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**МҮМКҮНЧҮЛҮГҮ ЧЕКТЕЛГЕН АДАМДАР ҮЧҮН ДАРЫЛООЧУ ПЕРФОРМАНС:
ЭКСПЕРИМЕНТАЛДЫК МАДАНИЙ ТЕРАПИЯ МОДЕЛИ**

**ИСЦЕЛЯЮЩЕЕ ПРЕДСТАВЛЕНИЕ ДЛЯ ЛЮДЕЙ С ИНВАЛИДНОСТЬЮ:
ПОЛУЭКСПЕРИМЕНТАЛЬНАЯ КУЛЬТУРНАЯ ТЕРАПИЯ**

**PERFORMING HEALING FOR PERSON WITH DISABILITY:
A PRE-EXPERIMENTAL CULTURAL THERAPY MODEL**

Аннотация. Бул макалада физикалык жана интеллектуалдык мүмкүнчүлүгү чектелген адамдар (PwDA) үчүн атайын иштелип чыккан Bajau Laut элинин салттуу Igal бийи менен драмалык терапияны айкалыштырган маданий дарылоонун модели сунушталат. Жарым эксперименталдык сапаттык методологияны колдонуу менен изилдөө эки жолку 12 апталык мастер-класстардын алкагында катышуучулардын эмоциялык, символикалык жана физикалык (тулку бойдун) трансформацияларын изилдеген. Inclusive Treatment Experimental Ritual Performance (InTERiPe) моделинде маданий практикаларга негизделген клиникалык эмес дарылоону сунуштайт. Натыйжалар PwDA арасында эмоциялык чыдамкайлыктын жогорулашы, жан дүйнө өзүмдүгүнүн тастыкталышы жана өзүн билдирүү жөндөмдүүлүгүнүн өнүгүшү байкалганын көрсөтөт. Бул макала Түштүк-Чыгыш Азиядагы инклюзивдүү, деколониялык жана маданий коопсуз терапиялык ыкмалар боюнча дискурскка салым кошот.

Негизги сөздөр: PwDA, жарым эксперименталдык дизайн, Igal бийи, драма терапиясы, маданий терапия, инклюзивдүүлүк

Аннотация. В статье представлен культурный терапевтический подход, сочетающий традиционный танец игал народа Bajau Laut и драматерапию, специально разработанный для людей с инвалидностью (PwDA). С использованием полуэкспериментальной качественной методологии исследование изучило эмоциональные, символические и телесные трансформации, которые испытывали участники в ходе двух 12-недельных мастер-классов. Модель InTERiPe (Inclusive Treatment Experimental Ritual Performance) была разработана для неклинического исцеления, основанного на культурных практиках. Полученные результаты свидетельствуют о повышении эмоциональной устойчивости, утверждении идентичности и развитии выразительных способностей среди PwDA. Статья вносит вклад в дискуссию об инклюзивных, деколонизальных и культурно безопасных терапевтических методах в Юго-Восточной Азии.

Ключевые слова: PwDA, полуэкспериментальный дизайн, танец игал, драматерапия, культурная терапия, инклюзия

Abstract: This article presents a cultural therapeutic model that integrates the traditional Bajau Laut Igal dance and dramatherapy, specifically designed for Persons with Different Abilities (PwDA). Using a pre-experimental qualitative methodology, the study explored emotional, symbolic, and embodied transformations experienced by participants across two 12-week workshops. The Inclusive Treatment Experimental Ritual Performance (InTERiPe) model was developed to offer non-clinical healing anchored in cultural practices. Findings suggest enhanced emotional resilience, identity affirmation, and expressive capability among PwDA. This article contributes to the discourse on inclusive, decolonial, and culturally safe therapeutic methods in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: PwDA, pre-experimental design, Igal dance, dramatherapy, cultural therapy, inclusivity

Introduction

Traditional healing practices in Malaysia, particularly among the Bajau Sama, carry therapeutic dimensions that remain underutilized in modern mental health care. This study proposes a culturally grounded intervention known as InTERiPe (Inclusive Treatment Experimental Ritual Performance), aimed at enhancing the well-being of Persons with Different Abilities (PwDA). The terminology 'PwDA' is employed throughout this paper to reflect a person-first, ability-oriented language that recognizes diversity in human functioning. The study reframes *Igal* dance—traditionally linked to ritual and community—as a therapeutic act that fosters emotional expression, cultural identity, and psychosocial healing. The evolving discourse on disability studies has increasingly advocated for the decentralization of Western medical models in favor of culturally specific therapeutic approaches. This is particularly vital in Southeast Asian contexts, where traditional knowledge and communal rituals continue to offer psychosocial support (Tan & Abdullah, 2024). The *Igal* dance, often performed to honor ancestral spirits and coastal resilience, serves not only as cultural preservation but also as a medium of reconnection for those experiencing emotional dislocation. This paper also engages with emerging frameworks in inclusive performance studies that emphasize co-creation, embodiment, and storytelling as legitimate therapeutic pathways (Chilton, Gerber, & Scotti, 2019).

