

## VOICES OF HERITAGE: PRESERVING MALAY IDENTITY THROUGH FOLK SONGS IN EARLY EDUCATION

Bambang Suhartono Mohd Said<sup>1</sup>, Fatin Hafshah Rusli<sup>2</sup>, Lah Wan Yee<sup>3</sup>

1 Southern University College, Johor.Malaysia

2 Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia

3 Southern University College, Johor.Malaysia

*Corresponding author: bambang@sc.edu.my*

### Abstract

Learning through music has long been recognized as a powerful pedagogical approach in early childhood education, particularly in fostering moral and cultural development. This study examines the extent to which elements of Malay identity can be nurtured through traditional Malay folk songs in preschool education. Conducted in three preschools in the Bachok district of Kelantan, the study analyzed ten selected songs using qualitative methods that included interviews, observations, and content analysis. The theoretical framework integrates Behaviourism Theory (Skinner, 1953) and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1962), in relation to Tengku Luckman Sinar Badarshah's (1990) characteristics of Malay identity. Three preschool teachers were interviewed to explore their teaching practices and perspectives. The findings reveal that Malay folk songs are more than aesthetic cultural artefacts; they serve as effective educational tools that stimulate moral reasoning, language development, and social cognition among children. The study concludes that Malay folk songs should be further utilized in early education, not only to instill cultural identity but also to strengthen children's emotional resilience amid globalization and digital influences that contribute to identity erosion among youth.

Keywords: Malay identity, folk songs, preschool education, social cognition, cultural values

## INTRODUCTION

Technological advancement has indeed brought numerous positive impacts to human civilization. However, it has also had negative effects, causing people to gradually forget traditional knowledge that exists within society, deeming it irrelevant in the context of a rapidly developing world. Traditional elements are often seen as obstacles to progress. This issue was also addressed by Fitria (2018), who opined that technological advancement could diminish cultural heritage, even though the preservation of national heritage values is crucial and meaningful in shaping the identity and character of a nation.

Activities such as singing and dancing to music are examples of teaching methods rooted in creativity and aesthetics, as recommended in the *National Preschool Standard Curriculum* (KSPK, 2017). Music is an inseparable part of a child's world. Without music, a child's life would feel empty (Mohamad Azam Samsudin, Kamariah Abu Bakar, & Noorhayati Mohd Noor, 2019). Music and drama are forms of art that significantly impact a child's mental development. At the same time, children are given opportunities to showcase their artistic talents (KSPK, 2017).

Levinowitz, L. M. (1998) and Papageorgi, I. (2022) mentioned that music and singing are closely associated with early childhood. Naturally, children are drawn to sound and music, which entertain them. Therefore, music and singing have a positive effect and capture children's attention in the classroom (Harriet et al., 2014). Furthermore, children learn rhythm, melody, and pronunciation through music. Thus, music can be used creatively and effectively by teachers during teaching and learning sessions.

Sakti, S., Endraswara, S., & Rohman, A. (2024) emphasizes that integrating local cultural values into early childhood education significantly enhances character development, fostering virtues such as cooperation, tolerance, and social responsibility, as a means for them to understand themselves, their surroundings, and their community. Campbell and Scott-Kassner (2019) emphasized that this can be achieved through music education, as music provides children with knowledge about themselves, their families, and the world around them. They also cited educational pioneers such as G. Stanley Hall and Sigmund Freud, who agreed that music could be used as a medium and strategy in art education pedagogy.

According to Patricia (2019), when singing and dancing the children become engage with music and teacher can communicate with them through facial expression, indicative gesture which activate the desired social behaviors. This method effectively engages children's interest in their own culture while also shaping their perception and understanding of cultural objects. For instance, when singing, children become familiar with a song and begin to relate closely to the traditional musical elements it contains.

Ultimately, music education serves to instill national identity values in children and foster a love for their nation and country. As Aripin (2014) stated, love for one's nation and country reflect a strong and firm national identity. In relation to this, Malay art in general, and Malay folk songs in particular, can contribute significantly to instilling Malay identity in children. According to MacDonald (2002), music generally serves two key functions in expressing and reflecting national identity: it unites people through a shared sense of belonging.

From an ethnomusicological perspective, music is believed to unite members of a particular ethnic group. In the context of music education, music conveys ideas of national identity and emphasizes the importance of cultural heritage for future generations. This is clearly reflected in folk songs, which are seen as a system for fostering nationalism, with music being viewed not just as culture but as a national phenomenon (MacDonald, 2002, p. 158).

