

The Mandala Model: A Conceptual Framework for Preserving Cultural Identity in Local Culture-Based Elementary School Teacher Education

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Abstract: Social and cultural transformation in the era of globalization presents challenges to the preservation of cultural identity in education, particularly among prospective elementary school teachers. Prospective teachers are required to integrate local culture into learning as a foundation for character formation and the strengthening of students' cultural identity; however, current learning tends to provide limited opportunities for learning experiences rooted in local culture. This article aims to develop the Mandala Model as a conceptual framework for local culture-based learning in elementary school teacher education. This study employs a conceptual approach through an integrative literature review and synthesis of theories encompassing social constructivism, experiential learning, culturally responsive teaching, and local culture-based education. The review resulted in a conceptual framework of the Mandala Model that places local culture at the center of learning through the processes of Manambah (reflection/observation), Ngripta (creativity), Daya (actualization), and Laku Adiluhung (evaluation/reflection). The Mandala Model is conceptually expected to strengthen cultural identity, creativity, and cultural literacy among prospective elementary school teachers. The Mandala Model makes a conceptual contribution by integrating local culture-based learning and experiential learning within a holistic learning framework.

Keywords: mandala Model; local culture; Elementary School Teacher Education; 21st-century learning

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has brought significant changes to education and has created challenges in the form of decreasing attention to local cultural values that constitute a nation's identity. This condition has contributed to the weakening of young people's understanding of their own regional cultures, making educational efforts to preserve them necessary. Education plays a strategic role in transmitting cultural values to younger generations. Elementary education is an appropriate target because childhood is a critical period for laying foundational development. At this developmental stage, children need stimulation to shape their character, attitudes, and cultural awareness. Therefore, elementary school teachers are required not only to master academic competencies but also to possess the ability to integrate local cultural values into the learning process.

Education does not only develop thinking skills but also nurtures feeling, intention, and character within a living cultural context. Thus, students' creativity and adaptability grow from meaningful socio-cultural experiences. In line with Haikal's view, education that does not focus solely on cognitive aspects but also addresses emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions will produce individuals who are wise, creative, and independent in facing the challenges of the digital world (Haikal et al., 2025). The lack of cultural understanding in education can result in the loss of identity, decreased creativity, and weakened national character. Education disconnected from culture may produce intelligent individuals without direction rather than cultured individuals who are able to live wisely and meaningfully.

The phenomenon identified in dance learning activities in the Elementary School Teacher Education program at Universitas Nusantara PGRI Kediri shows that students' achievement in developing creativity to create elementary-school children's dance works based on local wisdom remains low.

This condition has an impact on the final assessment results. Among the 2024 cohort, in the first semester of the 2025 academic year, there were 253 students, of whom only 30 were able to demonstrate creativity, particularly in exploring dance movements grounded in local culture, according to creativity indicators adopted from Torrance's creativity theory: fluency, originality, flexibility, elaboration, and connection with the local cultural context. Most students were still unable to produce

dance movements with uniqueness, flexibility of thought, and a strong connection to local cultural values. Therefore, a more effective approach to dance education is needed to improve students' creativity so that they can develop dance movements that are not only creative and authentic but also appropriate to the local cultural context and the learning needs of elementary school children.

A factor contributing to students' low creativity is that the learning model used remains relatively conventional and oriented toward teacher-centered learning. This learning model positions the lecturer as the main source of knowledge and controller of the learning process, while students primarily act as recipients of information. Consequently, this learning pattern provides insufficient opportunities for students to explore, experiment, and independently construct creative experiences. Rosala's research indicates that education fundamentally requires several important elements for individual development. These include creativity, emotion, intellect, perception, and the ability to interact effectively within society. All of these are closely related to emotional intelligence (Rosala, 2016).