Literature Review

Arts-based therapeutic models have increasingly embraced culturally specific practices, aligning with global discourses on decolonizing therapy (Kapitan, 2018; Arai & O'Connor, 2020). In Southeast Asia, ritual performance is a vehicle for healing, identity, and resilience (Low, Kipli & Panan, 2021). Leavy (2020) and Snow & D'Amico (2021) argue that pre-experimental and heuristic methods are essential in capturing symbolic, relational, and embodied change in arts-based research. Malaysian-based studies (Shariff, 2022; Rahman & Ng, 2023) have shown how

indigenous arts like Mak Yong and Zapin serve therapeutic functions for neurodivergent and mobility-challenged populations. Such frameworks emphasize holistic engagement over standardized symptom metrics, allowing participants to express personal meaning and emotion through performance. In particular, Bräuninger (2021) highlights how movement-based therapies facilitate emotional regulation in individuals with motor and cognitive differences. Furthermore, Phelan (1993) discusses the 'unmarked' body in performance as a political and therapeutic act, which resonates with PwDA reclaiming space through embodied expression. Hervey (2020) contributes a crucial ethical dimension, arguing for 'embodied ethics' in arts-based work—underscoring the therapist's responsibility to witness without colonizing participant narratives.

Methodology

This study adopted a pre-experimental design with heuristic and phenomenological foundations. Two cycles of workshops involving 41 PwDA participants were conducted. Sessions combined dramatherapy, story enactment, *Bajau Laut Igal* dance, and cultural rituals. Facilitators included a dramatherapist, a traditional dance expert, and a counselor. The pre-experimental format ensured all participants received the full experience, addressing ethical concerns of withholding interventions (McLeod, 2022). Data were collected through video documentation, reflective journals, post-session interviews, and field observations. Themes were analyzed for affective shifts, cultural affirmation, and expressive breakthroughs. The choice of pre-experimental design aligns with the study's intention to explore inner transformation rather than produce generalized outcomes. Workshops were divided into five stages based on Emunah's Five Phase Model (1994), progressing from warm-up and dramatic play to life enactments and closure. Each session was filmed and coded for affective cues such as eye contact, vocal shifts, and bodily engagement. The inclusion of PwDA from varied backgrounds allowed for a richer analysis of how disability intersects with cultural expression and healing.

Findings and Discussion



Figure 1.0: The posters of two projects (2023, 7 & 8 January and 2024, 11 & 12 January)

The Inclusive Treatment Experimental Ritual Performance (InTERiPe) model was implemented through two community-based projects conducted on 7–8 January 2023 and 11–12 January 2024, organized by the College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA, in collaboration with partners such as UNESCO Malaysia, Universiti Malaya, OKU Sentral, Anak Seni Production, Malaysia International Dance Organization, FiTA Dance Theatre, FiTA Theatre Production, Kolej Jasmine & Dahlia UiTM Cawangan Selangor (UCS), Unit Perkhidmatan OKU UCS, Unit Kebudayaan UCS, INSAN, and MAGIS.

These initiatives supported four key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

- SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being
- SDG 4 – Quality Education
- SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities
- SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

Analysis of participants' experiences and facilitator observations revealed three interrelated themes that reflect the psychosocial impact of the InTERiPe model:

Emotional Release and Resilience

Participants repeatedly described the *Igal* dance as “a new language to speak emotions.” The gestures, particularly in improvisational segments, enabled PwDA to express suppressed

feelings beyond verbal constraints. The safe space created during sessions allowed emotions such as grief, frustration, and joy to be embodied and transformed through movement.

For example, in one session centered around mask-making and roleplay, participants confronted unresolved trauma. This emotional material was later ritualized and channeled into choreographed *Igal* sequences, reinforcing Cruz and Berrol's (2020) argument that “symbolic movement helps externalize and process trauma in embodied ways.”

Symbolic Self-Representation

The workshops provided a platform for PwDA to reclaim agency by constructing and performing their own narratives. Through cultural gestures, traditional chants, and storytelling, participants reimagined themselves not as subjects of therapy but as creators of meaning.

This resonates with Boal's (2002) concept of performance as “rehearsal for revolution,” where participants use the stage as a site of transformation. As one facilitator noted, “Participants created avatars of themselves—warriors, healers, sea wanderers—and danced their truths into being.”

Collective Identity and Ritual Coherence

The incorporation of ritual structures, such as communal chanting, synchronized gongs, and

closing circle rites, fostered a strong sense of group unity and belonging. Many PwDA reported feeling “*part of something ancient*” and expressed pride in reconnecting with their cultural roots.

This aligns with Rappaport’s (1999) assertion that ritual “*binds social meaning and identity*,” reinforcing community and shared resilience. A facilitator recorded in their journal:

“Participants seemed most alive during communal rhythm moments, where eye contact and synchrony emerged naturally.”

These moments of embodied synchronicity—especially among individuals with communication barriers—highlight the therapeutic potency of culturally embedded, non-verbal performance.

Ethical Consideration of Pre-Experimental Design

While the study did not include a control group, this was a deliberate and ethical decision. Given the exploratory, inclusive, and community-driven nature of the project, withholding access to cultural healing would have been inappropriate. The pre-experimental design thus served not as a limitation, but as a flexible

structure that foregrounded human dignity and cultural safety (McLeod, 2022; Tan & Abdullah, 2024).

Conclusion

The InTERiPe model provides a culturally resonant, inclusive, and ethical framework for non-clinical therapy targeting PwDA. The pre-experimental methodology allowed deep exploration of healing through traditional performance, affirming that cultural practices offer legitimate pathways for emotional and psychosocial support. This approach challenges dominant clinical norms and advocates for integrating indigenous knowledge in mental health intervention strategies. Further longitudinal and mixed-method studies are recommended to enhance validity and policy integration.

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