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Art therapy in Indonesia: Integrating local arts to strengthen self-esteem and mental health

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ABSTRACT

Background: Indonesia's rich cultural heritage provides a foundation for integrating traditional arts into psychological interventions. Art therapy has long been recognized for its significant potential in enhancing emotional regulation and self-esteem. However, most existing interventions are rooted in a Western context, thus neglecting local cultural values. This study aims to explore the application of art therapy based on local Indonesian culture as a means to enhance self-esteem and emotional well-being. **Methods:** This study employed a qualitative approach based on literature studies by analyzing various empirical findings related to art therapy, self-esteem, and cultural adaptation in mental health interventions. The analysis focused on identifying cultural elements that can be integrated into art therapy, such as batik-making, gamelan-playing, and pantun-writing, and examining the psychological mechanisms underlying their therapeutic impact. **Findings:** The study showed that the creative process in traditional arts not only serves as a means of emotional release but also encourages self-reflection, identity formation, and cultural pride. Activities such as batik-making and gamelan-playing collectively foster patience, concentration, and togetherness, which play a role in strengthening self-esteem. Furthermore, recent research, conducted in 2023–2024, demonstrated that structured art therapy can enhance multidimensional self-esteem. However, challenges such as limited facilitator competency, the risk of reducing cultural meaning, and limited access remain major obstacles to the implementation of culture-based art therapy in Indonesia. **Conclusion:** Integrating local arts into therapeutic practice is a promising and contextual approach to improving the mental health of Indonesians. This study emphasizes the importance of collaboration between mental health professionals and arts and culture practitioners to ensure that arts-based interventions maintain psychological integrity and cultural values. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** This study contributes to the development of culture-based psychology by proposing a conceptual model of art therapy unique to Indonesia. This model emphasizes the synergy of modern psychotherapy approaches with traditional arts wisdom as a sustainable and culturally relevant intervention to improve self-esteem and mental well-being.

KEYWORDS: art therapy; local art; self esteem.

1. Introduction

Mental health is a fundamental aspect of human life that is often neglected compared to physical health. Yet, psychological issues are now a real global challenge. A World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) report states that more than 970 million people worldwide suffer from mental disorders, and this number has increased sharply since the COVID-19 pandemic. In Indonesia, the Basic Health Research (RISK) recorded the prevalence of depression reaching 6.1% of the total population, with adolescents and

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young adults being the most vulnerable groups (Ministry of Health, 2018). These figures demonstrate that mental health is not merely an individual issue, but a pressing social problem, requiring a creative, humanistic, and socially acceptable approach to addressing it, one of which is through art.

Mental health is crucial to everyday life. Good mental health helps individuals cope with themselves and their environment, which helps them maintain a healthy lifestyle, both physically and emotionally. Meeting mental health needs has become a pressing global priority, particularly in regions where cultural context plays a significant role in shaping individual experiences (Boyd, 2014). The goal of counseling is to foster an individual's awareness of various aspects of themselves, including positive and negative emotions. This process helps them understand that feelings of sadness will pass and that happiness can be found in other ways (Febrieta & Sukma, 2023).

Art, in its various forms, has long been recognized as a medium of expression capable of channeling emotions, reducing stress, and improving quality of life. McNiff (2004) emphasized that art has an intrinsic power to heal through the creative process. According to him, the experience of creating art, whether drawing, writing, dancing, or singing, can create a space for reflection, channel emotions, and also enter into a process of dialogue with oneself a process McNiff (1992) calls the dialogue with images, namely a therapeutic encounter between an individual and creative symbols born from their subconscious. This view is in line with the results of recent research showing that involvement in artistic activities has a significant positive impact on emotional well-being and stress reduction. For example, a quasi-experimental study on college students showed that the creative process of painting significantly reduced stress levels and increased relaxation (Sumanggala et al., 2023).

Furthermore, a systematic review found that creative arts interventions can facilitate emotional processing, adaptive nonverbal communication, collective meaning-making, and post-traumatic growth in individuals with high psychological distress (Versitano et al., 2025). In Indonesia, art therapy practices have begun to be developed as a medium for channeling mental well-being and strengthening social support in the community (Waryanti, 2024). Art not only functions as entertainment, but can also be interpreted as a natural, humanistic, and inclusive therapy to build spiritual harmony (Stepney, 2017).

Furthermore, the relationship between art and mental health can be understood through the concept of self-esteem (Sowislo & Orth, 2013). Rosenberg (1965) explains that self-esteem consists of two main dimensions: individual self-esteem, which relates to how a person views themselves, and social self-esteem, which refers to how a person feels valued within their social group. In this context, personal artistic activities such as drawing, writing, or painting play a role in strengthening individual self-esteem because they provide space for self-expression and authentic experiences of personal identity. Conversely, collective arts such as role-playing, dancing, or singing together can increase social self-esteem through the process of interaction, collaboration, and positive acceptance from the social environment (Wallrer & Gilroy, 2000).

