

From Culturally Responsive to Culturally Sustaining Music Pedagogy in Elementary Schools: An Integrative Literature Review and Conceptual Model

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Abstrak

Pendidikan musik di sekolah dasar menempati peran yang mendasar dalam pembentukan kultural dan perkembangan identitas anak, namun praktik pembelajaran di banyak sistem pendidikan masih beroperasi melalui pendekatan yang terstandarisasi dan tidak terhubung dengan latar belakang musikal beragam yang dibawa siswa ke kelas. Penelitian ini mengkaji transisi konseptual dari pedagogi responsif kultural menuju pedagogi berkelanjutan secara kultural dalam pendidikan musik di sekolah dasar. Melalui *integrative literature review* terhadap 41 sumber yang dipilih secara sistematis dari Scopus, ERIC, Web of Science, dan Google Scholar (1995-2024), data dianalisis menggunakan *thematic synthesis*. Temuan mengungkap empat dimensi tematik: pengakuan pengalaman musikal dan identitas kultural siswa, desain pembelajaran kontekstual, orientasi keberlanjutan kultural, dan ekosistem kolaboratif antara sekolah, keluarga, seniman lokal, dan komunitas. Keempat dimensi disintesis menjadi model konseptual yang melampaui kerangka sebelumnya dengan mengintegrasikan penilaian autentik sebagai elemen struktural, memformulasikan ekosistem kolaboratif secara mandiri, dan menghadirkan perspektif non-Barat melalui konteks pendidikan Indonesia. Model ini menawarkan kerangka berbasis teori bagi pendidik musik, pengembang kurikulum, dan pembuat kebijakan dalam menavigasi keberagaman kultural di sekolah dasar.

Kata Kunci: ekosistem kolaboratif; pedagogi responsif kultural; pendidikan musik; sekolah dasar.

Abstract

Music education in elementary schools occupies a foundational role in children's cultural formation and identity development, yet instructional practice in many educational systems continues to operate through standardized approaches that remain disconnected from the diverse musical backgrounds students bring to school. This study examines the conceptual transition from culturally responsive pedagogy to culturally sustaining pedagogy in elementary music education. Through an integrative literature review of 41 systematically selected sources from Scopus, ERIC, Web of Science, and Google Scholar (1995–2024), data were analyzed using thematic synthesis. The findings reveal four thematic dimensions: recognition of students' musical experience and cultural identity, contextual learning design, cultural sustainability orientation, and a collaborative ecosystem connecting school, family, local artists, and community. These dimensions were synthesized into a conceptual model that advances existing frameworks by integrating authentic assessment as a structural element, formulating the collaborative ecosystem as a standalone component, and introducing a non-Western perspective through the Indonesian educational context. The model offers a theoretically grounded framework for music educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers navigating cultural diversity in elementary schools.

Keywords: collaborative ecosystem; culturally responsive pedagogy; music education; elementary school.

Introduction

Music education at the elementary school level occupies a position that extends well beyond the transmission of technical performance skills. Hallam (2010) drawing on a substantial body of empirical evidence, demonstrated that sustained engagement with music during early schooling is associated with measurable gains in language processing, working memory, and social sensitivity, suggesting that music functions as a medium through which broader developmental capacities are cultivated in children. This understanding has found institutional expression in the UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education (UNESCO, 2024), which positions arts and music not as peripheral additions to the curriculum but as constitutive elements of quality education for all children in their formative years. At the elementary level, children encounter music through experiences that are embodied and contextually embedded, including family songs, communal rituals, rhythmic play, and the sonic textures of everyday life. These encounters form the basis of musical knowledge long before formal instruction begins, and they fundamentally shape the ways children hear, interpret, and make meaning through music. When schooling fails to acknowledge and build upon this prior knowledge, the music classroom risks becoming a space that transmits content without cultural resonance, organized according to institutional convention rather than the actual lives of the children it serves.

In Indonesia, this pedagogical challenge carries particular weight. As an archipelagic nation with more than 1,300 recognized ethnic groups (Statistik, 2010), Indonesia holds one of the world's most diverse repositories of musical heritage, encompassing traditions such as gamelan, angklung, gondang, kolintang, and tifa, among hundreds of others distributed across the country's regions. These traditions represent not merely musical forms but living systems of knowledge, social organization, and cultural identity. Two of them have been inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, namely angklung in 2010 (UNESCO, 2010) and gamelan in 2021 (UNESCO, 2021), a recognition that underscores their significance beyond national borders and affirms their status as practices worthy of active preservation. At the policy level, the Kurikulum Merdeka introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in 2022 marked a meaningful shift by emphasizing flexible, project-based learning and the purposeful integration of local wisdom across subject areas, including arts and culture (Kementerian Pendidikan Riset, dan Teknologi, 2022). Studies examining music teaching practices in Indonesian elementary schools, however, suggest that classroom instruction continues to be shaped predominantly by standardized textbook materials. Sularso et al., (2023) found that strategies for teaching traditional music in Indonesian elementary schools have not fully accommodated the diverse musical backgrounds students bring from their home and community environments. Setyatama (2025) reinforced this finding by demonstrating that efforts to integrate local cultural values into music learning continue to face systemic obstacles, particularly as a result of nationally standardized instructional materials. The distance between policy aspiration and classroom reality is not a challenge unique to Indonesia, but it takes on particular urgency in a context of such cultural richness and such pressing questions

about what it means to educate children through music in ways that are genuinely grounded in their lives.