Aripin (2014) suggested that folk songs should be introduced from early childhood, as they can instill valuable ideas in young minds. He expressed disappointment over the gradual marginalization of folk songs, noting that many young people today are unaware of their existence. He also emphasized that folk songs are easy to sing, remember, and internalize due to their long-standing presence in the lives of earlier generations. He firmly believes that kindergartens or preschools are the most effective starting point for fostering appreciation for Malay folk songs.

Therefore, in the context of this study, based on the views presented above, the issue to be examined is the extent to which the instillation of Malay identity through traditional Malay folk songs can be effectively implemented in preschool education.

Despite existing studies on music in early childhood education and on the transmission of cultural values, few have specifically examined the role of Malay folk songs in shaping Malay identity among preschool children. This study addresses this gap by investigating how traditional folk songs can simultaneously promote language development, moral values, and a sense of cultural belonging. By combining in-depth interviews with preschool educators and classroom observations, the research provides empirical insights into the practical application of folk songs as culturally responsive pedagogical tools. This approach highlights a previously underexplored link between early musical engagement and the formation of ethnic and national identity, offering valuable implications for curriculum design and early childhood education in Malaysia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.0 Folk Songs

Nazilah Rezkifutri (2018) defines folk songs as short musical pieces consisting of lyrics and melody, sung or chanted by communities and passed down orally. As a form of oral literature, they develop within societies and are performed with tone and rhythm, often accompanying traditional games in specific regions. Siti Noor and Normaliza (2017) explain that because folk songs spread through oral transmission and often lack identifiable origins, they become collective cultural heritage reflecting communal experiences, stories, and legends. Their melody and tempo mirror the spirit and character of the societies that produce them.

Danandjaja (1984) adds that the tone and melodic style in folk songs represent emotional responses to life events and the cultural values upheld by the community. This understanding resonates with Western ethnomusicologists. Sharp (1907), for instance, emphasizes that folk songs evolve organically within community life, shaped through repeated oral transmission. Likewise, Lomax (1968) argues that folk songs reflect the behavioural, emotional, and cultural patterns of the communities that create them. Nettl (2005) further highlights that their simple melodic forms and narrative structures make folk songs powerful tools for transmitting social knowledge and collective memory.

Nur Asmira Mat Din (2011) also notes that in earlier communities, folk songs served not merely as entertainment but as educational media conveying messages, moral guidance, and social knowledge. Aripin Said (1999) supports this by noting that skilled storytellers (*penglipur lara*) used folk songs to educate while entertaining. Jamal Abdul Hamid (1999) positions folk songs as spontaneous oral traditions that, despite lacking rigid structural rules,

remain effective in conveying meaningful messages. Western scholars echo this view: Seeger (1977) and Lloyd (1967) argue that folk songs continuously evolve because they are shaped by communal participation and reinterpretation.

Rogayah A. Hamid (2006) observes that folk songs typically employ regional dialects that reinforce cultural identity. Their indirect and symbolic messages act as mechanisms of social control, providing guidance in a refined and ethical manner. Fita Fitria (2018) describes folk songs as simple, beautiful, and accessible. Similarly, Bartók (1976) asserts that folk songs contain the “musical DNA” of a culture, expressing collective history and emotions. Mohd Anis (2003) strengthens this view by identifying traditional melodies as “cultural texts” preserving memory, identity, and norms. Bohlman (1988) adds that folk songs function as cultural markers that shape worldviews and social structures. Collectively, these perspectives demonstrate that folk songs serve not only as art and entertainment but as cultural mechanisms shaping values, identity, and intergenerational knowledge.

## 2.0 Malay Folk Songs

Rahmah Bujang (1999) concluded that Malay folk songs originate from the Malay ethnic group and embody the worldview and collective thoughts of the Malays from regions such as the Malay Peninsula, the Riau Archipelago, Indonesia, Brunei, and Singapore. These songs were commonly sung in domestic settings, ranging from lullabies for children to performances during Malay festive occasions. They were presented either individually or in groups and were typically accompanied by traditional Malay musical instruments. The content of these songs reflects the close relationship between the Malay people and their natural environment, as well as the socio-economic conditions of the time.

Rahmah further notes that Malay folk songs are also categorized as children’s songs due to their cheerful tone. The singing style and timing of these songs are adapted to suit the lives and routines of children. Aripin Said (1999) supports this perspective by stating that folk songs are a source of pride for the Malay community. Beyond their uniqueness, they contain philosophical values that encapsulate the Malay worldview, which has been developed and refined over generations. These values play a significant role in shaping the personality and identity of the Malay people.

