



Therapeutic Harmonies of Angklung Music and Enhancement of Well-being for the Elderly in Nusantara Malay Archipelago

Muhammad Asyraf Mohd Bakri ^{1,2,*}, Mohammad Kamal Sabran ³, Mohammad Reevany Bustami ⁴, Asrenee Ab Razak ⁵

¹ Department of Product Design, School of The Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia, USM, Penang, Malaysia

² School of Applied Creative Arts and Design, Han Chiang University College of Communication, Penang, Malaysia

³ Department of New Media Design and Technology, School of The Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia, USM, Penang, Malaysia

⁴ Center for Policy Research, Universiti Sains Malaysia, USM, Penang, Malaysia

⁵ School of Medical Sciences, Health Campus Kubang Kerian, Kelantan, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Kota Bharu, Kelantan, Malaysia

* Corresponding author: asyrafbakri94@gmail.com

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Abstract:

Purpose: The aging process increases vulnerability to illness and mortality. The Angklung, a traditional bamboo instrument, serves as a cultural and therapeutic tool, fostering healing and social connections among the elderly in the Nusantara Malay Archipelago. This study explores its therapeutic benefits.

Methods: This study employs a qualitative descriptive methodology to examine Angklung as a therapeutic tool for the elderly in the Nusantara Malay Archipelago. Data collection includes primary and secondary sources such as books, journal articles, and historical documents using library research techniques. The analysis ensures historical accuracy and links findings to Angklung's therapeutic applications, presented in a clear and structured manner.

Results: The study highlights Angklung's therapeutic benefits across the Nusantara Malay Archipelago. In Malaysia, it enhances elderly well-being through programs like the Angklung Healing Art Project. In Indonesia, it fosters social interaction, nostalgia, and reduces depression. In Thailand, the Smart Band device improves cognitive and physical skills, enhancing life satisfaction. In Singapore, Angklung in art therapy promotes emotional expression, relaxation, and social engagement. These findings affirm Angklung as a culturally significant, non-pharmacological tool for elderly well-being in the region.

Conclusions: This study underscores Angklung's therapeutic benefits for the elderly across the Nusantara Malay Archipelago. By enhancing physical, psychological, and social well-being, Angklung serves as a culturally significant, non-pharmacological tool. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of its role in elderly care, supporting its integration into therapeutic and community programs.

Keywords:

Angklung, Ageing, Arts in Health, Cultural, Nusantara Malay Archipelago

1. Introduction

Eastern and Southeast Asia are undergoing significant demographic shifts, with projections indicating a substantial increase in the elderly population in the coming years (United Nations, 2019). Quality of life, as defined by the World Health Organization



(WHO), encompasses an individual's subjective assessment of their cultural, normative, and environmental circumstances in relation to their personal aspirations, goals, standards, and concerns throughout their lifespan. This holistic perspective underscores the importance of enhancing well-being through various methods, including creative and cultural interventions.

Arts in healthcare, also known as arts in medicine, is a dynamic multidisciplinary field that uses creative expression to enrich healthcare services (National Organisation for Arts in Health, 2017). This integrative approach combines literary, performing, visual, and design arts to improve healthcare delivery by fostering meaningful interactions at crucial life stages. As Armstrong (2021) highlights, art plays a significant role in promoting healing and fostering social cohesion within healthcare settings. Arts-based therapies offer effective non-pharmacological alternatives to pain management, demonstrated by El Geziry et al. (2018), who show their effectiveness in alleviating fear, discomfort, anxiety, and pain, thereby empowering patients to regain emotional balance in challenging medical situations. Grebe (2019) further emphasizes the therapeutic benefits of artistic interventions in enhancing emotional resilience and psychological well-being, providing vital support to individuals facing illness, physical trauma, and adversity. The WHO (2023) underscores the pivotal role of creative expression in promoting overall well-being and therapeutic progress across diverse populations.

Recent studies by Mileski et al. (2019) and Howden-Chapman et al. (2017) underscore the multifaceted benefits of music engagement, which not only enhance cognitive function and emotional well-being but also mitigate stress, manage pain, and help prevent age-related cognitive decline, particularly among older adults. Meanwhile, Rosyadi (2012) explores the nuanced evolution of Angklung, tracing its historical journey from a practical tool to a revered musical instrument. In Sundanese culture, Angklung transcends mere entertainment, playing integral roles in traditional ceremonies and cultural contexts. Despite historical fluctuations, Angklung's recognition as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage underscores its enduring cultural significance (Rosyadi, 2012).