The scholarly literature on culturally responsive approaches to music education has grown considerably over the past three decades, offering a productive body of thought for understanding this challenge. The theoretical foundation was established by Ladson-Billings (1995), whose concept of culturally relevant pedagogy proposed that effective teaching must simultaneously support academic achievement, cultivate cultural competence, and foster critical consciousness, three orientations that cannot be pursued independently without diminishing the quality of the educational experience. Gay (2018) extended this framework into the operational dimensions of classroom practice, showing how teachers' choices of materials, interaction styles, and instructional strategies carry cultural implications that directly shape students' engagement with learning. Within music education specifically, Bond (2017) conducted a foundational literature review demonstrating that culturally responsive approaches arrived later in the field than in general education, while identifying the conceptual and practical groundwork the discipline would need to develop. Bond & Russell (2021) subsequently proposed a conceptual model connecting culturally responsive knowledge to music teacher preparation, a framework that has informed subsequent scholarship in the field. Kelly-McHale (2019) contributed a valuable reorientation by arguing that cultural responsiveness in elementary music settings is best understood as a pedagogical disposition rather than a fixed technical repertoire, shifting the focus from what teachers do to how they think and relate to the students and communities they serve.

Running alongside these developments has been a substantive shift in the broader pedagogical conversation, from cultural responsiveness toward cultural sustainability. Paris (2012) articulated the conceptual distinction clearly, arguing that responsive approaches risk stopping at acknowledgment of students' backgrounds while leaving intact the institutional structures that consistently subordinate non-dominant cultural forms. Culturally sustaining pedagogy, by contrast, holds that schools must function as active sites for preserving and strengthening the linguistic and cultural practices of students' communities, particularly those historically marginalized within formal education. Within music education, Good-Perkins (2021) explored the philosophical dimensions of this transition, arguing that genuine cultural sustainability requires a rethinking of what counts as legitimate musical knowledge within the school. Liu (2020) extended this discussion to the general music classroom, examining how teachers might practically enact sustaining orientations in their day-to-day instruction. These contributions have meaningfully advanced the field. Nevertheless, they remain fragmentary with respect to the specific context of elementary schooling, leaving unresolved questions about how sustaining orientations translate into coherent pedagogical frameworks at the level where children's musical identities are most actively forming.

Taken together, the existing literature reveals three interrelated gaps that motivate and shape the present study. Theoretically, no existing framework has brought together the conceptual transition from culturally responsive to culturally

sustaining pedagogy, the developmental characteristics of elementary-age learners, authentic assessment practices, and the collaborative ecosystem of school, family, and community within a single integrated model. Each of these dimensions has received attention in isolation, but the relationships among them remain underarticulated in the literature. Methodologically, reviews in this area have rarely employed transparent and consistently documented protocols for literature selection and thematic analysis, a limitation that affects the replicability and cumulative value of their syntheses. Contextually, scholarship on culturally responsive and sustaining music pedagogy has been generated almost entirely within North American and Western European research traditions. The perspectives of researchers and educators working in the Global South, including countries with extraordinarily rich musical heritages and pressing questions about cultural sustainability in schooling, remain largely absent from the international conversation on this topic.

This study was designed to address these gaps through a systematic conceptual literature review with a qualitative approach. The study aims to analyze and synthesize scholarly literature on culturally responsive and culturally sustaining music pedagogy in elementary schools, and to derive an integrative conceptual model with implications for music learning that is more contextual, participatory, and culturally just. The central question guiding the inquiry is as follows: How is culturally responsive music pedagogy conceptualized in the scholarly literature, and what integrated framework can be constructed from this synthesis for elementary music learning? The contribution of this study is threefold. First, it offers a more comprehensive conceptual model than currently available in the literature, one that articulates the interconnections among student cultural experience, contextual learning design, cultural sustainability, and community partnership as mutually reinforcing dimensions of music pedagogy. Second, it brings the Indonesian educational context into explicit conversation with international scholarship on this topic, providing a non-Western vantage point that the field has yet to systematically engage. Third, it incorporates assessment practice as a substantive and integrated component of culturally grounded pedagogy, a dimension that prior models have addressed only in passing. The remainder of this article is organized as follows: Section 2 describes the methodological approach; Sections 3.1 through 3.4 present the thematic findings organized around the model's core dimensions; Section 3.5 synthesizes these findings into a conceptual model; and Section 4 presents the conclusions and directions for further research.

