

## Teaching Pedagogical Approaches to Teaching the Pa'gellu' Dance to International Students in the BIPA Program

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### ABSTRACT

The Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) program at the Christian University of Indonesia Toraja (UKI Toraja) not only facilitates Indonesian language acquisition for international students but also introduces them to local culture. One key element of this cultural immersion is the Pa'gellu' dance—a traditional performance of the Toraja people. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the instructional strategies used in teaching the Pa'gellu' dance to 17 international students from the University of Western Australia, Denpasar campus. Data were collected through structured observations, focusing on students' engagement across seven instructional stages: Introduction and Theory, Basic Practice, Technique Refinement, Costume and Performance, Cultural Integration, Evaluation, and Staging. Findings reveal that international students successfully met the learning objectives. They demonstrated the ability to recognize, practice, and perform the Pa'gellu' dance in a culminating presentation. Although the teaching structure mirrored that used for local students, the content was simplified for non-native participants. Instructional methods included lectures, demonstrations, guided practice, drills, simulations, and performance exercises. Despite linguistic and cultural barriers, students were able to grasp the core techniques of the Pa'gellu' dance. The study suggests that immersive, performance-based pedagogy can effectively bridge cultural and linguistic gaps in arts education for foreign learners.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The globalization of education has heightened the demand for cross-cultural exchange and understanding (Shadieff, Wang, & Huang, 2021). In line with this, it is essential to introduce traditional cultural elements to international students to foster mutual respect and appreciation across diverse cultures (Tiawati, Rahmat, Kemal, & Chen, 2022). One such effort is the Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) program at the Christian University of Indonesia Toraja (UKI Toraja), which is designed to teach Indonesian to non-native speakers. BIPA students typically come from cultural backgrounds distinct from the Torajan culture and language they are learning (Yulianeta & Amandangi, 2021). Therefore, in addition to language instruction, these students are also introduced to Torajan cultural elements, such as traditional dance, including the Pa'gellu' dance (Hakpantria, Trivena, Mersilina Luther Patintingan, & Nanda Saputra, 2022).

One of the efforts to introduce Toraja culture is through the teaching of the Pa'gellu' dance, a traditional dance of the Toraja people in Indonesia, to international students in the BIPA (Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers) program at the Christian University of Indonesia (UKI) Toraja (Ode & Alamiah, 2024). The Pa'gellu' dance is a ceremonial dance of the Toraja community, performed to celebrate joyful occasions such as house inaugurations, welcoming guests, harvest festivals, moving into a new house, and the Rambu Tuka' ceremony (thanksgiving event).

The Pa'gellu' dance is a group dance typically performed by young women who have reached adulthood in odd numbers, such as 3, 5, 7, or 9, featuring 12 types of movements including Pa'tabe', Pa'gellu Tua, Pa'dena'-dena', Pa'langkan-langkan, Penggirik tang taru', Pa'lolok pao, Pangrapa Pentulun, Pa'tulekke, Passiri, Pa'kaka bale, Pangrampanan, and Pa'tutu' kaka bua (Pala'langan, 2014). The movements of this dance vary depending on the region where it is performed. These are traditional movements that remain quite simple, often with similar gestures and repetition. The dance originated from the community's expression of joy after returning victorious from the battlefield, where they would dance to celebrate their success. Pa'gellu' is known for its intricate movements, colorful costumes, and symbolic meaning. Although considered complex, the basic movements in Pa'gellu', such as tiptoeing (ma' kadetten) and the graceful yet staccato hand movements (dira'pak), are relatively easy to follow for someone learning Pa'gellu' with intensive practice.

Additionally, the Pa'gellu' dance is a traditional Toraja dance in which the patterns and movements reflect the values upheld by the Toraja people. The movements of this dance carry philosophical meanings and values, encompassing religious, social, entertainment, communication, and economic aspects that are intertwined with the role of art and community life. For the Toraja people, this dance represents pride and an expression of joy for the abundant blessings granted by God Almighty (Trivena et al., 2024). Therefore, introducing the Pa'gellu' dance to international students is expected not only to serve as an engaging medium for cultural learning but also to contribute to the preservation and promotion of the rich cultural heritage of the Toraja community on an international scale.

