
Student Agency as a Driving Force in Revitalizing Local Culture through an Interdisciplinary Approach to Art History Learning

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Abstract

The revitalization of local culture is becoming increasingly important in the era of globalization and digital technology, which often leads to cultural uniformity and weakens the connection of the younger generation to their traditions. Art education, which still focuses on techniques and aesthetic appreciation, also contributes to this problem, as students are rarely given the opportunity to actively explore their cultural heritage. This indicates a research gap: a lack of studies linking *student agency* namely students' voice, choice, and ownership in learning with efforts to revitalize culture through an interdisciplinary approach. This study aims to explore the role of student agency in revitalizing local culture through interdisciplinary art history learning. Using a literature review method analyzing 24 journal articles, both national and international, this study examines topics surrounding student agency, interdisciplinary learning, and community-based or digital art practices. The research findings reveal that when students are given agency, they can actively investigate, interpret, and communicate cultural heritage in new and relevant ways. The interdisciplinary approach, which connects art with fields such as anthropology and digital technology, helps students gain a deeper and more contextual understanding of culture. Overall, the integration of student agency in art education not only increases students' motivation, creativity, and cultural identity but also supports the sustainable preservation and revitalization of local culture.

Introduction

Social change and the rapid development of digital technology have had a significant impact on how young people interact with and understand local cultures (Castells, 2010; Jenkins, 2016). Amidst globalization and digitalization, orientations toward cultural values and aesthetic preferences have shifted, often distancing students from their own cultural roots (Appadurai, 1996; Tomlinson, 1999). In the context of art education—particularly art history this challenge is further exacerbated when students function merely as passive recipients of information, without meaningful opportunities to actively engage in cultural exploration, interpretation, and preservation (Eisner, 2002; Freedman, 2011). This situation underscores the urgent need for learning approaches that empower students as active agents, enabling them to play a meaningful role in constructing understanding, shaping cultural identity, and fostering a sense of responsibility toward their cultural heritage (Barton & Tan, 2018; Gouzouasis, 2019; Choi & Piro, 2009).

The concept of student agency is an important foundation in developing meaningful learning. Based on the Social Cognitive Theory developed by Bandura (2018; 2020), humans are agentic beings, meaning individuals who are able to act consciously, reflectively, and proactively in directing their lives. In the educational context, student agency encompasses three main dimensions: voice (students' ability to voice opinions and

participate in decision-making), choice (freedom to determine the direction and strategy of learning), and ownership (a sense of ownership over the learning process they undergo). This third dimension enables students to become the main drivers in building meaningful learning experiences (Klemenčič, 2015; Klemenčič, 2017). Furthermore, research conducted by Inouye et al. (2022) also confirms that student agency is a key element in transformative learning that emphasizes social, cultural, and ethical engagement.

An interdisciplinary approach can be a strategic framework for actualizing student agency in fine arts learning. Through the integration of various disciplines such as history, digital technology, and character education, art learning no longer focuses solely on understanding and implementing visual aesthetics, but also on the social and cultural realms behind it. The OECD (2019), through its Learning Compass 2030, emphasizes the importance of a cross-disciplinary and collaborative approach to developing students' competencies in addressing global issues while remaining grounded in local values. In this regard, learning art history can serve as a tool for students to create, interpret, and communicate local cultural heritage in a creative and relevant way.

Previous studies have shown that student agency plays an important role in enhancing learning engagement and the development of student identity. A number of studies have found that student agency can promote active participation, ownership of the learning process, and reflective thinking skills (Inouye et al., 2022; Klemenčič, 2017). In addition, research in art education highlights that contextual and participatory art learning can strengthen cultural understanding and increase creativity (Eisner, 2002; Freedman, 2011). Other studies on community-based education and digital art practices also show that students' involvement in cultural projects can reinforce their connection to local identity (Gouzouasis, 2019; Choi & Piro, 2009). However, most of these studies still focus on higher education or contemporary art practices without explicitly linking them to the revitalization of local culture at the secondary education level. A research gap emerges because there are still few studies integrating the concept of human agency (Bandura, 2018; 2020) with art education—particularly art history learning—that is directly oriented toward local cultural preservation. Furthermore, interdisciplinary approaches that combine art, anthropology, digital technology, and character education are rarely implemented systematically for the purpose of cultural revitalization in secondary schools. Considering these motivations and gaps, the novelty of this study lies in the integration of Band.