Methods

This study employs an integrative literature review design with a qualitative approach. This design was selected because it enables the researcher to examine, evaluate, and synthesize literature from diverse research traditions in a systematic manner, thereby generating a more comprehensive understanding of a topic that remains under active development (Torraco, 2016). Unlike a systematic review, which restricts its scope to studies with specific experimental designs, an integrative literature review accommodates theoretical, empirical, and policy sources

simultaneously, making it more appropriate for constructing a new conceptual framework from complementary scholarly perspectives. Snyder (2019) affirms that this approach is particularly relevant when the purpose of research is not merely to summarize existing findings but to produce a synthesis capable of opening new intellectual horizons. In the context of this study, the design was chosen because culturally responsive and culturally sustaining music pedagogy in elementary schools has yet to be articulated within a single unified conceptual framework, and integrative synthesis is therefore regarded as the most suitable approach for addressing this gap.

The literature search was conducted across four academic databases, namely Scopus, ERIC, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, covering publications from 1995 to 2024. The starting year of 1995 was determined with reference to the foundational work of Ladson-Billings, which constitutes the primary theoretical basis of this study. The search was carried out between January and March 2025 using keyword combinations based on Boolean operators. The primary keywords used in English included: *"culturally responsive pedagogy"* AND *"music education"*, *"culturally sustaining pedagogy"* AND *"elementary school"*, *"music learning"* AND *"cultural identity"*, and *"elementary music"* AND *"cultural sustainability"*. To extend coverage to Indonesian-language literature, additional searches were conducted using the keywords *"pendidikan musik"* AND *"budaya lokal"*, *"pedagogi responsif kultural"* AND *"sekolah dasar"*, and *"keberlanjutan budaya"* AND *"pembelajaran musik"*. The search also included cross-referencing from identified sources to capture relevant literature that may not have been retrieved through direct database searching.

The literature selection process was governed by a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria established prior to the commencement of the search, as recommended by Xiao & Watson (2019). The inclusion criteria comprised five dimensions: first, the source must be a peer-reviewed journal article, an academic book from a reputable publisher, or a policy document from an internationally recognized institution; second, the content must be directly related to culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy, music education, or elementary school learning; third, the source must be written in English or Indonesian; fourth, the source must have been published between 1995 and 2024; and fifth, the full text must be accessible in its entirety. Sources excluded from the review include non-academic popular articles, conference proceedings that did not undergo a structured selection process, unpublished theses and dissertations, and sources whose thematic connection to the focus of this study is marginal or indirect. These criteria were applied consistently by all members of the research team to ensure the transparency and replicability of the selection process. A summary of the selection criteria is presented in table 1.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for literature selection

Dimension	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Source type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books from reputable publishers, policy documents from recognized institutions	Popular articles, proceedings without structured review, unpublished theses and dissertations
Topical relevance	Directly related to culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy, music education, or elementary school learning	Marginal or indirect connection to the study focus
Language	English and Indonesian	Languages other than English and Indonesian
Publication period	1995 to 2024	Published before 1995 or after 2024
Accessibility	Full text available and fully accessible	Full text unavailable or restricted

*Source: (Adapted from Xiao & Watson, 2019)

The literature selection process was carried out in four stages adapted from the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021). At the identification stage, searches across all databases yielded a total of 347 records. Following the removal of duplicates across databases, 289 records remained and proceeded to the screening stage. At this stage, the titles and abstracts of all records were evaluated against the established inclusion criteria, resulting in 94 articles deemed eligible for further review. At the eligibility stage, the full texts of these 94 articles were read in their entirety and assessed for their relevance to the focus and purpose of the study. From this process, 53 articles were excluded because they did not meet the criteria for substantive relevance or did not satisfy the minimum methodological standards established for this review. At the final stage, 41 sources comprising journal articles, academic books, and policy documents were retained as the literature corpus used in the synthesis. The complete selection process is presented visually in the flow diagram in Figure 2 to facilitate reader verification of the transparency of the procedures applied.

Data from all selected sources were analyzed using the thematic synthesis procedure developed by Thomas & Harden (2008) and reinforced by the integrative review framework of Torraco (2016). Thematic synthesis was selected because it was designed specifically for synthesizing data derived from literature sources rather than from primary empirical data such as interview transcripts or observational records, making it more consistent with the design of this study. The analytical procedure proceeded through three iterative stages. In the first stage, each source was read in its entirety and subjected to line-by-line coding to identify key ideas, important concepts, and central arguments relevant to the focus of the review. In the second stage, codes sharing semantic proximity were grouped into descriptive themes that summarized the patterns and tendencies found across the literature. In the third stage, these descriptive themes were analyzed further to generate analytical themes that move beyond the content of the original sources and produce new interpretations and conceptual contributions. All stages of analysis were conducted reflexively, with the researchers documenting each analytical decision on an ongoing basis to ensure the traceability of the process from beginning to end.

The trustworthiness and rigor of this study were ensured through four evaluative dimensions proposed by Lincoln & Guba (1985). First, credibility was achieved through a collaborative verification process in which all themes generated during analysis were reviewed and confirmed by all members of the research team, so that the interpretations produced reflect analytical consensus rather than individual judgment alone. Second, dependability was ensured through the maintenance of an audit trail documenting all analytical decisions, from the initial coding process through to the final formulation of themes, so that the research process can be transparently reconstructed by external parties. Third, confirmability was preserved through researcher reflexivity, whereby the initial assumptions and epistemological orientations of the researchers were documented before the analysis commenced in order to minimize the influence of subjectivity on data interpretation. Fourth, transferability was strengthened by presenting a detailed and thorough methodological description, as recommended by Shenton (2004), enabling other researchers to assess the applicability of these findings to their own contexts or to adapt the procedures employed in comparable studies.