The relationship between art therapy and self-esteem has been widely studied in the psychology literature. According to Rogers (1993), in his Humanistic Art therapy approach, the creative process encourages individuals to discover their own worth and potential through honest and authentic artistic expression. Artistic activities enable individuals to see themselves as creative individuals, which in turn increases feelings of competence and self-esteem. Kramer (1993) also explains that through artistic expression, individuals learn to accept imperfections and integrate both positive and negative aspects of themselves, a process that is essential in developing healthy self-esteem.

Recent research supports a positive relationship between involvement in arts activities and increased self-esteem. A longitudinal study of adolescents showed that active participation in arts activities was significantly associated with increased self-esteem and psychological well-being (Mak & Fancourt, 2019). Similar results were found by Hadi et al. (2024), who showed that art therapy training can significantly improve high school students' self-esteem through self-exploration and emotional validation.

Art therapy is an approach that combines elements of art, psychology, and various other disciplines to support an individual's recovery process. In practice, art therapy creates a safe, warm, and non-demanding environment, allowing participants to create without pressure to produce specific works. Art is not used as a tool for assessment, but rather as a means to channel and understand inner experiences. Through creative activities such as drawing, painting, or sculpting, individuals can express emotions that are difficult to express verbally. This process allows for profound emotional honesty, where artworks not only reflect outward appearances but also represent states and hidden meanings within (Maftukha, 2020). Thus, art therapy helps individuals recognize and process their feelings through symbols and visual forms that emerge naturally from the creative process.

Art therapy Local culture-based art therapy not only helps individuals improve self-esteem but also strengthens awareness of cultural identity, which plays a crucial role in psychological and social balance. This approach aligns with Bandura's (1997) notion of self-efficacy, where confidence in one's abilities is formed through concrete experiences of meaningful success. In the context of local culture, this success is measured not only by the artwork but also by the symbolic meaning and social recognition inherent in the process of creating traditional art. Therefore, developing an art therapy model that integrates Indonesian cultural values is relevant for strengthening individual self-esteem while preserving national identity in the realm of mental health.

Indonesia's local culture boasts extraordinary richness and diversity, encompassing languages, customs, arts, and belief systems spread across diverse regions. Each cultural element serves not only as a legacy from our ancestors but also as a means of strengthening collective identity and a sense of togetherness within a diverse society. In daily life, local culture plays a role in regulating patterns of social interaction, value systems, and people's perspectives on life. Values such as mutual cooperation, mutual respect, and balance with nature are integral to the character of Indonesian society, strengthening relationships between people and between generations.

In a psychological context, local culture plays a crucial role in shaping how individuals and communities cope with emotional distress and trauma. The values of togetherness embedded in social traditions often act as protective factors against stress and mental disorders. For example, traditions of gathering, religious rituals, and community activities serve as social healing spaces where individuals receive emotional support and a sense of belonging. According to Skevington (2020), cultural values such as solidarity and belonging can enhance resilience, the ability to recover from psychological difficulties. Thus, local culture can be understood not only as a social heritage but also as a source of mental and spiritual strength for individuals and communities.

Furthermore, these local cultural values can be integrated into therapeutic approaches, one of which is through culture-based art therapy. Traditional arts such as batik-making, singing, or playing gamelan contain symbolic values that reflect patience, harmony, and self-reflection. These artistic activities not only serve as a means of emotional expression but also strengthen a sense of identity and connection to cultural roots. When someone channels their feelings through a culturally recognized and meaningful art form, the therapeutic process becomes more profound and contextual. Therefore, the application of art therapy rooted in local culture has the potential to be an effective strategy for improving the mental health of Indonesians, as it combines psychological, social, and cultural dimensions in one cohesive experience.

Traditional artistic expressions such as batik, gamelan, wayang, or pantun not only serve as therapeutic media but also strengthen identity, affirm local wisdom values, and foster collective pride (Jais et al., 2022). When mental health interventions integrate local cultural elements, the recovery process becomes not only individual but also social and cultural, enabling a higher level of acceptance within the community (Listiyandini, 2025). For example, a study of Generation Z in Indonesia found that local cultural practices such as artistic rituals and traditional community activities provide a framework for emotional expression and social reintegration, essential for trauma recovery (Zafila & Purnairawan,

2024). Thus, the application of culture-based art therapy not only helps individuals restore their psychological balance but also strengthens their sense of belonging and social connection within their community.