Angklung emerges as uniquely suited for engaging with the senior population of the Nusantara Malay Archipelago through art-based interactions. Crafted from bamboo, Angklung is valued for its lightweight design, making it accessible for elderly individuals, including those dealing with conditions such as sarcopenia (Roubenoff, 2000). Its intuitive playing technique, involving shaking to produce sounds, requires no prior musical experience, democratizing musical expression. Moreover, the instrument's ability to generate distinct notes fosters collaborative efforts for harmonic synthesis, promoting collective engagement and social cohesion during group performances (Hiranpanthaporn et al., 2022).

This article aims to illuminate Angklung's transformative role in art-based interventions for the elderly across the diverse cultural landscapes of the Nusantara Malay Archipelago. Within this framework, the term Nusantara Malay Archipelago encompasses the cultural and civilizational spaces where Malay communities have thrived for centuries, nurturing a rich tapestry of traditions that endure and evolve to this day.



2. Literature Review

Art in Health

The field of arts in health is rapidly expanding, encompassing a multidisciplinary domain that integrates various artistic expressions to enhance healthcare delivery and overall well-being (National Organization for Arts in Health, 2017). This holistic approach incorporates literary, performing, visual, and design arts into therapeutic and educational settings, aimed at promoting stress reduction, emotional resilience, and mental health support (Goodman & Sims, 2009).

Music, art, and dance therapies have emerged as particularly effective modalities among elderly populations, offering non-pharmacological approaches to alleviate pain, anxiety, and depression (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). Studies such as those by El Geziry et al. (2018) and the University of Michigan Injury Prevention Center (2023) highlight music therapy's ability to empower patients, providing emotional relief and fostering a sense of control over their well-being.

Traditional musical art forms like Angklung, a bamboo instrument originating from Indonesia, show promising potential in elderly care. Research indicates that Angklung-based interventions enhance cognitive function, emotional regulation, and social connectedness through collaborative music-making activities (Raglio et al., 2015). Despite limited specific research on Angklung therapy, existing studies consistently underscore its benefits for aging individuals, emphasizing its role as a valuable tool for improving well-being and promoting social inclusion.

Beyond its musical attributes, Angklung's participatory nature fosters a sense of community and belonging among elderly participants, addressing feelings of isolation and loneliness common among older adults. Engaging in group Angklung sessions allows individuals to strengthen social bonds, enhance communication skills, and experience heightened self-esteem and well-being. This communal aspect of Angklung therapy is vital in addressing the holistic needs of aging populations, supporting cultural continuity and personal fulfillment through meaningful artistic engagement.

Music Therapy

Music therapy is integral to arts-based healthcare interventions, providing a non-pharmacological approach to enhancing emotional and psychological well-being. Recognized as a therapeutic modality, music engages patients actively through playing instruments or singing, as well as passively through listening, contributing to improvements in cognitive function, anxiety reduction, and enhanced social interaction (González-Ojea et al., 2022).

Research underscores the significant benefits of music therapy for elderly populations, particularly those in institutionalized care settings. It has been shown to alleviate depressive symptoms and foster creative expression through structured musical activities such as singing, rhythmic exercises, and instrumental play. These interventions play a crucial role in maintaining daily functions, reinforcing independence, emotional stability, and overall well-being (World Health Organization, 2023).



Furthermore, studies highlight music therapy's role in emotional regulation and its ability to mitigate feelings of loneliness, especially among individuals with cognitive impairments like dementia (Chu et al., 2014). By enhancing quality of life, music therapy offers a viable alternative to conventional treatments, advocating for holistic and patient-centered care approaches (Mohd Bakri & Sabran, 2022).

Aging

Aging represents a global phenomenon presenting significant challenges to healthcare and social systems worldwide. By 2050, an estimated 80% of older adults will reside in low- and middle-income countries, underscoring the rapid expansion of the global aging population. In 2020, the number of individuals aged 60 and older surpassed that of children under five years old. Projections indicate that by 2050, the over-60 population will nearly double, rising from 12% to 22% (World Health Organization, 2022).

In response to these demographic shifts, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2021–2030 as the Decade of Healthy Ageing, empowering the World Health Organization (WHO) to lead global efforts in reducing health disparities and enhancing the well-being of older adults. This initiative aligns with the UN Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasizing community-based support systems, age-friendly environments, and person-centered healthcare services.