Results and Discussion

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Theoretical Foundations and Critical Evaluation

Culturally responsive pedagogy emerged as a scholarly and practical response to the persistent failure of mainstream educational institutions to accommodate the cultural diversity of their students. The conceptual foundation was established by Ladson-Billings (1995) through the notion of culturally relevant pedagogy, which argued that effective teaching must simultaneously pursue three inseparable orientations: meaningful academic achievement, the development of students' cultural competence, and the cultivation of critical consciousness toward social realities. The significance of Ladson-Billings' contribution lies in her rejection of the assumption that academic excellence and cultural relevance are mutually exclusive, a dichotomy that had long been treated as self-evident in mainstream educational practice. Within her framework, students' cultural identities are not obstacles to be overcome but sources of knowledge that must be recognized as legitimate foundations for learning.

Gay (2018) extended this framework into more concrete operational dimensions, demonstrating how cultural responsiveness manifests in teachers' everyday pedagogical decisions. A culturally responsive teacher does not merely acknowledge students' backgrounds in a symbolic or performative sense but actively integrates students' experiences, communication styles, cultural references, and learning orientations into choices about materials, instructional interactions, and learning strategies. This extension is significant because it shifts cultural responsiveness from a plane of normative principle toward a plane of observable and applicable pedagogical practice. Together, Ladson-Billings and Gay constitute the conceptual foundation that has served as the primary reference point in the culturally responsive pedagogy literature for more than two decades.

Notwithstanding these substantial contributions, culturally responsive pedagogy is not without limitations that warrant critical acknowledgment. Aronson & Laughter (2016), through a cross-disciplinary synthesis of research, demonstrated that the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy in practice frequently stops at the level of surface-level adaptation: teachers incorporate local cultural elements as examples or illustrations without altering the underlying epistemological structure of instruction. Under such conditions, students' cultures are present in the classroom but do not genuinely shape the direction and purpose of education. Abril (2013) reinforced this concern in the music education context specifically, observing that shallow cultural responsiveness can produce an illusion of inclusivity without actually disturbing the established hierarchy of musical knowledge embedded in the curriculum. These limitations suggest that culturally responsive pedagogy, however strong its conceptual representation, requires a deepening of orientation to move beyond accommodation toward genuine transformation.

The relevance of culturally responsive pedagogy becomes especially pronounced when considered alongside the developmental characteristics of elementary-age children. At this level of schooling, children learn through experiences that are concrete and embedded within the social contexts they directly inhabit, including family, peers, community, and the cultural traditions they inherit from an early age. Hargreaves & Marshall (2003) demonstrated that children's musical identities are actively formed during this period through the interplay of musical experiences at home, in their communities, and at school, making continuity across these three environments a condition that significantly shapes the meaning music learning holds for students. The conceptual development of culturally responsive pedagogy from Ladson-Billings through Gay and toward Paris is visualized in figure 1.

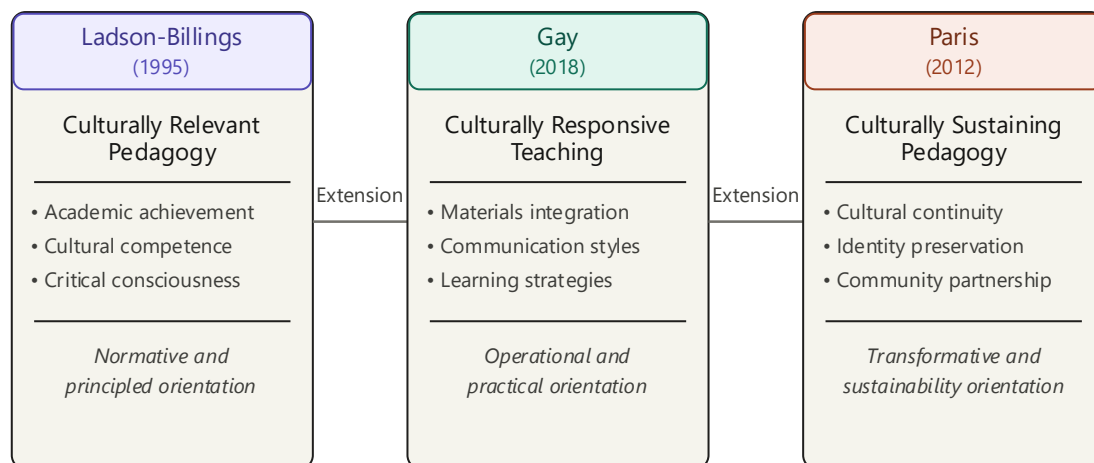


Figure 1. Conceptual development of culturally responsive pedagogy in education
Source: (Developed by the authors based on Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012)

Culturally Responsive Music Pedagogy in Elementary Schools

In the context of music education, culturally responsive pedagogy takes on a particularly concrete form because music is itself a cultural practice laden with identity, memory, value, and social experience. Campbell (2018) affirms that every musical

form emerges from a specific life context and carries a particular way of understanding the world, such that no music functions as a culturally neutral teaching material. Instruction that disregards this dimension risks reducing music to a collection of technical skills divorced from its cultural and social meaning. For this reason, music education is one of the fields in which the argument for culturally responsive approaches is both most compelling and most urgently needed.