Research by Suyitno et al. (2019) shows that integrating local wisdom into the learning process can strengthen character values while creating synergy with students' lives. Parmin et al. (2020) argue that local culture-based learning can improve cultural literacy and student engagement in the learning process. Parhan et al. (2023) demonstrate that local wisdom plays an important role in character education and can be implemented across various formal and non-formal educational contexts. In addition, a systematic review of culturally responsive pedagogy indicates that students' cultural backgrounds can increase engagement, sense of belonging, and learning success (Caingcoy, 2023). Other research confirms that culturally responsive education can strengthen the relationship between learning experiences and students' social realities, making learning more meaningful (Smith et al., 2024). Most previous studies have focused on implementing learning strategies or developing specific competencies. Studies offering a conceptual framework that integratively connects local wisdom, creativity, collaboration, reflection, and the strengthening of cultural identity within the context of elementary school teacher education remain relatively limited.

Although various studies have developed local wisdom-based learning, a conceptual model specifically designed for elementary school teacher education that places the strengthening of cultural identity as the primary goal through the syntax of Manembah, Ngripta, Daya, and Laku Adiluhung has not yet been identified. Its conceptual advantage lies in positioning local culture not merely as learning material or context, but as an organizing principle that drives the entire learning experience. This framework is designed as a broader pedagogical framework for strengthening the cultural identity of prospective elementary school teachers through local culture-based learning experiences.

Based on this gap, this study aims to formulate the Mandala Model as a conceptual framework for local culture-based learning to strengthen the cultural identity of prospective elementary school teachers. Although developed in the context of dance learning, the model is designed as a pedagogical framework that can be further examined in other learning contexts requiring the integration of culture, experience, creativity, and reflection. This article focuses on the conceptual construction of the model; testing its validity, practicality, and effectiveness is positioned as an agenda for future research.

METHODS

This study employs a conceptual research approach aimed at developing the Mandala Model as a conceptual synthesis of local culture-based learning in elementary school teacher education. A conceptual approach was selected because this study focuses on developing theoretical ideas and constructing a learning model based on the synthesis of relevant concepts, theories, and research findings. The research data consist of scholarly literature obtained from reputable national and international journal articles, books, and previous studies related to local wisdom, social constructivism, experiential learning, culturally responsive teaching, and culture-based learning. Literature was purposively selected based on three criteria: (1) direct relevance to the constructs required for model development, (2) publication recency to capture developments in the field, and (3) conceptual contribution to culture-based learning and the strengthening of identity. Thus, this study constitutes an integrative literature review for conceptual synthesis rather than a systematic review or meta-analysis.

The analysis used a conceptual synthesis approach to identify relationships among concepts and formulate the structure of the Mandala Model through the stages of literature identification, classification, interpretation, and synthesis. At the identification stage, relevant concepts and theories were collected and critically examined. The classification stage grouped concepts that were related to model development. Interpretation was then conducted to identify relationships among concepts and learning principles that support the strengthening of cultural identity. The interpreted findings were subsequently synthesized into the main components of the Mandala Model, consisting of Manembah (observation), Ngripta (creative exploration), Daya (actualization), and Laku Adiluhung (reflective appreciation), centered on local culture. The synthesis served as the basis for constructing the conceptual framework of the Mandala Model as a local wisdom-based learning model in elementary school teacher education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theoretical Foundations of the Mandala Model

The literature review indicates that the development of the Mandala Model is based on the following theories: social constructivism, experiential learning, creativity, and local culture. Social constructivism provides the basis that knowledge is constructed through interaction and shared meaning-making; experiential learning positions direct experience as a source of learning; creativity theory provides principles for the exploration of ideas and creation; culturally responsive teaching directs learning to connect with learners' cultural backgrounds; while local culture-based education provides value and identity orientations. These five foundations are not positioned as five separate stages but are synthesized into the four syntaxes of the Mandala Model.