## 3.0 The Use of Folk Songs in Preschool Education

Shahizan Hasan and Ahmad Shahabudin (2006) define preschool children as those between the ages of four and six. At this stage, children are considered highly impressionable, as their personalities are influenced by their immediate environment. Their cognitive development is still in progress, resulting in a vivid imagination and an inclination toward fantasy.

Preschool education generally refers to an informal learning system that emphasizes play-based learning, aligned with the physical and mental development of children. It is designed to introduce children to social life and prepare them for formal education in primary school. Key developmental aspects emphasized include language and communication, cognitive and mental development, emotional and spiritual growth, moral values, psychomotor skills, and physical development.

Numerous studies in Malaysia and Indonesia have investigated the use of folk songs in early childhood education. Each region possesses unique ethnic groups and languages rich in folk traditions. For instance, Siti Noor Riha Sulong and Normaliza Abd Rahim (2017) found that among Indigenous communities, folk songs have been passed down across generations to foster children's interest in schooling. These songs serve as foundational literacy tools, enabling children to connect with their cultural heritage and instilling values of self-identity and moral integrity. Animal-themed folk songs such as *Si Pintar*, *Si Manis*, and *Kura-Kura* have been shown to develop children's empathy toward animals and convey moral messages through personified characters. These songs provide not only entertainment but also serve as instruments of social critique and satire that are accessible to children.

Loy Chee Luen (2016) concluded that the Kodály Method, which incorporates folk songs into music instruction, is an effective and adaptable approach for preschool education. The method encourages musical skill development through solfa singing, hand signals, body movement, and playing musical glasses. These interactive strategies engage children in the musical learning process, helping them discover and express themselves while nurturing a love for music.

Danandjaja (1984) observed that songs embedded within folk stories are part of oral literature and are designed to simplify the communication of messages and lessons to children. Sri Ayu Laali (2018), in her study *Character Formation in Children through the Kokonua Song*, found that folk songs are effective in character

education, offering insights from psychology, cognition, language, and behavioral sciences.

Rahmat Kartolo (2019) emphasized that folk songs often explore everyday themes that are easy for children to grasp. Their implementation in preschool settings can be enhanced through multimedia tools like videos, which increase children's engagement. Fita Fatria (2018), in her work *Socialization of the Archipelago's Songs as an Effort to Cultivate Love for the Homeland*, supported Rahmat's view, noting that the relatable nature of folk song themes promotes acceptance across various communities.

Nazilah Rezkifutri (2018), in her study *Cultural Values in Folk Songs for Children in the Tambelan Community, Bintan, Riau Archipelago Province*, identified key Malay cultural values in children's folk songs, particularly the concept of unity. These songs teach harmony across differences in ethnicity, religion, and class, fostering mutual care, empathy, and respect within families and communities.

Hanifah Sabin, V. P., and Bullare@Bahari, M. I. (2019) argued that folk songs can promote behavioral and psychological changes in children. Their rhythmic qualities can be popularized among modern youth, even in the face of global cultural trends such as K-pop. When integrated into reading instruction, these culturally relevant songs accelerate literacy acquisition by connecting with children's social environments and daily experiences.

Finally, the animated program *Didi & Friends* has proven effective in incorporating Malay folk songs into early childhood education. Zaharah Osman (2016) demonstrated that the program not only entertains but also positively impacts children's emotional and cognitive development. It is widely used by preschool teachers to create joyful learning environments, especially since many children are already familiar with the content outside of the classroom.

#### 4.0 Malay Identity

This study adopts the classical framework of Malay identity (*Jati Diri Melayu*) proposed by Tengku Luckman Sinar Badarshah (1990), a foundation for understanding the Malay cultural worldview (Mohd Taib Osman, 1989; Shamsul A.

B., 1996). According to this framework, Malay identity rests on several interconnected criteria. First, an individual is considered Malay when they profess Islam, speak the Malay language daily, and observe Malay customs and traditions. These customs follow the principle that “customs are based on Islamic Law, and Islamic Law is based on the Quran.” Scholars such as Mohamad Abu Bakar (1980) and Milner (2008) similarly affirm that Islam forms the philosophical core of Malay identity. Second, Malay rulership is central to cultural continuity. The proverb “Where there is a ruler, customs thrive; without a ruler, customs perish” reflects the historic significance of Malay kingship, where rulers were viewed as God’s representatives responsible for maintaining order and safeguarding moral integrity (Milner, 1982; Andaya & Andaya, 2001). Closely tied to this is the concept of *daulat*, which grants rulers divine sanctity and positions them as protectors of Malay customs and Islamic leadership (Buyong Adil, 1983; Milner, 1995).