Children enter the music classroom not as subjects empty of musical experience but as individuals who already possess musical knowledge formed socially through interactions with their family and community environments. Kelly-McHale (2019) asserts that these prior musical experiences, ranging from songs sung at home and music heard through media to rhythmic play and communal musical traditions, constitute a pedagogically legitimate foundation that must serve as the starting point for classroom learning. In the Indonesian context, this means that traditions such as gamelan, regional songs, children's musical games, and the diverse forms of community musical expression distributed across the archipelago should be positioned not merely as acknowledged cultural heritage but as sources of musical knowledge with genuine pedagogical legitimacy in the classroom. Sularso et al., (2023) demonstrated that when strategies for teaching traditional music in Indonesia are developed with close attention to students' cultural backgrounds, their engagement in learning increases substantially.

This reorientation carries significant implications for how the teacher's role in elementary music education is understood. Kelly-McHale (2019) argues that a culturally responsive teacher cannot be understood primarily as a transmitter of content or a director of technical skill. The teacher must instead function as a reader of cultural context, a musical mediator, and a facilitator of meaningful learning experiences. This role demands the capacity to recognize students' social and musical backgrounds, to understand their familiarity with particular musical forms, and to translate that understanding into relevant pedagogical decisions. Gay (2018) cautions that the development of such capacity does not occur automatically and requires concrete institutional support, including sustained professional development opportunities and sufficient curricular flexibility.

The implications of culturally responsive pedagogy for music learning in elementary schools extend across several interrelated dimensions, from repertoire selection to the relationship between school and community. Bond (2017) showed that when culturally responsive orientations are applied consistently, change occurs not only at the level of materials taught but also in how interactions are structured, how musical activities are designed, and how connections between school and community cultural resources are maintained. A summary of these implications is presented in table 2.

Table 2. Implications of culturally responsive pedagogy for music learning in elementary schools

Dimension	Orientation	Practical Implication
Repertoire	Grounded in students' cultural experience	Regional songs, community music, and local musical play are used as legitimate teaching materials
Learning strategies	Contextual, dialogic, and participatory	Students are invited to respond, interpret, and discuss music from the context of their own lives
Musical activities	Rooted in everyday experience	Students sing, move, and create music from forms that are familiar and meaningful to them
Teacher role	Cultural mediator and learning facilitator	Teacher connects curricular goals with students' musical and social backgrounds
School-community relationship	Building cultural connections	Learning involves local repertoire and genuine community participation

*Source: (Developed by the authors based on Bond, 2017; Kelly-McHale, 2019; Sularso et al., 2023)

From Culturally Responsive to Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Paradigmatic Shift

Culturally responsive pedagogy has provided an important foundation for learning that is more sensitive to student diversity. Studies across the field have shown, however, that in practice this approach frequently encounters limitations of a structural nature. Aronson & Laughter (2016) found that schools adopting the language of cultural responsiveness do not always alter the curricular structures, assessment systems, or knowledge hierarchies that underlie their practices. As a result, students' cultures become present at the surface of the classroom without genuinely shaping the architecture of learning at a deeper level. Within music education specifically, Abril (2013) observed that practices claiming cultural responsiveness often do no more than introduce local or ethnic music as occasional illustrations within a curriculum whose fundamental structure remains organized around repertoire and assessment standards from a particular tradition. This limitation indicates that responsiveness, unless accompanied by a deeper commitment, risks operating as cultural ornamentation rather than pedagogical transformation.

It is from this awareness of limitation that Paris (2012) introduced the concept of culturally sustaining pedagogy as an orientation that moves beyond responsiveness toward sustainability. The fundamental difference between the two lies in the position assigned to students' cultures within the educational process. In culturally responsive pedagogy, students' cultures are acknowledged and used as contexts that make learning more relevant. In culturally sustaining pedagogy, students' cultures are positioned as something that must continue to live, develop, and receive legitimacy within the school as an institution. Paris & Alim (2017) extended this argument by affirming that culturally sustaining pedagogy represents not merely a terminological shift but a fundamental epistemological one: the pedagogical question is no longer

"how do we make learning relevant to students' cultures?" but "how do we ensure that students' cultural practices, languages, and identities continue to thrive through and alongside schooling?" This shift carries far-reaching consequences for how schools understand their own function as social and cultural institutions.