Syntax	Pedagogical Component	Theoretical Foundation
Manembah	Observation	Experiential Learning (Dewey)
Ngripta	Creative Exploration	Creativity (Torrance) and social constructivism (Vygotsky)
Daya	Actualization	Experiential Learning (Dewey)
Laku Adiluhung	Reflective Appreciation	Local Culture-Based Education (Latif)

The table above shows that the Mandala Model is constructed with different pedagogical functions through the synthesis of complementary learning theories that support the strengthening of cultural identity among prospective elementary school teachers. This synthesis integrates theories oriented toward learning experience, knowledge construction, creativity development, and culturally grounded education. Through this integration, each syntax of the Mandala Model has not only a pedagogical function but also a philosophical foundation rooted in local cultural values.

The Manembah stage (cultural observation) is grounded in Dewey's Experiential Learning theory. At this stage, students gain direct experience through observing various cultural phenomena in society. These concrete experiences become the starting point for developing an understanding of cultural values, traditions, symbols, and practices that are alive in the surrounding environment. Through observation, students do not merely acquire information but also build cultural awareness as a foundation for learning.

The Ngripta stage (creative exploration) is rooted in Torrance's creativity theory, which views creativity as the ability to generate new ideas that are original, flexible, fluent, and elaborated. At this stage, students creatively explore various possibilities of movement, symbols, and local cultural values to generate new ideas relevant to the cultural context and learning needs. This creative exploration is

also supported by Vygotsky's social constructivism, which positions social interaction as a means of developing ideas and interpreting culture.

The Daya stage is the actualization stage, oriented toward applying and materializing creative ideas into tangible works. This stage is rooted in the principles of experiential learning, which position active experience as an important part of the learning process. Through Daya, students implement the results of their creative exploration into dance compositions, performances, or local culture-based learning products so that ideas developed in the Ngripta stage acquire a concrete form that can be appreciated.

Laku Adiluhung is the reflective appreciation stage that positions local culture as a source of values and a learning orientation. The philosophical foundation of this stage refers to Yudi Latif's ideas on culturally grounded education, which position culture as a foundation for character formation and national identity. Through reflection and appreciation of the learning process and its outcomes, students not only evaluate learning achievement but also develop awareness of the importance of preserving and developing local culture as part of their personal identity and teaching profession.

The four syntaxes form an interconnected conceptual cycle: the cultural experience and awareness developed in Manambah become sources for Ngripta exploration; the resulting exploration is realized through Daya; and the work and experience are subsequently interpreted through Laku Adiluhung. Reflection can direct students back to subsequent observation and exploration. This cyclical pattern is a pedagogical adaptation of the principles of centrality, interconnectedness, and continuity used as the Mandala metaphor.

Mandala Learning Model

The Mandala Model was developed as a conceptual framework that places local culture at the center of learning. Historically, mandala represents values, harmony, and the cultural cosmology of the Indonesian archipelago. Mandala represents a concept of interconnected relationships that form the unity and balance of the cosmos; the circle symbolizes perfection, wholeness, completeness, and the essence of the universe—an invisible and imperceptible energy that nevertheless exists and is present (Kartika, 2007:161). In Buddhism, a mandala is a cosmic model depicting the abode of the Buddha at the center of the universe. Similar to Hindu temples, many Buddhist temple structures were also based on the spiritual model of the mandala (Khan & Varadarajan, 2016). In Nusantara traditions, Mandala is understood as a learning space in which educational processes occur through dialogue, meditation, movement, and the internalization of cultural symbols. This pattern is reflected in architecture, artifacts, and historical sites.

In the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language (KBBI), mandala means a circle and also a religious center. Based on this definition, mandala has a fundamental principle in visual form, namely the circle. The circle symbolizes a complex and recurring cycle. In a deeper sense, the circle is not merely a geometric form but a representation of cosmic order that demonstrates relationships between the center and the periphery or area surrounding the center. The center of the mandala functions as a point of orientation as well as a source of symbolic energy, while the surrounding circles represent the dynamics of life that move continuously, in layers, and in an organized manner.

Philosophically, mandala reflects the concept of unity in diversity, in which every element within the circle has an integral relationship with its center. This pattern shows that processes do not occur linearly but recur in a continuously developing cycle and undergo ongoing transformation. Thus, mandala can be understood as a symbolic system that presents not only an aesthetic dimension but also ontological and epistemological dimensions concerning how humans interpret order, balance, and harmony in life.