This research aims to describe the pedagogical approach used in teaching the Pa'gellu' dance to international students at UKI Toraja by detailing the specific learning steps involved, which include Introduction and Theory, Basic Practice, Technique Deepening, Costume and Performance, Cultural Integration, Evaluation, and Staging. By exploring the teaching of the Pa'gellu' dance in depth, this study seeks to emphasize the benefits of integrating traditional arts into language and cultural education for international students. Furthermore, this research will address the broader implications for cultural preservation and international cultural exchange (Evans, Kensington-Miller, & Novak, 2021).

Based on the background explained, the research problem in this study is: how is the learning process of the Pa'gellu' dance for foreign students, and what are the inhibiting and supporting factors? This study aims to understand and introduce the Pa'gellu' dance and to comprehend the learning process of the Pa'gellu' dance. The benefits of this research are to serve as a reference for other academics, as a resource for preserving the traditional dance of Toraja, and to enhance readers' knowledge. Additionally, the results of this research can be used as a guide in introducing the dances of Tana Toraja Regency to foreign nationals, particularly the Pa'gellu' dance.'

## 2. METHODS

The research method employed in this study is qualitative research utilizing a descriptive approach (Sugiyono, 2019). This descriptive approach is specifically chosen to gain a deeper understanding of how the Pa'gellu' dance is taught to international students. The research was conducted in Denpasar, Bali, involving 17 students from the University of Western Australia as the subjects of the study. An observation sheet was utilized as the instrument to assess the implementation of the Pa'gellu' dance lessons for foreign students (Kurniati et al., 2023). The activities observed during the Pa'gellu' dance lessons included the following:

**Table 1.** Activities in the Learning of the Pa'gellu' Dance

| No. | Activities               | Materials                                  | Description                                                                                                               |
|-----|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.  | Introduction and Theory  | History and Meaning of the Pa'gellu' Dance | Students are encouraged to understand the historical background, philosophy, and meaning of the Pa'gellu' dance.          |
|     |                          | Components of the Pa'gellu' Dance          | Explanation of the accompanying music, costumes, and props used in this dance.                                            |
| 2.  | Basic Practice           | Basic Movements                            | Students learn the basic movements of the Pa'gellu' dance, including foot steps, hand positions, and facial expressions.  |
|     |                          | Coordination, and Rhythm                   | Practice to improve coordination of movements with the accompanying music.                                                |
| 3.  | Technique Deepening      | Advanced Movements                         | Students learn more complex movements and special techniques in the Pa'gellu' dance.                                      |
|     |                          | Choreography                               | Introduction to the complete choreography and practice to master the entire dance.                                        |
| 4.  | Costumes and Performance | Costume Introduction                       | Students learn about the costumes used in the Pa'gellu' dance, including how to wear them.                                |
|     |                          | Performance Simulation                     | Performance practice with costumes and props, as well as simulation of performing in front of an audience.                |
| 5.  | Evaluation               | Progress Evaluation                        | Periodic evaluations to assess students' progress in mastering the Pa'gellu' dance.                                       |
| 6.  | Workshop/Performance     | Collaborative Performance                  | Students are given the opportunity to perform with local dancers at cultural events, enhancing their learning experience. |

In addition to observing the applied learning aspects, data collection was also conducted through interviews and documentation. The interviews were structured with open-ended questions to encourage detailed responses from the participants and lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes each. Data were collected at various stages of the dance instruction to capture a comprehensive view of the learning process, including observations made during the Introduction and Theory, Basic Practice, and Performance stages.

The collected data were then analyzed through the stages of reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved coding and categorizing responses to identify key themes and challenges faced by the students. This process was carried out by the research team, ensuring a systematic approach to analysis. The findings were then presented in a structured format, highlighting the insights gained from both observations and interviews, ultimately leading to the drawing of conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the pedagogical approach in teaching the Pa'gellu' dance.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to describe the aspects of learning the Pa'gellu' dance for foreign students. Data collection activities were conducted over a period of 2 weeks, during which foreign students learned the Pa'gellu' dance from dance theory to performance, taught by a dance instructor and students who are also Pa'gellu' dancers from UKI Toraja. The following is a summary of the research findings.