Within music education, the shift toward culturally sustaining pedagogy brings concrete and fundamental consequences. Good-Perkins (2021) argues that genuine cultural sustainability in music education requires an expansion of the epistemic space regarded as legitimate within the classroom: the kinds of musical knowledge considered worthy of study must extend beyond the traditions that have historically dominated formal curricula. Under this orientation, students' music is no longer a "doorway" used by the teacher to introduce predetermined curricular content but rather the "pedagogical goal" itself, something worthy of being studied, practiced, and celebrated in its own right. Liu (2020) translates this orientation into the practical context of the general music classroom, examining how teachers can actively facilitate cultural sustainability through repertoire choices, participation structures, and assessment approaches. In the Indonesian context, this orientation opens space for the active preservation of gamelan, angklung, gondang, and hundreds of other ethnic musical traditions through formal elementary school education, in alignment with the spirit of the Kurikulum Merdeka policy that emphasizes integration of local wisdom across subjects (Kementerian Pendidikan Riset, dan Teknologi, 2022).

The differences between culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally sustaining pedagogy can be mapped systematically across five interrelated dimensions, as presented in table 3. This mapping shows that while both approaches share a commitment to diversity, they differ significantly in their transformative ambition and the depth of institutional change they require. Figure 2 visualizes this paradigmatic shift.

Table 3. Comparison of culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally sustaining pedagogy in music education

Dimension	Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy
Core orientation	Making learning relevant to students' cultures	Ensuring students' cultures continue to live through schooling
Position of student culture	Context that facilitates learning	Content and goal of learning itself
Function of schooling	Accommodating cultural diversity	Preserving and strengthening students' cultural practices
Measure of success	Student engagement and academic achievement	Continuity of students' cultural practices and identities
Implication for music	Local musical elements as contextual illustrations	Community music as the substance and purpose of learning

*Source: (Developed by the authors based on Good-Perkins, 2021; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim 2017)

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP)		Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP)
• Relevance as the goal	Orientation	• Sustainability as the goal
• Culture as learning context	Position of culture	• Culture as learning content
• Accommodate diversity	Function of school	• Transform institutional structure
• Academic achievement	Measure of success	• Cultural identity continuity
• Local content as illustration	Music implication	• Community music as purpose

Figure 2. Paradigmatic shift from culturally responsive to culturally sustaining pedagogy
Source: (Developed by the authors based on Good-Perkins, 2021; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017)

Implications for Music Learning in Elementary Schools

One of the most direct implications of a culturally sustaining orientation for elementary music learning concerns the logic underlying repertoire selection. In conventional approaches, repertoire is typically determined on the basis of technical difficulty sequences, national curricular conventions, or the availability of existing textbooks. A culturally sustaining orientation transforms this logic fundamentally: repertoire is selected on the basis of its musical proximity to students' cultural experiences and its potential to support the continuity of their cultural practices. Bond (2017) demonstrated that when repertoire is drawn from students' actual musical lives, their engagement in learning increases significantly because the music being studied is no longer something external or unfamiliar to who they are. In the Indonesian context, this means opening substantially greater space for regional songs, traditional children's musical games, communal singing traditions, and ethnic musical expressions alive in students' communities as legitimate and valued repertoire within the elementary music curriculum.

A culturally sustaining orientation also transforms the character of the instructional strategies used in the music classroom. Strategies aligned with this orientation are dialogic, participatory, and responsive to diversity, affording students space to respond, interpret, and connect musical experience with their own social contexts. Economidou Stavrou (2024) demonstrated that differentiated instruction, meaning the calibration of strategies to the diverse needs and backgrounds of students, not only enhances individual engagement but also broadens the possibilities for meaningful participation in music learning. This approach calls on teachers to move beyond uniform instructional patterns toward flexible and responsive learning designs, a shift that requires both pedagogical capacity and adequate institutional support.

Assessment represents one of the dimensions most frequently overlooked in discussions of culturally responsive and sustaining music pedagogy, yet it carries

profoundly significant implications. Fautley (2010) argues that assessment in music education cannot be separated from the pedagogical values that underlie it: if learning is oriented toward cultural meaningfulness and active student participation, then assessment confined to measuring technical accuracy becomes inadequate because it captures only a fraction of the quality of learning actually taking place. Within a culturally sustaining framework, dimensions such as creative participation, cultural reflection, the capacity to connect music with social context, and the expression of identity through music must be counted as valuable components of achievement. Authentic assessment approaches including context-based performance rubrics, process portfolios, documentation of learning experiences, and self-assessment offer orientations more aligned with these pedagogical values because they can capture qualities of learning that product-only measurement cannot explain.

Cultural sustainability in music learning cannot be sustained by teachers or classrooms operating in isolation. Paris & Alim (2017) affirm that schools can only function as spaces of cultural sustainability when they build genuine and reciprocal connections with the cultural resources alive outside the classroom. In the context of music education, this means opening family involvement in learning, bringing local musicians and cultural practitioners into the classroom, using locally rooted musical repertoire and practices as teaching material, and forming partnerships with cultural preservation initiatives at the community level. Epstein et al., (2018) provide a useful framework for understanding how school, family, and community partnerships can be designed in a systematic and sustained manner. Figure 3 visualizes this collaborative ecosystem.