The term Mandala is etymologically derived from the Sanskrit *maṇḍala*, meaning “circle,” “center,” or “an organized sacred space.” In ancient Nusantara traditions, Mandala was understood not only as a cosmic symbol but also as a learning space—a spatial arrangement designed to cultivate harmony, concentration, and contemplation. Historically, the design of the Mandala pattern is reflected in temples, pura, or spiritual educational centers such as padepokan and monasteries, where learning took place through meditation practices, teacher–student dialogue, and bodily experience within spaces organized according to cosmological principles (Kartika, 2007).

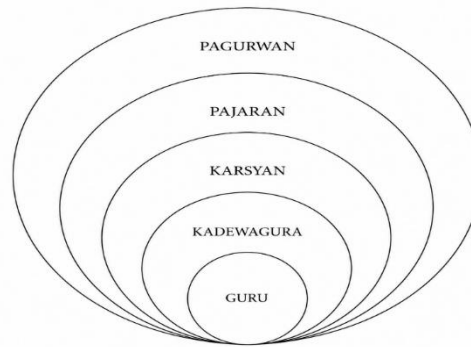


Figure 1. Historical representation of Mandala learning

The diagram shows that Mandala learning in the past was conducted in stages, with the teacher as the center. The learning system demonstrates continuity across the stages undertaken. The teacher made the final determination as to whether an individual could progress to the next level or remain at a stage considered incomplete. This Mandala diagram became a basic reference for developing the Mandala Model in the context of dance learning for students in the elementary school teacher education program. The transformation from the traditional Mandala system into a contemporary learning model demonstrates a shift from spiritual practice toward pedagogical-creative practice without eliminating its basic principles, namely centrality, interconnectedness among processes, and continuity of culture-based learning experiences. Thus, the historical figure functions as a source of conceptual inspiration rather than a procedure adopted directly.

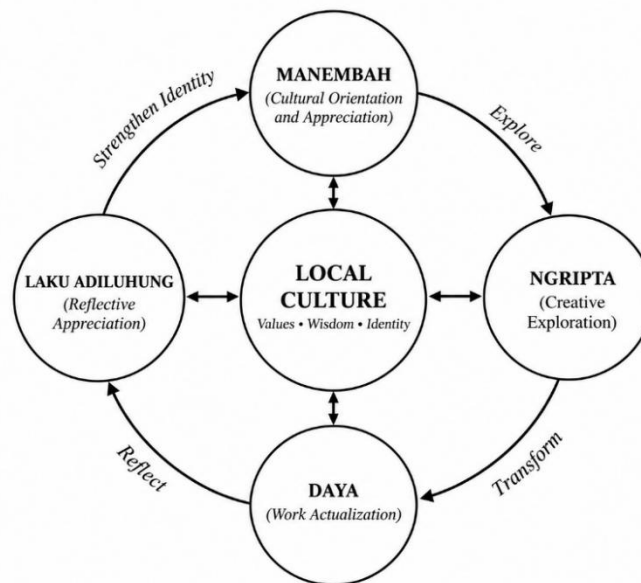


Figure 2. Mandala Model in dance arts education for PGSD students

The diagram demonstrates centrality, interconnectedness, and continuity. Local culture is positioned at the center, with four syntaxes surrounding it. The circular relationship indicates that the learning process is interconnected and can occur cyclically. The labels in the diagram are standardized with the textual explanation: Manembah as cultural orientation and appreciation, Ngripta as creative exploration, Daya as work actualization, and Laku Adiluhung as reflective appreciation. The model does not focus only on cognitive development but also on students' creativity rooted in local culture. Mandala represents an initial reflective stage that directs students to build learning awareness, understand learning objectives, and open space for contemplation of the relationship between art, culture, and life. This stage is strongly rooted in the ideas of reflection and meaningful experience in Dewey's concept (1938).