The role of local culture in maintaining mental well-being is significant, especially in a country like Indonesia, known for its ethnic and cultural diversity. Each community has a system of values, social norms, and cultural practices that shape how individuals understand themselves and their environment. Through language, rituals, and cultural symbols, people find meaning in everyday life and navigate emotional experiences. Local culture essentially functions as a "psychological map" that helps individuals interpret the world and respond to life's challenges with a perspective that aligns with their social values. In this context, culture is not merely a legacy but also a cognitive and emotional mechanism that influences how a person processes inner experiences.

Furthermore, various studies have shown that local culture has a significant influence on a person's mindset, behavior, and psychological well-being. Values such as togetherness, spirituality, and respect for nature are often sources of strength that help individuals cope with stress and trauma. Ismawan et al. (2021) emphasize that cultural values can function as a psychological support system that fosters a sense of security and social connectedness. In Indonesian society, for example, culturally based social activities such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), thanksgiving (*selamatan*), or regional arts serve as forms of collective emotional support. These activities strengthen a sense of belonging and solidarity, ultimately contributing to increased well-being and a reduced risk of social isolation or psychological distress.

Integrating local cultural values into mental health approaches offers a significant opportunity to create more contextual and community-acceptable interventions. One example is the implementation of culture-based art therapy, where traditional arts activities are used as a means of self-expression and emotional healing. Art such as batik, wood carving, traditional dance, or gamelan music serves not only as a form of aesthetic expression but also as a medium for reflection and self-healing. When individuals channel their feelings through symbols and activities with cultural significance, the therapeutic process becomes more natural and relevant to their lives. This approach demonstrates that mental well-being is inextricably linked to the cultural roots that shape human identity and experience thus, strengthening local culture is also part of a strategy to improve the mental health of Indonesians.

Various previous studies have confirmed the effectiveness of art therapy in improving psychological well-being and self-esteem. However, most of these studies have focused on clinical or formal educational contexts and have not yet integrated local cultural perspectives as part of the therapeutic process. Yet, traditional Indonesian arts such as batik, gamelan, and wayang (wayang puppetry) hold great potential as a medium of expression and healing rooted in the social and spiritual values of the community. This gap highlights the need to develop a culturally relevant conceptual framework for art therapy.

The integration of local artistic elements into art therapy presents a different perspective compared to interventions that have been largely adapted from Western countries. Approaches originating from foreign cultural contexts often do not fully align with the strong values of family, spirituality, and religion in Indonesian society, thus reducing participant engagement or comfort in the therapy process (Listiyandini, 2025). Therefore, the main challenge in developing mental health research and interventions in Indonesia lies not only in methodological aspects, but also in ethical and cultural sensitivity. A deep understanding of local values is required so that any form of therapy implemented is truly contextual and acceptable to the community.

Based on the background outlined above, this study focuses on the role of art as a means of building individual and social self-esteem, which in turn becomes a path to achieving mental health. By combining McNiff's art therapy theory with Rosenberg's concept of self-esteem, this paper seeks to emphasize that spiritual harmony can be achieved through contextual, creative, and culturally based artistic expression. The urgency of using local culture in art therapy lies in the relevance and public acceptance of

the therapy process itself. By utilizing local culture-based art, therapy becomes more easily accepted because it is rooted in practices that are inherent in everyday life (Rajagukguk et al., 2024). Furthermore, this approach can reduce the stigma surrounding mental health services, as the public feels more comfortable when therapy is packaged as a positive cultural activity.

Furthermore, the application of local culture-based art therapy also has the potential to strengthen collective values such as mutual cooperation, togetherness, and respect for cultural identity. Findings by Kaloeti et al. (2024) also indicate that cultural values such as togetherness and solidarity play a crucial role in building individual psychological resilience, which forms the foundation for mental health. Roy (2024) also found, through a systematic review, that arts-based interventions, whether in the form of music, visuals, or dance, can improve emotional regulation and psychological well-being across cultures.

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach using a narrative literature review design to examine concepts, theories, and empirical findings related to art therapy, self-esteem, and the integration of local culture in mental health interventions. The aim of this approach is to synthesize various research findings and theories in order to produce a comprehensive conceptual understanding and an integrative model relevant to Indonesia's socio-cultural conditions. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research focuses on exploring concepts and the meaning of naturally occurring phenomena through an interpretive process. In this context, the researcher acts as the primary instrument, examining, reviewing, and synthesizing various theories and previous research findings to obtain a comprehensive conceptual picture.

The data sources in this study are relevant scientific literature, including national and international journals and academic books. The data collection process was carried out by searching online databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, DOAJ, and Portal Garuda using keywords such as art therapy, self-esteem, culture-based art, and mental health. Data analysis was carried out through content analysis, namely by identifying main themes, grouping relevant information, and interpreting the relationships between concepts that emerged from various literature sources.