Aging also significantly increases the prevalence of dementia, which ranks as the seventh leading cause of death globally. Alzheimer's disease accounts for 60–70% of dementia cases, affecting over 55 million people worldwide, with a predominant impact on populations in low- and middle-income countries. As global life expectancy continues to rise, the number of dementia cases is expected to escalate further (World Health Organization, 2023).

Women are disproportionately affected by dementia, both as patients and caregivers, providing nearly 70% of global dementia care hours. Additionally, approximately 15% of the world's population—over 1 billion individuals—live with disabilities, with older adults facing heightened vulnerability to age-related impairments that compromise independence and quality of life (United Nations, 2023).

Angklung

Angklung, a traditional bamboo idiophone, is crafted from two to four tubes bound with rattan, typically using *Gigantochloa atroviolacea* Widjaja (black bamboo) for its durability and acoustic resonance (Mohd Bakri, Surip, & Sabran, 2021). Originally integral to agricultural rituals and theatrical performances, Angklung has evolved into a medium for visual art appreciation, entertainment, and modern musical expression (Juju Masunah, 1999). Its cultural significance was solidified on January 18, 2011, when UNESCO officially recognized Angklung as part of Indonesia's Intangible Cultural Heritage, reaffirming its status as a cultural symbol and artistic heritage (Rosyadi, 2012).

As a percussive instrument, Angklung produces sound when shaken and is traditionally performed in ensemble settings, requiring multiple players to create harmonized melodies, although solo performances are also possible (Wahono, 2010; Zainal et al., 2009). Beyond its artistic and cultural roles, Angklung has gained



prominence in education, therapy, and assistive interventions, expanding into cognitive, social, and rehabilitative domains.

Angklung has been integrated into music education and cultural engagement programs, serving as a tool to develop musical appreciation and cultural awareness in schools, orchestras, and community settings. Moreover, its structured coordination requirements make it effective in cognitive and emotional therapy, stimulating cognitive function, emotional resilience, and social interaction. This activity-based approach is particularly beneficial for students and elderly individuals, fostering engagement and enhancing overall well-being.

3. Methods

The aim of this study is to investigate the therapeutic use of Angklung among the elderly in the Nusantara Malay Archipelago. The research employs a qualitative descriptive methodology, utilizing both primary and secondary sources gathered through comprehensive library research techniques. This approach involves analyzing a variety of materials including reference books, academic journals, theses, and historical documents to explore the evolution of Angklung as an art-based intervention tool.

Data collection involves meticulous sourcing of information to ensure accuracy and relevance to the study's objectives. This process of gathering sources, data, and historical records is critical to establishing a robust foundation for the analysis. The qualitative descriptive approach guides the data analysis phase, which focuses on examining how Angklung music has been utilized historically and its current applications in enhancing the well-being of elderly individuals across the Nusantara Malay Archipelago.

The study aims to verify the accuracy of historical sources and their alignment with Angklung's therapeutic role. The findings will be presented in a clear and accessible manner, ensuring that the research contributes to a comprehensive understanding of Angklung's cultural significance and its practical benefits in therapeutic settings. This approach underscores the study's commitment to rigorous scientific inquiry and aims to provide valuable insights into the integration of traditional musical practices in promoting health and wellness among aging populations.

4. Results and Discussion

Eastern and Southeast Asia are currently experiencing significant demographic shifts, with projections indicating a notable increase in the elderly population (United Nations, 2019). Aging is a complex process marked by intricate molecular and cellular changes that lead to progressive physical and cognitive decline, heightened susceptibility to diseases, and increased mortality risks (WHO, 2022). Addressing the specific musculoskeletal needs of the elderly, particularly those affected by conditions like sarcopenia, is crucial for promoting their overall health and quality of life (Chen & Liao, 2022).

In response to these challenges, non-pharmacological interventions such as Angklung music activities have emerged as promising approaches to enhance both mental acuity and physical well-being among older adults (National Organisation for Arts in Health, 2017). Angklung, a traditional bamboo musical instrument consisting of two to four



bamboo tubes bound with rattan, holds deep cultural and therapeutic significance in Malaysia. Historical records trace its origins back to 1930 (Mohd Bakri, 2021). Renowned for its lightweight construction and melodious tones, Angklung has gained acclaim as an effective therapeutic tool for elderly care.