In the scholarly context, interpreting mandala as a centered circle opens broader possibilities for interpretation, namely as a conceptual framework for understanding various phenomena in spiritual, social, and artistic domains. Therefore, mandala is not merely understood as a visual representation or geometric circle but also as a model of thinking that emphasizes centrality, interconnectedness, and continuity of processes. This perspective allows mandala to be adapted for the development of a dance learning model by positioning learners as the center (centrality). Meanwhile, reflective attitudes, openness of feeling (empathy), creativity, exploration, and appreciation are positioned around and reinforce the center (interconnectedness). Local wisdom functions as the value foundation underlying the entire learning process (continuity).

The Mandala Learning Model is an integration of Murgiyanto's choreography concept (1983) and Barker's cultural studies (2011). This integration gives rise to choreocultural studies, an interdisciplinary approach that examines the relationship between creative dance-making and culture in a broader context. Choreocultural studies views dance not only as a form of physical expression but also as a cultural product that reflects social values, cultural identity, and the historical context of the society in which the dance develops. In this approach, dance movements are understood as cultural texts that can be read and interpreted to explore deeper meanings concerning the social, political, and cultural identity of a group.

Through choreocultural studies, the Mandala learning model invites students not only to master choreographic techniques but also to understand dance movements as cultural practices that produce and represent social meaning in society. Each dance movement

By combining choreography and cultural studies, choreocultural studies provides a more comprehensive and dynamic lens for understanding dance creativity, connecting it with local cultural values, and facilitating students' development of reflective skills concerning the role of dance in society. As a result, the Mandala learning model offers learning that is not limited to movement technique but also introduces students to a deeper understanding of culture and provides a framework for interpreting dance as a complex form of cultural expression.

The developed Mandala learning model integrates the aesthetics of Nusantara dance as a source of aesthetic experience and cultural knowledge. The term Mandala is used as a pedagogical metaphor for a center of meaning, interconnected elements, balance, and cyclical movement in learning. The model places aesthetic experience and cultural interpretation at the center, then connects them with creative exploration, work creation, and reflective appreciation.

The Mandala Model is formulated into four syntaxes. First, *Manambah* represents cultural aesthetic orientation. At this stage, students observe Nusantara dance and identify the forms, symbols, values, and cultural contexts found in the Kediri region. Second, *Ngripta* represents creative exploration of movement through improvisation, experimentation with forms, and development of ideas. Third, *Daya* represents the actualization of composition and the creation of dance works based on local culture. Fourth, *Laku Adiluhung* represents aesthetic reflection and appreciation of the creation process and its outcomes as represented in the work.

The literature review shows that the development of the Mandala Model is based on four main theoretical foundations: social constructivism, experiential learning, culturally responsive teaching, and local wisdom-based education. Social constructivism positions social and cultural interaction as important factors in knowledge construction. In the context of elementary school teacher education, students do not acquire knowledge only through information transfer but also through active engagement in the social and cultural environment surrounding them.

Experiential learning emphasizes experience as a primary source of learning. Students need direct experience in recognizing, understanding, and interpreting local cultural values so that learning becomes more meaningful. Culturally responsive teaching emphasizes the importance of connecting learning processes with learners' cultural backgrounds. Recent studies indicate that this approach can increase learning engagement, strengthen cultural identity, and create a more inclusive learning environment (Gulya & Fehérvári, 2024; Alamsyah, 2025). Conceptually, the learning process moves from experience to creation and back to interpretation. Therefore, the four syntaxes should be understood as an interconnected sequence rather than four independent activities.

Table 2. Summary of the Mandala Model syntaxes

Stages	Description	Learning Objectives
Manembah	An initial observation stage that helps students understand learning objectives and connect dance with culture and everyday life.	Increase students' understanding of local culture and how that culture is relevant to dance.
Ngripta	A creative exploration process in which students develop local culture-based dance movement ideas, encouraging fluency, flexibility, and originality in artistic creation.	Students develop creative ideas and integrate local culture into dance movements.
Daya	A stage emphasizing the actualization of creative ideas into a complete dance work ready to be performed.	Increase students' creativity in creating free, flexible, and authentic dance movements and presenting their dance work.
Laku Adiluhung	Reflective appreciation of the resulting dance work, focusing on the cultural values contained in the dance movements and the learning process.	Students develop the ability to appreciate their own dance work and reflect on the meaning of local culture in the dance work they have created.