The analysis process is carried out through three main stages, namely data reduction, Thematic categorization, and conceptual synthesis. In the data reduction stage, relevant literature was selected and classified based on the focus of the discussion, such as the role of art therapy in emotional regulation, increasing self-esteem, and integrating local cultural values. The second stage, thematic categorization, was carried out by identifying patterns and relationships between variables that emerged from the literature. Next, the results of the analysis were synthesized to produce a conceptual model that explains the relationship between art therapy, cultural identity, and improving mental health.

3. Results and Discussion

Art, as an expression of the soul, plays a crucial role in fostering mental health. According to McNiff (2004), art is not merely a work of art, but a creative process that can create a space for healing and recovery. Through artistic activities such as drawing, writing, dancing, or singing, individuals have the opportunity to express emotions, process inner experiences, and find inner harmony (Sarwili et al., 2021). This process has significant therapeutic effects, positioning art as an alternative pathway to mental health (SJ Kang et al., 2021).

The link between art and self-esteem further strengthens art's role as a means of healing and self-development. In the context of art therapy, personal art activities such as drawing and writing play a role in strengthening an individual's self-esteem by fostering self-confidence, self-actualization, and the ability to manage emotions (Williams, 2018). A study by Ayunda et al. (2025) showed that visual art activities significantly increased self-

acceptance and emotional regulation in students experiencing academic anxiety. The process of creating works helped participants feel more capable because they saw concrete results from their own efforts and creativity. This encouraged the growth of self-confidence and appreciation for one's abilities, which are the foundation of healthy self-esteem (Wijaya et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, collective arts activities such as role-playing or singing together contribute to strengthening social self-esteem because they involve cooperation, appreciation, and acceptance among group members (Williams, 2018). Research by Liao et al. (2024) shows that group arts therapy not only improves psychological well-being but also strengthens social bonds between members through appreciation and emotional support. When someone feels accepted and appreciated in their social environment, a sense of value and contribution to the group emerges. Thus, both in personal and collective forms, art helps individuals build more positive relationships with themselves and others and is a process that plays an important role in establishing psychological balance and mental health (Lianawati et al., 2024).

Art therapy provides an additional, more contextual and meaningful dimension. When cultural elements are integrated into the therapy process, art activities become not only a means of personal expression but also a bridge to understanding community identity and values. Through traditional arts practices such as batik-making, singing, or regional dance, individuals not only channel their emotions but also connect with their cultural roots, providing a sense of continuity and meaning in life. A study by Permatasari et al. (2017) confirmed that the use of local cultural symbols and motifs in art therapy can enhance a sense of belonging and self-esteem, as participants feel part of a valuable collective heritage.

Recent studies also strengthen the effectiveness of art in improving self-esteem. A study by Anggawijayanto et al. (2024) showed that creative art therapy conducted for five days and divided into eight sessions can reduce anxiety levels while increasing self-esteem in Generation Z. Another study by Hadi et al. (2024) found that art therapy training in high school students was able to strengthen aspects *of* self-esteem through the development of abilities, wisdom, and a sense of worth, this can be seen from the significant difference in students' self-esteem scores after participating in art therapy training which shows that the intervention is effective in increasing individual self-esteem.

Even in patients with clinical conditions, such as schizophrenia, research by Untari & Nugroho (2025) demonstrated that art therapy interventions based on the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale significantly increased self-esteem. This study concluded that art activities are not only a means of expression but can also be a therapeutic strategy to support the psychological well-being of schizophrenia patients. This shows that art is inclusive and can be applied to various age groups and psychological conditions (Setiawan et al., 2025).

The process of art therapy provides a space for individuals to practice healthy emotional regulation. When someone draws or paints, they project internal emotions into visual form, allowing feelings such as anxiety, anger, or low self-esteem to be reinterpreted more constructively. Recent research by Yohannan et al. (2025) in Kerala, India, provides strong empirical support for the effectiveness of art therapy in improving self-esteem in children living in foster care institutions. The study, involving children aged 10–16, showed that participation in art therapy sessions resulted in significant improvements in various domains of self-esteem, including general self-esteem, social self-esteem, and academic self-esteem. The mechanisms underlying these improvements are related to the opportunities provided by art activities to express pent-up emotions, address maladaptive behaviors, and strengthen a sense of personal competence. Art therapy provides a safe space for children to express their feelings without fear of judgment, thus creating repeated successful experiences in their creative process.