Faith in Allah constitutes another criterion, forming the spiritual foundation of Malay identity (Shaharuddin, 2000). Malay society also upholds strong respect for the rule of law, as reflected in legal texts such as the Hukum Kanun Melaka (Hooker, 2004), which historically ensured peace and social order. Courtesy and refined conduct remain central features of Malay civilisation, reflecting the cultural importance of civility and good manners (Hashim Musa, 2005; Hussain Othman, 2010). The pursuit of knowledge is highly valued as both a religious duty and cultural expectation (Wan Hashim, 1992). A strong sense of shame, tied to modesty, gentle speech, and appropriate behaviour, further characterises Malay ethics, encapsulated in expressions such as “*lebih baik mati anak daripada mati adat*” (Mohd Taib Osman, 1989). Decision-making is grounded in mesyuarat (discussion) and muafakat (consensus) (Shamsul A. B., 1996), while hospitality toward guests is upheld as a moral responsibility (Hussain Othman, 2010). Historical resilience and the willingness to defend cultural values also reflect enduring Malay warrior ethics (Andaya & Andaya, 2001).

Complementing this classical view, the Tunjuk Ajar Melayu framework by Zakaria Stapa, Noranizah Yusuf, and Abdul Fatah Shaharudin (2012) outlines four pillars of Malay identity: piety to Allah, morality (akhlak), knowledge, and social relations (muamalah). Abdul Halim Ramli (2008) further asserts that Malay identity is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings, while the richness of Malay linguistic aesthetics, seen in *pantun*, *gurindam*, *syair*, idioms, and proverbs, reflects cultural refinement and intellectual depth (Hashim Musa, 2005). Collectively, these perspectives portray Malay identity as a multidimensional construct shaped by faith, custom, language, morality, knowledge, leadership, and social cohesion.

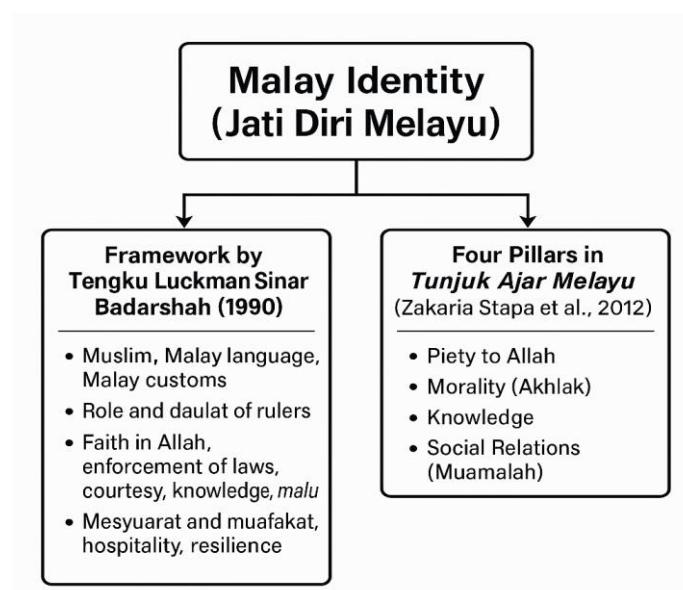


Figure 1 Integrated Conceptual Model of Malay Identity

## 5.0 Behaviorism Theory

According to Skinner (1953), in the development process of students, they often respond to their environment when repetition occurs. The process of shaping behavior will take a long time and result in complex actions due to the frequent environmental factors. Rachlin (1991) explained that reinforcement is given firstly to satisfy an individual's needs, and secondly, to reduce stress and stimulate the brain. Skinner divided reinforcement into two types: positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement.

There are five types of processes in Skinner's operant conditioning theory, namely: Positive Reinforcement, Negative Reinforcement, Punishment, Premack Principle and Extinction

## 6.0 Social Cognitive Theory

According to Bandura (1962), humans naturally learn through imitation or observation—that is, by seeing others perform behaviors and then receiving rewards for their actions, or by observing others being punished for their actions. Initially, this theory was known as social learning theory. This theory has similarities with operant

conditioning theory, which considers the effect of reinforcement on behavior. It later developed into Social Cognitive Theory since cognitive processes are also involved. Naturally, humans learn through the process of observation and imitation (Bandura, 1962) Social Learning through Imitation. In M. R. Jones (Ed.), Nebraska Symposium on Motivation (pp. 211-269).

