uncover new synergies between cultural expression and 21st-century skills.

Longitudinal studies are needed to evaluate sustained engagement, alumni outcomes, and whether exposure to MAWAR increases cultural activism or pursuit of arts-related careers. It would also be useful to explore student identity development, especially in urban settings where cultural hybridity is more pronounced.

Finally, comparative studies between provinces or countries with strong oral traditions (e.g., Philippines, Malaysia, India) could further test the international adaptability of the MAWAR model, contributing to global discourse on decolonizing arts education.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the MAWAR instructional model, when anchored in indigenous songs, substantially enhances high school students' musical skills and cultural appreciation. The structured five-phase cycle fosters motivation, analysis, creation, and reflection—hallmarks of holistic music learning.

Quantitative improvements and enthusiastic student perceptions suggest that culturally sustained pedagogy can synergise with skills-based curricula. By foregrounding local heritage, music education becomes a conduit for both artistic excellence and cultural preservation.

Educational stakeholders should support teachers in accessing regional repertoire, allocate sufficient instructional time, and integrate reflective practices that honour learners' identities.

Future research should replicate the model in varied cultural contexts and explore technology-enhanced adaptations to sustain indigenous music traditions in an increasingly digital world.



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