#### 2.1. Introduction and Theory

The first learning activity for foreign students in the Pa'gellu' dance program is the introduction and theory. This activity is conducted in a classroom setting with a 45-minute time allocation, starting with a brief introduction followed by the presentation of the material. The material covered includes the history and meaning of the Pa'gellu' dance and its components. In the first part, students are introduced to the historical background, philosophy, and meaning of the Pa'gellu' dance, while the second part covers the accompanying music, costumes, and props used in the dance. The following is an image from the presentation of the material in the classroom.



**Figure 1.** Presentation of the Introduction and Theory of the Pa'gellu' Dance in the classroom by a dance instructor from UKI Toraja

The presentation of the material was supported by showing images and videos of Toraja dancers performing the Pa'gellu' dance through an LCD projector to help students better understand the material presented. This introduction and theory aim to provide an overview of the Toraja people and their culture, as well as a brief introduction to the Pa'gellu' dance, to broaden the perspective and interest of foreign students regarding the Pa'gellu' dance. The foreign students listened and engaged with enthusiasm, and some students asked questions related to the material presented. The following are some of the students' questions:

*A : What is the daily life of the Toraja people like?*

*B : When and where is this dance performed?*

*C : Is it difficult to perform this dance?*

## 2.2. Basic Practice

The second activity is basic practice. In this aspect, students are taken outside the classroom to learn the basic movements, coordination, and rhythm of the Pa'gellu' dance. This is important for teaching movements such as foot steps, hand positions, and facial expressions, as well as practicing to improve the coordination of movements with the accompanying music. This activity is conducted over 3 sessions, with each session lasting 45 minutes. The basic movements taught include ma' kadetten (tiptoeing) and ma'ra'pak (staccato and graceful hand movements), as these movements are performed from the beginning to the end of the dance without stopping. Initially, students found it challenging, especially with the tiptoeing (ma' kadetten) because the body weight during this movement is supported on the toes, requiring intensive practice. Additionally, students also struggled to synchronize with the hand movements (ma'ra'pak). The following is an image of students engaging in basic practice:



**Figure 2.** Basic Practice Activities for Ma'kadetten and Ma'ra'pak Movements in the Pa'gellu' Dance

## 2.3 Technique Deepening

In this learning activity, students practice more complex movements and special techniques in the Pa'gellu' dance, as well as an introduction to the complete choreography and practice to master the entire dance. This activity is conducted over 7 sessions, each lasting 45 minutes. The 12 movements in the Pa'gellu' dance are taught progressively, starting with Pa'tabe', Pa'gellu Tua, Pa'dena'-dena', Pa'langkan-langkan, Penggirik tang taru', Pa'lolok pao, Pangrapa' Pentallun, Pa'tulekke, Passiri, Pa'kaka bale, Pangrampanan, and Pa'tutu' kaka bua. The twelve movements are not taught all at once; instead, 2-3 movements are taught in each session with several repetitions to facilitate memorization by the foreign students. In the 7th session, all movements are combined and practiced with multiple repetitions from the first to the twelfth movement.



**Figure 3.** Technique Deepening of the 12 Movements in the Pa'gellu'

#### **2.4 Costumes and Performance**

This activity is conducted over 2 sessions, during which the instructor demonstrates the costumes used in the Pa'gellu' dance, including how to wear them. Additionally, the various parts of the Pa'gellu' dancer's costume are explained, including the garments worn, accessories such as the kandaure and head decorations made of beads, as well as the meaning of the colors and motifs present on the Pa'gellu' dance costume.



**Figure 4.** Costume Fitting and Introduction for Pa'gellu' Dancers

In this session, students also engage in a final rehearsal using the costumes and accompanied by the supporting music before the final performance. Foreign students demonstrate their commitment during this final rehearsal to deliver their best performance in the last session and to correct any mistakes or parts they have not yet memorized. The instructor also continues to provide reinforcement and appreciation for the progress made by the foreign students.



## 2.5 Evaluation

Evaluation activities are conducted periodically at each session with the goal of assessing students' progress in mastering the Pa'gellu' dance. Additionally, through these evaluation activities, students receive feedback on their performance, allowing them to identify mistakes in their movements and make improvements in subsequent sessions. This is expected to result in significant progress in the learning of the Pa'gellu' dance by the foreign students.