In synthesizing previous research on Angklung interventions for the elderly, Table 1 provides a literature matrix that highlights key findings across Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Singapore. Many studies illustrate Angklung's therapeutic and social benefits, including enhanced cognitive performance (Deswita, 2015; Tallutondok, 2019), reductions in depression (Fitria et al., 2022), improved quality of life (Putri, 2018; Wattanasoei, 2016), and strengthened emotional well-being (Esplanade, 2017). Additionally, Angklung workshops in Malaysia (Sulaiman, 2023; Mohd Bakri, 2024) and the development of a Smart Band in Thailand (Phoasavadi, 2022) demonstrate innovative approaches, further underlining the adaptability and therapeutic potential of Angklung for elderly populations in diverse cultural contexts.

Angklung's Therapeutic Benefits in Malaysia

Muhammad Asyraf Mohd Bakri has played a pivotal role in advancing Angklung's therapeutic applications through initiatives like the Angklung Healing Art Project, which has demonstrated substantial improvements in the quality of life for elderly participants across Malaysian care facilities (Sulaiman, 2023). Mohd Bakri's extensive research (2024) further underscores Angklung's multifaceted benefits in Malaysia, highlighting enhancements in physical health, psychological well-being, social engagement, and environmental comfort.

Beyond its musical attributes, Angklung offers therapeutic efficacy through its rhythmic and melodious qualities, creating a soothing atmosphere that promotes relaxation and emotional release, particularly beneficial for elderly individuals managing stress or anxiety. The interactive nature of Angklung sessions fosters social interaction among participants, fostering a sense of community and reducing feelings of isolation commonly experienced by the elderly. This communal aspect is integral to the therapeutic process, enhancing emotional well-being and overall life satisfaction among participants.

Moreover, Angklung serves as a cultural bridge, connecting elderly individuals with their heritage and community traditions. In Malaysia, a nation that celebrates cultural diversity, Angklung workshops and performances provide older adults with opportunities to participate in cultural activities that reinforce their identity and sense of belonging. This cultural reinforcement not only enriches personal experiences but also promotes societal cohesion and fosters intergenerational understanding.

Exploring Angklung's Therapeutic Potential in Indonesia

In Indonesia, scholarly investigations have extensively explored various dimensions of Angklung's potential in eldercare settings. Deswita (2015) conducted a study documenting the positive impact of Angklung training on social interaction and cognitive performance among seniors participating at the Soka Gakkai Foundation. Through structured Angklung sessions, seniors engaged in collaborative music-making, which not



only enhanced their cognitive abilities but also fostered a sense of community and belonging within the group.

Tallutondok (2019) investigated Angklung's role in memory screening among elderly populations, revealing its unique capacity to evoke nostalgic memories and stimulate cognitive functions. Participants in Angklung activities reported enhanced memory recall and cognitive flexibility, contributing to overall mental acuity and emotional well-being.

Putri's study (2018) on Angklung music therapy further highlighted significant improvements in the quality of life among elderly women. Through regular participation in Angklung sessions, these women experienced enhancements across multiple domains, including physical health, emotional resilience, social connectedness, and spiritual well-being. The therapeutic benefits of Angklung were particularly evident in reducing feelings of loneliness and enhancing overall life satisfaction among participants.

Similarly, Komariyah (2016) emphasized Angklung's therapeutic efficacy in enhancing the well-being of elderly women residing in nursing facilities. Her study illustrated how Angklung sessions provided a creative outlet for emotional expression and stress relief, promoting a sense of relaxation and contentment among participants. The rhythmic and melodic qualities of Angklung contributed to a calming atmosphere that facilitated emotional regulation and improved mood states among elderly women.

Fitria et al. (2022) further investigated Angklung exercises as an intervention for managing depression in the elderly, reporting positive outcomes in mental health. Their research demonstrated that regular engagement in Angklung activities significantly reduced depressive symptoms and improved psychological well-being among elderly participants. The structured nature of Angklung exercises provided a sense of purpose and accomplishment, enhancing self-esteem and motivation in managing mental health challenges.

Innovative Approaches in Thailand

In Thailand, Phoasavadi (2022) introduced the Smart Band device, an innovative and user-friendly gadget designed to facilitate Angklung activities among elderly residents in foster care. This device aims to improve their cognitive abilities and physical skills by blending technology with traditional musical therapy. The Smart Band encourages active participation in Angklung sessions, promoting hand-eye coordination, motor skills, and cognitive functions through interactive musical exercises. This approach not only enhances physical agility but also stimulates mental acuity, contributing significantly to the overall well-being of elderly individuals in care settings.