When compared to the Indonesian context, these results are relevant to the findings of Hadi et al. (2024), who revealed that art therapy training for high school students also had a positive impact on improving self-esteem and managing emotions. This similarity in

patterns suggests that the effectiveness of art therapy is universal, but its added value is greater when linked to local cultural elements familiar to participants. For example, batik-making or drawing traditional motifs not only provides aesthetic satisfaction but also strengthens self-identity and pride in cultural heritage.

One example of the application of local culture-based art therapy is batik-making for adolescents. The batik-making process requires concentration, patience, and creativity, thus training emotional control and fostering self-confidence when the motif is successfully completed (Jais et al., 2022). When an adolescent sees their motif successfully completed and becoming part of the cultural heritage, it not only fosters technical skills but also emotional control, such as waiting for the candle wax to dry and correcting mistakes, as well as the self-confidence that arises because "I can create a work" or "I am helping to preserve the nation's culture" (Andini & Andaryani, 2025).

For adolescents who frequently experience identity crises and low self-esteem, batik-making not only provides a space for self-expression but also fosters pride in national culture. Research shows that art therapy approaches are generally effective in improving adolescent self-esteem. For example, a study by reported that a group-based art therapy intervention in junior high school students significantly increased self-esteem scores (Nuradilah & Dini, 2024).

Meanwhile, a systematic review of the research on the Art therapy Technique "Batik" to Improve the Emotional Intelligence of Junior High School Students confirmed that the batik technique in particular is effective in helping adolescents express emotions, train patience and precision, while strengthening awareness of the importance of preserving traditional culture and batik also broadens adolescents' insights about the importance of preserving traditional culture in the era of globalization (Rahmiawan et al., 2024).

Another example is the use of gamelan for the elderly in communities or nursing homes (Rohman et al., 2022). The activity of playing gamelan is collective and requires cooperation between players, thus increasing social self-esteem, reducing feelings of loneliness, and fostering a sense of togetherness. Furthermore, the rhythmic and harmonious sounds of gamelan have a relaxing effect that supports inner peace (Saputri et al., 2025). In this context, art therapy becomes a restorative social space that not only improves personal well-being but also strengthens social cohesion. The integration of this aspect of togetherness aligns with Indonesian cultural values that uphold mutual cooperation *and* respect for others.

Research conducted by Ulfiana et al. (2020) indicates that cultural arts activities (batik colet) combined with an art therapy approach can be an alternative intervention for the elderly, particularly to maintain or stimulate cognitive function and provide more meaningful activities at the elderly integrated health post (*Posyandu*). Such a program can enrich routine Posyandu activities, increase elderly participation, and provide added psychosocial value (self-expression, new skills, social interaction) in addition to cognitive aspects.

Art therapy process can be implemented through several interconnected stages. The first stage is preparation, where the facilitator introduces participants to the traditional art form to be used, such as batik, gamelan, or pantun. At this stage, it is important to create a safe, warm, and supportive atmosphere so participants feel free to express themselves without fear of judgment. An explanation of the cultural significance of the chosen art is also provided so participants understand its context and philosophical values.

During the preparation stage, the facilitator can open the session with a story or light discussion, such as, "Why did our ancestors create this motif?", "What do the colors or lines you see mean?", or "How do you feel when you see -these motifs on batik cloth?". With these kinds of questions, participants begin to become subjects, not just objects. They not only learn how to use the canting technique, but also understand that traditional art has a history, roots, and a sense of pride. This is important because several studies have shown that when traditional art is used in a therapeutic context, the effects are not only technical but also strengthen the participants' cultural and emotional identities. For

example, a review of traditional art in art therapy found that the practice led to increased cultural pride and the reclaiming of cultural identity (Arslanbek et al., 2022).

Furthermore, by understanding the cultural context, participants experience two things simultaneously: first, they feel that "what I do has meaning," and second, they begin to see themselves as cultural preservers. This sense of meaning can support their internal motivation, and when they finally move on to the next stage, such as applying the canting (canting) or waiting for the wax to dry, the process becomes more than just an artistic activity; it also becomes an experience that supports emotional control, self-reflection, and strengthens self-confidence when the work is completed and can be viewed or shared. Research on groups using traditional cultural media in art therapy has shown that this type of intervention can improve self-efficacy and social functioning, for example, a study on individuals with schizophrenia using traditional Chinese art materials (Tong et al., 2021).

The second stage is exploration, the core of art therapy activities. Participants are encouraged to actively create using the provided art media. For example, they might draw batik motifs with a canting (a traditional Indonesian word for "canting"), write pantun (a pantun) depicting feelings, or play simple instruments in a gamelan. These exploratory activities operate in multiple dimensions. Emotionally, participants gain space to channel pent-up feelings, such as anxiety, shame, or identity confusion, into tangible forms (motifs, colors, rhythms). Cognitively and attentively, the process of batik-making or playing a gamelan requires concentration, present-moment presence, impulse control, and the ability to calmly correct mistakes. Interpersonally, when conducted in groups, such as a group gamelan session or a mutual performance of pantun works, these activities facilitate collaboration, mutual listening, appreciation of others' contributions, and build a sense of community (Jarmani, 2022).