The statement above are the fundamental processes of learning in Social Cognitive Theory. However, there are other concepts proposed by this theory that will influence the role of social learning. Specifically, Social Cognitive Theory states that if an individual feels a strong psychological connection with the model, the process of social learning will occur more frequently. According to White (1972: 252), identification begins with the desire to emulate, followed by the effort to act like the person who serves as a behavioral model

Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes not only the observer's ability to perform specific behaviors but also their belief in their capacity to do so. This belief, known as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977a), is considered a critical prerequisite for behavior change.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design, using two main approaches: interviews and content analysis. The interview method will be conducted with preschool teachers, parents, and individuals involved in early childhood education to gather their perspectives on the use of traditional Malay songs in the development of children's identity. This interview will emphasize their experiences and perceptions of the effectiveness of folk songs in shaping the Malay identity in preschool children.

In addition, content analysis will be performed on the lyrics and melodies of Malay folk songs used in preschool education. The purpose is to understand the cultural values contained within these songs and how these elements can be adapted to meet the educational needs of children. Through this, the study aims to evaluate the role of Malay folk songs in fostering Malay identity and its impact on the development of preschool children's identity. Overall, the qualitative approach used in

this study aims to build the researcher's understanding, which is to explore how Malay folk songs play a role in nurturing Malay identity among preschool children.

In the initial stage of the study, the researcher uses a phenomenological approach, which is a method oriented towards obtaining explanations. This research design is chosen because it is suitable for the researcher, who aims to explore the depth of the implementation of Malay identity through Malay folk songs.

The study location is in three preschools around Bachok, Kelantan. The informants for this study are three preschool teachers from three different preschools around Bandar Bachok, Kelantan. All three informants will be referred to as TA, TB, and TC. The method used by the researcher is in-depth interviews with a total of 14 questions, which are divided into Question 1, Question 2, and the closing question. Each question is further broken down into several sub-questions.

The interview protocol, containing these 14 questions, was developed by the researcher based on improvements made from the pilot study questions. Examples of the questions posed are:

1. Focused Question for Research Question 1: What is your view on the use of Malay folk songs in preschools?
2. Focused Question for Research Question 2: How do you ensure that children understand the noble values that you try to instill/communicate?
3. Closing Question: Do you have any suggestions to further enhance the implementation of Malay folk songs in instilling Malay identity in your preschool? If so, please state them.

## DISCUSSION

### 1.0 Preschool Teachers' Practices in Instilling Malay Identity Through Folk Songs

From this research question, the researcher identified several themes; introducing noble values, methods for understanding noble values, activities to assess understanding of noble value, teachers' views on noble values, folk songs that reflect Malay identity and characteristics of Malay identity.

The analysis of interview data with preschool teachers in the Bachok district reveals several key practices employed to instill Malay identity through the use of folk songs in early childhood classrooms. These practices reflect not only the teachers' pedagogical strategies but also their cultural awareness and intentional efforts to embed noble values, traditional knowledge, and elements of Malay heritage in daily learning activities. The themes that emerged from the data include the introduction of noble values, methods used to support children's understanding, activities for assessing value internalization teachers' perceptions of value-based learning, the selection of folk songs that reflect Malay identity, and the specific identity characteristics conveyed through these songs. Table 1 summarizes these findings and provides a detailed overview of how Malay folk songs function as meaningful tools in the process of cultural and value formation among preschool children.

Table 1 *Findings on Preschool Teachers' Practices  
in Instilling Malay Identity Through Folk Songs*

Theme	Sub-theme / Focus	Supporting Evidence (Informant Statements)
Introducing Noble Values	Question-and-answer method	<p>“I ask the children to mention the noble values in the lyrics and explain their meaning.” (TA)</p> <p>“I introduce and sing the song, then talk about the noble values in it.” (TB)</p> <p>“After singing, I ask whether they understand the meaning and explain the noble values.” (TC)</p>
Methods for Understanding Noble Values	Questioning, reminders, reinforcement	<p>“I always ask questions about their daily lives and remind them to practicing good things.” (TA)</p> <p>“After they retell the values, I reward them with reinforcement.” (TB)</p> <p>“I ask them to repeat what the teacher says.” (TC)</p>