Wattanasoei's pioneering research (2016) delved into the broader impact of Angklung therapy on Thailand's elderly population. His study explored how regular engagement in Angklung sessions enhanced participants' overall quality of life and life satisfaction. Through musical activities fostering emotional expression and social interaction, elderly individuals reported heightened happiness, reduced stress, and a strengthened sense of community and belonging. These findings underscore Angklung's therapeutic value as both a cultural tradition and social intervention, promoting emotional well-being and creating a supportive environment for aging populations in Thailand.



Impact in Singaporean Care Settings

The inclusion of Angklung in art therapy programs at Care Centres in Singapore has fostered deep emotional expression and social interaction among participants. The rhythmic and melodic tones of Angklung contribute to a therapeutic atmosphere that promotes relaxation and emotional release, significantly improving participants' mood and overall well-being (Esplanade, 2017).

Table 1: Literature matrix Angklung as an intervention for elderly research.

Author(s)	Focus	Key Findings	Location
Mohd Bakri (2021)	History of Angklung in Malaysia and its therapeutic use	Angklung has a long history in Malaysia, known for improving elderly quality of life through therapy.	Malaysia
Sulaiman (2023)	Workshops for elderly using Angklung in Malaysia	Workshops by Muhammad Asyraf Mohd Bakri improved the quality of life for elderly participants.	Malaysia
Mohd Bakri (2024)	Angklung's role in enhancing well-being in Malaysia	Angklung enhances physical, psychological, social, and environmental well-being.	Malaysia
Deswita (2015)	Angklung training for social and cognitive benefits in Indonesia	Improved social interactions and cognitive performance through Angklung training.	Indonesia
Tallutondok (2019)	Angklung's role in memory screening for the elderly	Stimulates nostalgic memories and cognitive capacities.	Indonesia
Putri (2018)	Angklung music therapy's impact on older women's quality of life	Enhanced well-being across various categories in older women.	Indonesia
Komariyah (2016)	Therapeutic effect of Angklung music on elderly women in nursing facilities	Demonstrated therapeutic potential for elderly women in nursing homes.	Indonesia
Fitria et al. (2022)	Angklung exercises' effect on depression among the elderly	Reduced depression and improved mental health with Angklung exercises.	Indonesia
Phoasavadi (2022)	Development of Smart Band for Angklung therapy in Thailand	Improved cognitive and physical skills using the Smart Band device with Angklung.	Thailand



Wattanasoei (2016)	Impact of Angklung therapy on quality of life in Thailand	Improved well-being and life satisfaction for Thailand's elderly population.	Thailand
Esplanade (2017)	Angklung in Singapore's art therapy program for emotional and social benefits	Promoted emotional expression, relaxation, and social interaction through Angklung sessions.	Singapore

Angklung music offers a promising therapeutic approach to enhance the well-being of elderly individuals across Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Singapore. Its melodious tones and engaging activities provide a unique avenue to address the complex physical, cognitive, and emotional needs of older adults, fostering a sense of joy and connection.

Moreover, beyond its immediate therapeutic benefits, Angklung serves as a catalyst for preserving Nusantara cultural heritage while promoting scientific innovation and advocating for mental health. By revitalizing cultural traditions within the Nusantara Malay Archipelago, Angklung enriches the cultural landscape and empowers stakeholders in mental health through appreciation of the arts and prioritization of mental-emotional well-being. Strategically utilized, Angklung has the potential to showcase the therapeutic and creative possibilities of Nusantara Malay Archipelago arts on a global scale, contributing to a holistic approach to elderly care and cultural preservation.

Looking ahead, future research could delve deeper into the physiological mechanisms underlying Angklung's therapeutic effects, conduct long-term studies to evaluate its lasting benefits, and explore its application in diverse healthcare settings beyond Southeast Asia. Such initiatives will not only advance our knowledge of Angklung's therapeutic potential but also broaden its global significance in promoting healthy aging and sustaining cultural vitality.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, despite the various challenges faced by elderly individuals in acquiring the skills to play the Angklung, this traditional musical instrument remains an essential therapeutic medium widely embraced across the Nusantara Malay Archipelago. Its presence in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand highlights the Angklung's role not only as a cultural artifact but also as a vital instrument for promoting the psychological and emotional well-being of the senior population. The widespread application of Angklung therapy across these nations transcends geographical boundaries, reflecting its cultural significance and its capacity to address the diverse needs of aging communities throughout the region.



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