## 2.6 Workshop/Performance

This learning activity is the final part of the entire learning process. Foreign students perform the Pa'gellu' dance from start to finish, accompanied by the instructor, with complete costumes and drum music. This performance is witnessed by an audience consisting of students and faculty from UKI Toraja and the University of Western Australia. The workshop and performance also serve as the concluding event for the cultural and language introduction program for foreign students.

After completing 14 sessions of learning, foreign students were assessed on their ability to demonstrate the results of their Pa'gellu' dance training. Foreign students were able to perform the Pa'gellu' dance in groups in front of the instructor and regular students, accompanied by music. Their abilities were evaluated by the instructor through a final assessment that covered several criteria of the Pa'gellu' dance, including affective, cognitive, and psychomotor aspects. The learning outcomes for foreign students in Pa'gellu' dance differ from those of regular classes, but the differences are not significant. Although their scores did not reach the maximum, foreign students were still able to meet the three aspects of the assessment in Pa'gellu' dance learning.



**Figure 4.** Pa'gellu' Dance Performance

Additionally, the results achieved align with the initial learning objectives, as students were able to recognize and practice the Pa'gellu' dance through a short presentation. Essentially, the implementation of Pa'gellu' dance learning for foreign students and local students is not significantly different; however, it is not as comprehensive as the dance education provided to local students. Foreign students are taught exclusively the Pa'gellu' dance, while local students are instructed in several types of Indonesian dances. Given that foreign students have limited exposure to Indonesian dance, focusing on one type of dance facilitates mastery (Boonstra & Rae, 2023). This approach also

takes into account cultural differences, particularly in dance traditions between the students' home regions and Toraja, which present varying levels of difficulty.

Several teaching methods were also employed by the instructor in the Pa'gellu' dance learning activities, including the lecture method, demonstration method, practice method, drill method, simulation method, and performance method (Tiawati et al., 2022). The lecture method was used to introduce the Pa'gellu' dance and explain the meaning behind each movement. This method was chosen to ensure that foreign students first understand the theory, which fosters interest and motivation in performing the Pa'gellu' dance. The lecture method is commonly used to introduce and explain the meaning behind the Pa'gellu' dance movements. Its use helps students, including those not from the local culture, to grasp the theory and deeper cultural context before they start learning the physical movements. In line with this, research conducted by Sadili et al. indicates that the lecture method is used in dance education to orally convey the meaning and origins of the dances being taught (Sadli, Sekarningsih, & Budiman, 2022). This can also enhance their interest and motivation in exploring and dancing the Pa'gellu' dance more deeply. This method serves as an important foundation before they engage in the physical practice and application of the movements (Rizal, 2023).

The drill method is a teaching approach focused on repetitive and intensive practice of the Pa'gellu' dance movements. Research conducted by Sudirman et al. states that the drill method facilitates students' understanding of a subject, particularly when the emphasis is on practice and hands-on training (Sudirman & Zain, 2023). In the context of dance education, this method is highly effective for helping students master basic techniques and improve the accuracy and speed of their movements (Putri, Wardiah, & Nurdin, 2023). Consistent repetition allows students to internalize the movements until they become automatic, which is crucial for dance performances (Purnamasari & Masunah, 2020). Through drill, students can correct mistakes, enhance body coordination, and build the muscle memory necessary for dancing efficiently and expressively (Pangesti & Wadiyo, 2021). The simulation method involves creating scenarios or settings that resemble real conditions, where students can practice the Pa'gellu' dance as if they were in an actual performance. In this method, students not only practice movements but also learn to express the emotions and messages conveyed by the dance (Dou, Jia, & Ge, 2021). Simulations may include stage settings, costume usage, and interaction with an audience (even if simulated) (El Raheb, Stergiou, Katifori, & Ioannidis, 2019). This method is important for helping students understand the performative context of the Pa'gellu' dance, increase their confidence, and prepare them for real-life performances.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Pa'gellu' dance learning method at UKI Toraja incorporates a variety of instructional strategies, including lectures, demonstrations, practice, drills, simulations, and performances. The process begins with the introduction of theoretical concepts, followed by basic practice, deepening of techniques, and the use of costumes, concluding with evaluation and performances. Although international students faced some challenges, they successfully mastered the basics of the dance. This learning approach proves effective not only in introducing and preserving Toraja culture but also in facilitating international cultural exchange.

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