Thus, this exploration stage becomes a space for transformation for participants, not just creating art, but also combining emotional expression, psychological training (self-control, focus), and strengthening cultural identity in a series of enjoyable and meaningful activities. As a result, they can feel calmer, more interested in themselves and their surroundings, and more confident that "I am capable" and "I have a place." For the exploration phase to run optimally, several aspects need to be considered by the facilitator, namely providing sufficient and safe tools and materials, giving short demonstrations but allowing room for improvisation, inviting participants to share the process for example "what do I feel when choosing this color?" or "why do I like this motif?", and designing collective activities such as exchanging pantun results or playing gamelan together so that social interaction grows. In other words, if the preparation phase sets the foundation and creates a safe atmosphere, introduction to culture and media selection, then the exploration phase is the root, a place where participants actively create, touch, feel, and connect. This activity is the core that brings change, both internally (emotions, self-confidence) and externally (social relationships, cultural identity).

The third stage is reflection, a crucial moment after the creative process where participants are invited to pause to record their experiences, what emerged in the process, how they felt, and what meaning they perceived. The facilitator can lead with open-ended questions such as "How did you feel when this batik motif began to appear?", "What were you thinking about while the candles were waiting to dry?", "When you were playing gamelan with your friend earlier, what happened in your heart?"

Reflection can be done verbally, so that participants share stories in groups, listen to each other, and receive feedback, or in writing, for example, short notes, journals, or even scribbles that are then colored. The goal is to become aware of the emotions that arise (joy, frustration, pride, shame), identify self-values ("I am patient," "I feel connected to the culture"), and strengthen the positive feelings that arise from the art activity ("I can," "I am appreciated," "I am part of a community").

Through reflection, artworks don't just remain physical objects, but become a bridge to self-understanding and self-development. Participants not only view their work but also reflect on their journey, how they chose colors, how they reacted to mistakes, or how their

peers -responded. In the process, they might conclude things like, "When I chose this motif, I wanted to reflect my hopes," or "When my friend complimented my work, I felt appreciated and my confidence increased."

Research supports the importance of the reflection process in art therapy. For example, in a study of art groups for adolescents, it was found that through focused interviews after sessions, participants began to understand themselves better and become aware of their emotions, developing a more positive self-concept (Huang et al., 2021). In the context of local culture, reflection can also be directed at cultural meanings. Participants can ask themselves, "What does this batik motif mean to me and my family?", "How do I feel when I play the gamelan that my grandmother used to play?", "When writing pantun, am I expressing something about my identity as part of my culture?" The reflection stage strengthens a sense of cultural pride. at a time personal self-confidence.

Facilitators play a crucial role in providing space for reflection by creating a supportive atmosphere, ensuring that each participant has the opportunity to speak or write, and valuing all forms of expression, not just those that are technically sound but also those that are honest and come from the heart. A model of local culture-based art therapy groups noted that after sessions of work and reflection, participants reported increased self-awareness. And willingness to express further.

The final stage is integration, the process of connecting artistic experiences with everyday life. At this stage, the facilitator and participants summarize the lessons learned, such as the importance of patience in batik-making, the value of togetherness in playing gamelan, or the confidence that grows after daring to write and recite pantun in front of friends. Thus, art experiences don't stop at momentary activities, but serve as a foundation for building individual and social self-esteem in real-life contexts (Yoo & Bae, 2019). It's hoped that participants will begin to apply these experiences in their daily routines, perhaps becoming more patient when waiting their turn, more open to speaking in front of others, or more appreciative of others' roles within a team. This allows for the increased self-esteem and sense of competence derived from art to extend into social settings such as school, the community, or at home.

Research supports that arts interventions that conclude with a process of reflection and connection to real-world contexts tend to produce more lasting change. For example, a study of nature-based art groups found that a nature- based group art therapy program not only improved self-esteem but also enabled participants to incorporate the art experience into their daily lives, thus making the effects more sustainable (Kang et al., 2021). To ensure the integration phase is effective, facilitators need to help participants connect their art experiences with concrete actions in their daily lives. One way to do this is by encouraging participants to write down or discuss concrete plans after the activity, for example, "After making batik today, I will try making a small motif at home," or "When I feel insecure, I will remember that I am capable of completing this work." Furthermore, facilitators can conduct follow-up monitoring by inviting participants back several weeks later to share their experiences about how the results of their art activities are being applied in their daily lives, whether at home, at school, or in their social circles.