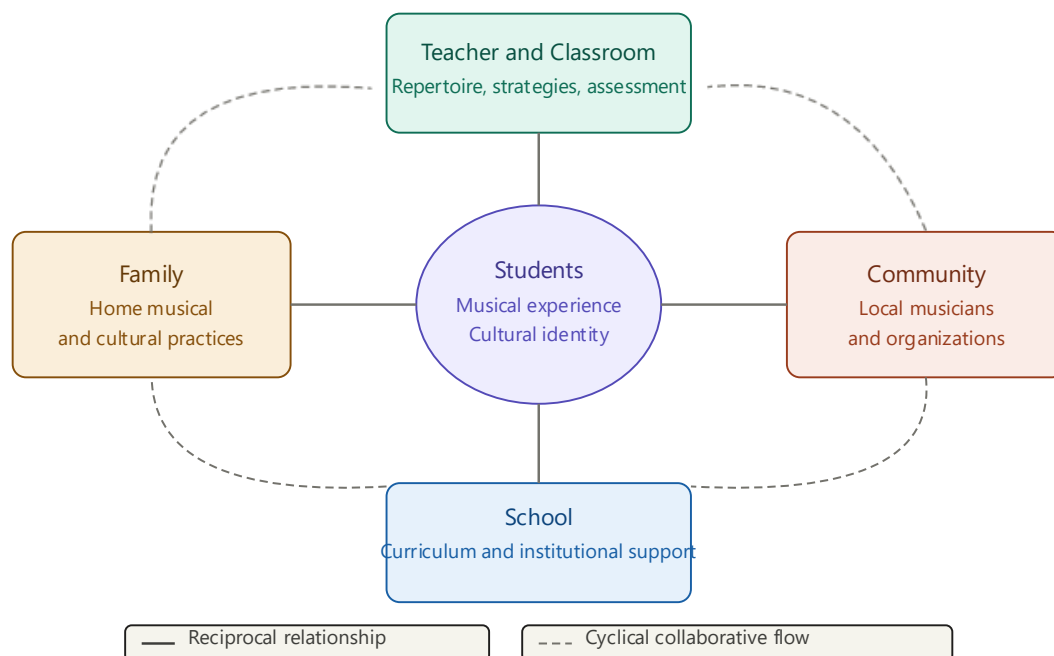


Figure 3. Collaborative ecosystem of culturally sustaining music learning in elementary schools

Source: (Developed by authors based on Epstein et al., 2018; Paris & Alim, 2017)

The pedagogical transformation demanded by a culturally sustaining orientation cannot proceed without accompanying institutional transformation. Gay (2018) reminds that the most significant obstacles to implementing culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy are often not rooted in teachers' lack of motivation but in the constraints of institutional support: rigid curricula, uniform learning resources, and nationally standardized assessment systems. In the Indonesian context, the Kurikulum Merdeka policy (Kementerian Pendidikan Riset, dan Teknologi, 2022) opens substantial opportunities through its emphasis on curricular flexibility and local wisdom integration, yet the realization of these opportunities requires sustained professional development for teachers, provision of diverse learning resources, and administrative commitment from school principals and regional education authorities. Without change at the institutional level, pedagogical transformation at the classroom level will struggle to endure and develop in a consistent and lasting manner.

A Conceptual Model of Culturally Sustaining Music Pedagogy in Elementary Schools

Drawing on the full body of thematic findings presented in sections 3.1 through 3.4, this study proposes a conceptual model that synthesizes the key elements of culturally responsive and culturally sustaining music pedagogy in elementary schools into an integrated framework. The model is built upon four elements that mutually support one another and cannot function optimally when operated in isolation. The first element is the recognition of students' musical experience and cultural identity as the epistemological point of departure for learning: all pedagogical decisions must be rooted in a deep understanding of who students are culturally and musically. The second element is contextual learning design, which translates that recognition into concrete decisions about repertoire, strategies, musical activities, and authentic assessment. The third element is an orientation toward cultural sustainability that ensures students' cultural practices are not merely acknowledged symbolically but actively strengthened and sustained through the educational process. The fourth element is the collaborative ecosystem that connects school, family, local artists, and community in a network of mutually supportive relationships oriented toward cultural continuity. The strength of this model lies not in each element individually but in the dynamic of relations that connects them as one coherent system.

The model proposed in this study differs from and extends the model developed by Bond & Russell (2021) in three significant respects. First, this model integrates authentic assessment as a substantive component inseparable from contextual learning design, a dimension that in Bond and Russell's model was addressed only implicitly and without adequate elaboration. Second, this model formulates the collaborative ecosystem among school, family, and community as a standalone structural element with equal weight to the other elements of the model, rather than treating it as an optional supplementary recommendation. Third, and most distinctively, this model integrates a non-Western contextual perspective by drawing explicitly on the realities of music education in Indonesia as a case that enriches and tests the generalizability of the conceptual framework being constructed. The model

therefore constitutes a direct response to the three gaps identified in the literature review: the theoretical, methodological, and contextual gaps. The relationships among the four elements are visualized in figure 4.