Each syntax provides opportunities for students to independently develop creative ideas while integrating local cultural values and the diversity of meanings contained in dance movements. The model aims to sharpen students' creativity in interpreting, exploring, and creating local culture-based dance works.

Local Culture in Elementary Education

In the Mandala Model, local culture functions as the core of learning and as a source of values, knowledge, and learning experiences. Local culture is implemented through the Mandala Model syntaxes: observation (reflection, observation, and searching) of local culture as a source for dance creation; exploration (processing creative movement based on local culture); actualization (creative ideas grounded in local culture are performed); and appreciation (the cultural meaning in the created dance work is reflected upon).

The Mandala Model offers a different perspective compared with previously developed learning approaches. Previous studies have largely positioned local culture as integrated into learning materials, whereas in the Mandala Model local culture serves as the primary foundation driving the entire learning process. Through observation, exploration, actualization, and appreciation, students can develop critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration skills. Jimenez et al. (2025) show that culturally competent learning experiences help students develop professional identity, reflective abilities, and collaborative skills required in educational practice. In the context of local culture-based learning, the integration of local wisdom has also been shown to contribute to strengthening cultural identity, creativity, and student engagement in learning (Wijayanti et al., 2025; Sofiyah et al., 2024). Thus, the Mandala Model functions not only as a local culture-based learning framework but also as a means of strengthening cultural identity and developing competencies relevant to the needs of 21st-century education.

Conceptual Advantage of the Mandala Model. The Mandala Model offers a conceptual distinction from culture-based learning approaches that primarily position local culture as learning material or context. In the Mandala Model, local culture is positioned as the organizing principle of the learning process. This distinction is evident in four aspects: (1) culture becomes the center of orientation from the beginning through reflection, (2) creativity is developed through the interpretation and transformation of cultural elements, (3) learning experiences move cyclically from observation–exploration–actualization–reflection, and (4) strengthening cultural identity is positioned as a primary orientation rather than merely a by-product of learning. Thus, the contribution of the Mandala Model is not simply

to add local culture to an existing model, but to organize the relationship among culture, experience, creativity, creation, and reflection within a single pedagogical framework.

The limitation of this study lies in its conceptual nature. The Mandala Model has not yet undergone expert validation, practicality testing, or effectiveness testing in the classroom. Therefore, the findings of this article are not intended to claim that the Mandala Model has been proven to improve students' creativity or cultural identity. The next stage of research should include: (1) conceptual and content validation by experts, (2) practicality testing through limited implementation and user responses, and (3) effectiveness testing through empirical research to determine the model's effects on creativity, cultural literacy, collaboration, and the strengthening of cultural identity among prospective elementary school teachers.

CONCLUSION

This article produces the Mandala Model as a conceptual framework for local culture-based learning to strengthen the cultural identity of prospective elementary school teachers. The conceptual novelty of the model lies in positioning local culture as both the center and organizing principle of the learning process through four interconnected syntaxes: Manambah (cultural orientation and appreciation), Ngripta (creative exploration), Daya (work actualization), and Laku Adiluhung (reflective appreciation). The model was developed through a synthesis of experiential learning, social constructivism, creativity theory, culturally responsive teaching, and local culture-based education.

The main contribution of the Mandala Model lies in its effort to integrate local cultural values with a learning process that promotes creativity, cultural meaning-making, and the strengthening of cultural identity. The model offers a new conceptual perspective in elementary school teacher education by positioning local culture not only as a learning resource but also as a foundation for the character and identity formation of prospective teachers. Further research is needed to test the conceptual validity, practicality, and effectiveness of the Mandala Model through implementation in elementary school teacher education contexts.

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