The values gained from arts activities also need to be linked to the cultural identity and social roles of participants. For example, when people play gamelan together, they not only learn to listen and cooperate but also contribute to preserving their nation's cultural heritage. Through this process, local culture-based art therapy not only becomes a means of self-expression but also forms part of character development and fosters a sense of pride in one's own culture (Ningrum & Pamela, 2022). Participants' artistic experiences ultimately extend beyond creative moments and become valuable tools for building and maintaining self-esteem in real life.

Art therapy has been shown to help individuals build self-esteem through creative activities and positive experiences during the creative process. This was found in a study by George et al. (2024) on children in an orphanage. After participating in a four-week art therapy program, the children showed increased self-confidence and felt more valuable because they were able to express themselves through artwork. This process occurs

because art therapy provides a space for individuals to express their feelings without fear of judgment, discover their abilities, and receive appreciation for their work. In this way, art not only becomes a tool for self-soothing but also helps individuals see themselves as capable and valuable individuals (Gong & Santoso, 2025).

Furthermore, group art therapy plays a crucial role in enhancing social self-esteem, the feeling of acceptance and appreciation from others. Research conducted in Indonesia by Misty & Tirta (2020) demonstrated that eight sessions of group art therapy provided to adolescents at the Tangerang Special Children's Development Institution (LPKA) successfully increased their self-confidence and ability to interact socially. Adolescents participating in the program reported feeling more confident in expressing themselves, more open to peer feedback, and more appreciated for the work they created together. These findings align with research conducted by Dashtaki & Yazdanpanahi (2024) in Iran, which demonstrated that group art therapy effectively improved social skills and reduced awkwardness in interacting with middle school students. Artistic activities such as drawing, collage-making, and discussing their work enabled participants to build positive relationships with others, feel accepted, and develop social confidence. Thus, the collective creative process not only strengthens individual self-esteem but also fosters a sense of community and social acceptance, which are essential for mental health (Han, 2025).

Art therapy has several advantages that make it relevant to the Indonesian context. First, traditional arts such as batik, gamelan, or pantun are already familiar in society, making their use as a therapeutic medium more readily accepted. These arts activities also embody values of local wisdom and collective identity, allowing participants not only to experience psychological benefits but also to gain pride in their cultural heritage (Yona et al., 2024). Furthermore, many traditional art forms are collective in nature, such as gamelan or dance, which foster social interaction, collaboration, and emotional support. This makes local culture-based art therapy effective not only for building individual self-esteem but also for building social self-esteem. Furthermore, this approach can reduce the stigma surrounding mental health services, as therapy is packaged in a fun and positive cultural activity. An additional, equally important benefit is the educational aspect, helping to preserve traditions and introduce culture to the younger generation through activities that are simultaneously therapeutic (Miswar et al., 2022).

Although culturally based art therapy offers numerous psychological and social benefits, its implementation in the field is not without challenges. One major obstacle is the facilitator's limited understanding of the therapeutic aspects of art itself. Many traditional artists possess advanced technical skills but may not understand the dynamics of emotion, trauma, or the psychological mechanisms involved in the therapeutic process. This can lead to arts activities remaining merely aesthetic, without addressing the emotional healing aspects of participants. Therefore, close collaboration between artists, psychologists, and educators is necessary for arts-based interventions to truly have measurable therapeutic effects (Furniss, 2016). Interdisciplinary collaboration also plays a role in ensuring that arts activities are not only enjoyable but also structured to support the achievement of psychological goals such as increased self-esteem, emotional regulation, and self-awareness.

To strengthen the sustainability of implementation, it is necessary to develop training modules for teachers, counselors, and mental health workers so they can facilitate art therapy activities with an ethical approach and sensitivity to local culture. Further research should also focus on testing the effectiveness of culture-based art therapy models in various contexts, such as schools, communities, and vulnerable groups. These research findings can form the basis for developing national guidelines for implementing culture-based art therapy in Indonesia. This approach will ensure that art serves not only as a medium for individual therapy but also as a means of sustainable character building and community psychosocial well-being.

Another challenge lies in how traditional art is understood and used in a therapeutic context. When cultural arts are used as a tool for psychological intervention, there is a risk of diminishing cultural meaning, namely when the spiritual, symbolic, and philosophical

dimensions of art are treated merely as technical media. In the Indonesian context, for example, batik-making or singing activities have spiritual values related to patience, harmony, and respect for ancestors. If these aspects are ignored, art therapy loses its symbolic power. Therefore, facilitators need to have good cultural literacy and ensure that the implementation of activities respects the context of local values and wisdom that underlie the art.