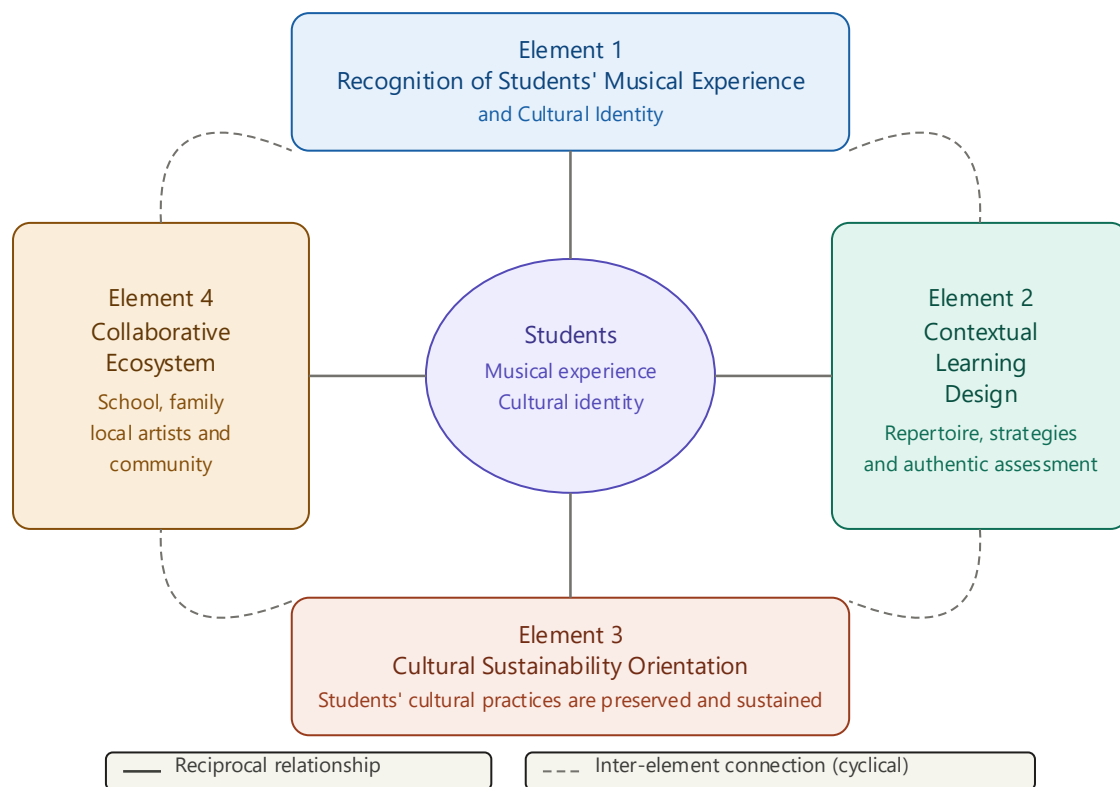


Figure 4. Conceptual model of culturally sustaining music pedagogy in elementary schools
Source: (Developed by authors based on Bond & Russell, 2021; Epstein et al., 2018; Paris & Alim, 2017)

This conceptual model carries implications at three distinct levels. For researchers, the model provides a theoretical framework that can serve as the basis for empirical studies examining how culturally sustaining pedagogy operates within diverse elementary school contexts, including through case studies, classroom action research, and ethnographic inquiry across different regions of Indonesia. For teachers, the model offers a holistic guide for pedagogical reflection, enabling them to evaluate the extent to which their practice has integrated all four elements simultaneously and to identify which dimensions still require strengthening. For policymakers, the model provides a structured argument for supporting curricular flexibility, context-based professional development, and community partnership as components that are inseparable from a quality music education system. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that as a conceptual construction grounded in literature review, this model has not yet been empirically tested in field settings. Studies that examine the application of this model within actual elementary school practice, particularly across Indonesia's diverse cultural contexts, represent a pressing and promising agenda for future research.

Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze and synthesize the scholarly literature on culturally responsive and culturally sustaining music pedagogy in elementary schools, and to construct an integrated framework with implications for music learning that is more contextual, participatory, and culturally just. The findings address the first research question by demonstrating that culturally responsive music pedagogy is conceptualized in the literature through a trajectory that moves from orientations of cultural relevance and responsiveness toward a more transformative orientation of cultural sustainability. Within the context of music education, this trajectory reveals that cultural responsiveness that stops at surface-level acknowledgment is insufficient to guarantee the continuity of students' musical practices, identities, and knowledge within the school as an institution. Thematic synthesis identified four key dimensions that together constitute a comprehensive pedagogical foundation: recognition of students' musical experience and cultural identity, contextual learning design, cultural sustainability orientation, and a collaborative ecosystem connecting school, family, local artists, and community.

Addressing the second research question, this study proposes an integrative conceptual model built upon these four elements as its primary theoretical contribution. The model advances existing frameworks in three specific respects: it integrates authentic assessment as a substantive structural component, formulates the collaborative ecosystem as a standalone element of equal structural weight, and introduces a non-Western perspective through the Indonesian music education context as a case that strengthens the generalizability of the framework constructed. For music educators, the model offers a holistic guide for pedagogical reflection. For policymakers, it provides a theoretically grounded argument for supporting curricular flexibility and community partnership in music education. For researchers, the model offers a conceptual scaffold for future empirical studies, including classroom action research and ethnographic inquiry, needed to test the applicability of this model across diverse elementary school contexts, particularly in Indonesia with its extraordinary richness of musical and cultural heritage.

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