Activities to Assess Understanding	Observation, quizzes, questioning	<p>“I observe them while playing, eating, or moving around to see if they have been practiced these values.” (TA)</p> <p>“Quizzes encourage participation and help assess understanding.” (TB)</p> <p>“I ask questions and give reinforcement.” (TC)</p>
Teachers’ Views on Noble Values	Children easily understand and remember values	<p>“Children at this age are very receptive to teaching.” (TA)</p> <p>“This activity helps them remember and understand values more easily.” (TB)</p> <p>“Noble values are easy to instill in 5–6-year-olds.” (TC)</p>
Folk Songs that Reflect Malay Identity	Suitable folk songs	<p><i>Lompat Si Katak Lompat</i> (TA)</p> <p><i>Tepuk Amai-Amai, Wau Bulan</i> (TB)</p> <p><i>Lompat Si Katak Lompat, Bangun Pagi, Bangau Oh Bangau</i> (TC)</p>
Characteristics of Malay Identity	Hard work, discipline, manners, respect	<p>“Encourages children to work hard to achieve their dreams.” (TA)</p> <p>“<i>Wau Bulan</i> teaches traditional Malay games and heritage.” (TB)</p> <p>“Values include manners, respect for elders, and waking early.” (TC)</p>
Teacher Efforts to Instill Malay Identity	Modeling good behavior	<p>“Children need examples through folk songs, activities, and behavior.” (TA)</p> <p>“I encourage them to follow good values and set an example.” (TB)</p> <p>“I try to show good manners and behavior.” (TC)</p>
Suggested Measures to Enhance Identity	Competitions	Organize of Malay folk song competitions from preschool to higher levels to deepen cultural appreciation (All Informant)

Formation	Multimedia technology	Provision of multimedia software containing folk songs with visual illustrations to reinforce values (All Informant)
	National-level competitions	Expansion of folk song singing competitions to the national stage for wider cultural engagement (All Informant)
	Broadcasting media	Continued broadcasting of Malay folk songs to promote cultural pride and enthusiasm among children (All Informant)

Note. TA = Teacher A; TB = Teacher B; TC = Teacher C.

### 3.0 Document Analysis

In this document analysis section, the lyrics of Malay folk songs are examined for the values of Malay identity that can be instilled in preschool children based on the 11 characteristics of the Malay Identity Concept formulated by cultural expert Tengku Luckman Sinar Badarshah (1990).

To further illustrate how Malay folk songs contribute to the inculcation of Malay identity among preschool children, the following table summarizes the meanings embedded in each song and the corresponding identity values reflected through their lyrics. This synthesis highlights how cultural knowledge, moral lessons, social behavior, and traditional practices are conveyed in ways that are accessible and meaningful to young learners.

Table 2 *Malay Identity Values Reflected in Selected Malay Folk Songs*

Song	Key Meaning / Interpretation	Malay Identity Values Reflected

1. <i>Air Pasang Pagi</i>	Teaches geographical knowledge (tides), morning routines, plant care, and animal habitats.	Love for nature (plants & animals); basic knowledge; appreciation of daily routines.
2. <i>Bangau Oh Bangau</i>	Cause–effect chain teaching cooperation instead of blame.	Consultation, consensus, cooperation, core Malay ethics.
3. <i>Bangun Pagi</i>	Promotes hygiene routines, early rising, neatness, and school readiness.	Discipline, health, piety, success, value of learning.
4. <i>Bapaku Pulang dari Kota</i>	Joy over receiving a gift; strong family ties.	Gratitude, love for family, respect, bonding.
5. <i>Burung Kakak Tua</i>	Symbolic reminder to honor the elderly.	Respect for elders, compassion, appreciation of wisdom.
6. <i>Ikan Kekek</i>	Teaches politeness and importance of studying.	Proper manners, education, avoiding laziness.
7. <i>Lompat Si Katak Lompat</i>	Encourages effort, early rising, and seeking knowledge.	Diligence, ethics, piety, pursuit of knowledge.
8. <i>Rasa Sayang</i>	Promotes friendliness and interest in Malay pantun.	Love for language, kindness, reducing prejudice.
9. <i>Tepuk Amai-Amai</i>	Shows mother's love; teaches empathy for siblings.	Empathy, responsibility, appreciation of mother's role.
10. <i>Wau Bulan</i>	Celebrates traditional Malay games and culture.	Cultural heritage, community bonding, social joy.