In addition to conceptual challenges, accessibility and equity are also significant obstacles to implementing local culture-based art therapy. Not all regions have the resources or facilities to present certain traditional arts, such as gamelan, wayang, or batik. In urban areas, modern art forms like digital painting or journaling may be easier to implement, while in rural areas, logistical difficulties or limited funding often present obstacles. Variations in individual preferences also need to be considered; some people may feel more comfortable with contemporary art forms, such as digital design or photography, than traditional art. Furthermore, empirical evidence on the effectiveness of local culture-based art therapy remains relatively limited.

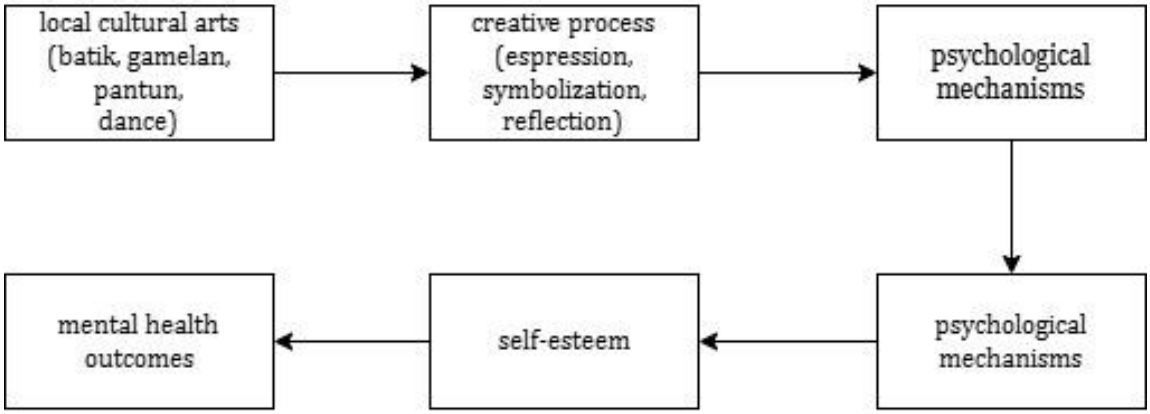


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework of local culture-based art therapy in enhancing self-esteem and mental health

Based on the synthesis of the reviewed literature, this study proposes a conceptual framework illustrating the relationship between local culture-based art therapy, self-esteem, and mental health outcomes. The framework highlights that traditional arts such as batik, gamelan, pantun, and dance function as primary therapeutic media. Through the creative process, which involves expression, symbolization, and reflection, individuals are provided with opportunities to externalize emotions and gain insight into their inner experiences. This process activates several psychological mechanisms, including emotional regulation, self-reflection, and the development of a sense of competence. Simultaneously, engagement in culturally grounded artistic practices also triggers cultural mechanisms, such as strengthening cultural identity, fostering a sense of belonging, and enhancing social interaction within a collective context.

The interaction between psychological and cultural mechanisms contributes to the enhancement of both individual and social dimensions of self-esteem. Individuals not only develop a stronger sense of personal worth and capability but also experience greater social acceptance and connectedness. Ultimately, improved self-esteem leads to better mental health outcomes, including increased psychological well-being, reduced stress, and enhanced resilience.

4. Conclusions

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that art, particularly through a local culture-based art therapy approach, plays a crucial role in building individual and social self-esteem, which directly contributes to improved mental health. Creative processes such as drawing, writing, batik-making, or playing gamelan not only provide a safe space for self-expression but also serve as a means to foster self-awareness, empathy, and pride in cultural identity. Artistic activities rooted in local wisdom enable individuals to recognize traditional values relevant to modern life, such as patience, perseverance, cooperation, and mutual respect. Thus, art serves not only as a therapeutic medium but also as a vehicle for character building and strengthening resilience in the face of life's pressures.

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Author Contribution
The authors confirm equal contribution regarding the study's conception, methodological design, analysis, and manuscript preparation. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final version for submission.

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Ethical Review Board Statement
Ethical review and approval were waived for this study due to the nature of the research, which did not involve interventions, experiments, or procedures that posed risks to participants. The study relied on voluntary participation and informed consent, with all data collected and analyzed in a manner that ensured confidentiality and anonymity of the informants.

Informed Consent Statement
Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. All participants were informed about the purpose of the research, and their participation was voluntary.

Data Availability Statement
The data presented in this study are not publicly available due to ethical and privacy restrictions, as they contain information that could compromise the confidentiality of research participants. Data may be available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Declaration of Generative AI Use
During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used ChatGPT to assist in improving language clarity, grammar, and overall academic tone of the manuscript. After using this tool, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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