## FINDING

### 1.0 Summary of Findings Based on In-Depth Interviews

Based on the in-depth interviews conducted with all three informants, it can be concluded that the use of Malay folk songs in preschool education is effective not only as a form of entertainment that brings enjoyment to children through singing and play activities, but also as an educational tool for the development of children's morals and character. The noble values embedded in Malay folk songs are closely tied to the core values of Malay identity.

Overall, based on the views of all three informants, the inculcation of Malay identity values through Malay folk songs is highly relevant and supports three out of the eleven characteristics of the *Malay Identity Concept* as outlined by cultural expert Tengku Luckman Sinar Badarshah (1990), namely:

1. Prioritizing courtesy (*budi bahasa*), which reflects politeness and the refined civilization of the Malays.
2. Emphasizing the importance of education and knowledge.
3. Valuing the sense of shame (*budaya malu*), speaking politely, and avoiding rude or humiliating speech towards others.

All three informants also demonstrated critical and creative awareness in their methods of using Malay folk songs in preschool education. They organized quizzes, singing, and dance competitions at their respective preschools. Furthermore, they exhibited a positive and forward-thinking attitude by proposing efforts to enhance the prestige of Malay folk songs, including the suggestion to hold national-level Malay folk song competitions involving preschool children, and encouraging broadcasting media to regularly play these songs to instill a sense of pride and love among Malaysian children.

Based on the ten Malay folk songs above, it is evident that Malay songs are not merely cheerful melodies that entertain children in preschool education. More importantly, they contain noble values in general and specifically promote the inculcation of Malay identity values that can indirectly contribute to the formation of children's personal and cultural identity. The singing of these folk songs by children also involves several indirect learning processes: recognizing musical tones,

memorizing lyrics, and developing thinking skills through the interpretation of the songs' content.

The efforts of preschool teachers to continue elevating the image of Malay folk songs are proof that these songs have a positive impact on preschool education. Their suggestion that all stakeholders involved in preschool education increase the use of Malay folk songs further demonstrates their positive stance toward their use. For instance, implementing more creative methods in singing, dancing, and artistic activities in preschools, and organizing competitions up to the national level. These efforts can significantly contribute to enhancing children's interest in Malay folk songs.

Overall, the findings of this study reveal that singing and dancing activities using Malay folk songs in preschool education in the Bachok district initially served as a form of activity aimed at bringing joy to children. However, gradually, whether directly or indirectly, children acquire essential skills and knowledge through engagement in these activities, teachers have actually implemented a learning process related to early childhood education, in line with the principles of the Behaviorism Theory.

The informants in this study have shown that the singing of Malay folk songs in their respective preschools has created a learning impact that stimulates both the minds and emotions of children towards the learning process. At the same time, children are introduced to Malay musical arts through the melodies and rhythms of these folk songs, which eventually foster appreciation and love for the Malay language. When children enjoy singing these songs, teachers are able to stimulate body movement, leading to individual or group dance forms.

The study findings also reveal that activities involving movement are a natural need for children, serving as a means for them to express their feelings and desires. In this regard, the use of music is a method that effectively achieves this goal. When singing activities are frequently repeated throughout a child's time in preschool, they will gradually begin to understand the meaning behind the Malay folk songs they sing. This process of understanding song meanings will slowly cultivate an appreciation for the moral values embedded in these songs. The internalization of these values will eventually foster a love for the elements of Malay identity,

ultimately shaping a personality and character in children that aligns with the image of the Malay identity.

The findings of this study indicate that the process of instilling Malay identity in preschool children is supported by the convergence of behavioral, social learning, and cultural frameworks. Teachers reinforce values through repetition and rewards (Skinner), model desirable behaviours for children to observe and imitate (Bandura), and draw upon culturally grounded principles outlined by Tengku Luckman Sinar and the Four Pillars of *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu* (Zakaria Stapa et al., 2012). When combined, these elements demonstrate that Malay folk songs function as an effective identity-forming tool, enabling children to internalize values through reinforcement, observation, reflection, and cultural alignment. The integrated diagram below summarizes this relationship.

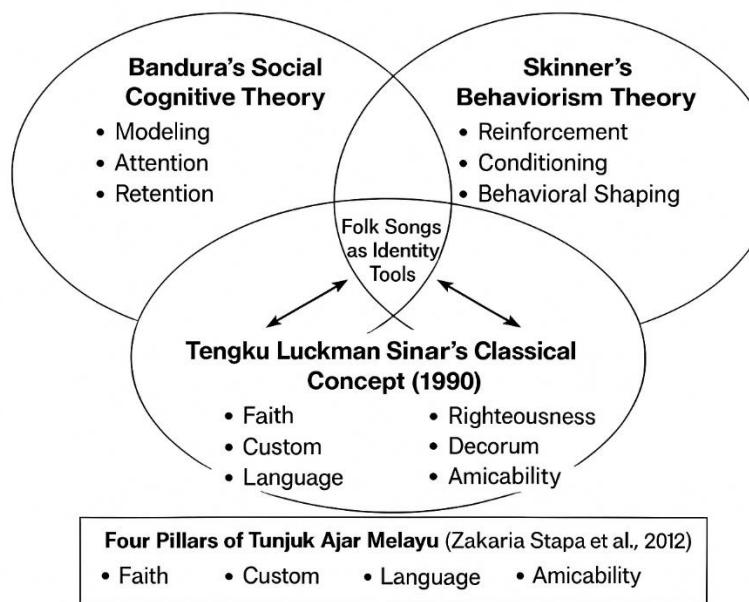


Figure 2 Integrated Conceptual Framework  
for the Formation of Malay Identity in Preschool Education

## CONCLUSION

This study confirms that Malay folk songs serve as a powerful cultural and educational tool in preschool settings. Their accessible melodies and meaningful lyrics not only support children's cognitive and linguistic development but also cultivate early appreciation for

Malay values, language, and heritage. By engaging with songs connected to their daily experiences, children naturally develop foundational elements of Malay identity, including respect, discipline, cooperation, and love for culture.

The findings underscore the pivotal role of preschool teachers in shaping children's value formation. Their pedagogical creativity, cultural competence, and capacity to use folk songs as intentional instructional tools directly influence the extent to which children internalize the cultural and moral values embedded in these songs. When teachers apply systematic reinforcement, facilitate reflective understanding, and model appropriate behaviors, Malay folk songs transcend their function as simple musical activities and become structured, culturally grounded mechanisms for character development.

Given the cultural richness inherent in traditional Malay songs, their pedagogical use should be further strengthened within early childhood education. Future research could investigate how folk songs contribute to children's emotional resilience and cultural grounding, particularly amid the pressures of globalization and digital media. Additional studies might explore multimedia-based folk song resources, regional variations in song practices, and the development of culturally responsive pedagogies that integrate music, identity formation, and early learning. Collectively, such efforts would further enhance the potential of Malay folk songs in cultivating confident, culturally rooted, and socially grounded future generations.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

*“The authors declare no conflict of interest.”*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for profit sectors.

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## BIOGRAPHY

### ASST. PROF. DR. BAMBANG SUHARTONO MOHD SAID

PhD (Communication-UKM), M.Philosophy (Rhetoric-UKM), Drs (Indonesia Language & Arts-IKIP Bandung\_Indonesia)

Assistant Professor at Southern University College, Johor, Malaysia since 2023. Previously (1994-2022) served as a lecturer, Head of Department & Director of Media Department, Publisher & Student Affair Officer at UiTM, UUM & MDIS College Malaysia from. Also active as a Film Script Writer and Director and Columnist in newspapers and magazines in Malaysia.

#### Contact Information:

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,  
Southern University College, Malaysia  
PTD 64888, Jalan Selatan Utama, KM 15, Off. Jalan Skudai  
81300 Skudai, Johor, Malaysia.

[bambang@sc.edu.my](mailto:bambang@sc.edu.my)

## **FATIN HAFSHAH RUSLI**

M.Education (Preschool Education-UKM), B. Media Technology (Advertising-UUM)

Senior Teacher at Sri Ara International School, Johor & Media Consultant at Saphire Screen Bhd. PhD Student (Communication-UKM). Part Time TV Program Script Writer.

### **Contact Information:**

Center for Media and Communication Studies

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

43600, Bangi, Selangor

[hafshahfatin@gmail.com](mailto:hafshahfatin@gmail.com)

## **LAH WAN YEE**

**MBA (Yuan Ze University, Taiwan), MA. Corporate Communication (UPM),**

**BA. Communication (UPM)**

Senior Lecturer at Southern University College, Johor, Malaysia since 2024. She has over 15 years of experience teaching communication and event management courses, along with holding academic administrative roles in private universities. She has led survey teams for multiple music festivals and has published two books on the subject.

### **Contact Information:**

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,

Southern University College, Malaysia

PTD 64888, Jalan Selatan Utama, KM 15, Off. Jalan Skudai

81300 Skudai, Johor, Malaysia.

[wylah@sc.edu.my](mailto:wylah@sc.edu.my)