Method

This study employs a literature review design with a descriptive–analytical approach using secondary data obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, book chapters, conference papers, dissertations, policy documents, and credible digital academic sources such as Google Scholar, ERIC, JSTOR, and Scopus-indexed publications. Data collection is carried out through the identification of relevant keywords, systematic database searching, and a structured screening process based on inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure relevance and credibility. The selected literature is organized using reference management tools and categorized according to themes related to student agency, interdisciplinary learning, art history education, and local cultural revitalization. The data are analyzed through content analysis, thematic categorization, comparative analysis, and synthesis to construct a comprehensive conceptual understanding, while also identifying research gaps—particularly the limited integration of Bandura's Human Agency theory within interdisciplinary art history learning aimed at cultural revitalization. The findings from this analytical process then serve as the conceptual foundation for proposing the development of new learning models in visual arts education.

Results and Discussion

The concept of student agency serves as a key lens in examining students' role in revitalizing local culture through arts education. In this context, agency is understood as students' capacity to go beyond simply receiving information, but to act constructively, consciously, and purposefully (Klemenčič, 2017) in interpreting, reassessing, and communicating cultural values. This concept is then operationalized through three main aspects: voice, choice, and ownership (OECD, 2019), which enable students to actively participate in determining the direction and form of their learning. Based on this framework, a review of empirical research at the high school level was conducted.

Research by Inouye, Lee, and Oldac (2022) shows that student agency is significantly related to increased intrinsic motivation and academic self-efficacy. This means that when students feel in control of their learning process, they tend to be more internally motivated and confident in their ability to achieve learning goals. In the context of art history learning, these research findings can be implemented through activities that provide space for students to explore and reinterpret local culture in ways appropriate to their age and level. For example, teachers can invite students to examine traditional regional decorative motifs such as batik, carvings, or woven fabrics, then discuss the symbolic meanings behind their shapes and colors. Afterward, students are given the opportunity to redesign these motifs in a modern style according to their personal interpretations.

However, research by Thornton et al. (2024) explains that adolescent participation in arts and cultural activities is positively correlated with increased emotional well-being, a sense of social connectedness, and self-satisfaction. This is because arts activities provide a space for self-expression, collaboration, and a sense of meaning within the community. In the context of art education in schools, when students are given the freedom to choose themes, media, or visual styles relevant to their local culture, they not only practice artistic skills but also affirm their own cultural identity. This aligns with the concept of self-efficacy proposed by Bandura (2020), which is a person's belief in their ability to achieve desired results. When students feel capable of interpreting and visualizing their culture authentically, their self-confidence grows. This confidence then fuels intrinsic motivation to continue learning and contributing through artistic creation.

Through these activities, students not only learn the history and aesthetic aspects of art but also experience a creative and reflective process that fosters pride in their local culture and self-efficacy as a young generation capable of preserving and developing their nation's arts. Thus, student-agency-based art history learning is no longer oriented toward memorization, but rather creates meaningful, participatory learning experiences rooted in the students' own cultural context. Scientifically, this active involvement creates transformation in three key domains: cognitive, affective, and social, through collaborative work and interdisciplinary communication.

An interdisciplinary approach plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between art learning, technological innovation, and cultural context. Silverman and McNeil (2022) emphasize that art history instruction that focuses on local contexts encourages students to understand art as a living social practice, not simply an aesthetic object. Meanwhile, Purwoto and Kurniawan (2025) demonstrate that implementing digital storytelling in history learning can enhance cultural literacy, empathy, and reflective thinking skills.

An interdisciplinary approach has been shown to enrich students' thinking because they not only learn to understand art from a visual aesthetic perspective but also relate it to the socio-cultural, historical, and technological developments that shape the artwork itself. According to Klemenčič's (2022) study, this interdisciplinary learning process aligns with the concept of the "double conversion model" in student agency theory. In this model,

students' agentic orientations, including values, intentions, interests, and motivations for learning, can be transformed into tangible capabilities when students are provided with supportive structural opportunities, such as cross-disciplinary projects that combine fine arts, digital technology, and cultural studies. For example, students are invited to create a digital infographic about the development of traditional arts.

This suggests that an interdisciplinary approach not only strengthens conceptual understanding of art and culture but also fosters transformative agency—students' ability to become interpreters, developers, and preservers of local culture, aware of its traditional roots and able to project it into the future with a creative and reflective approach.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that student agency can act as a driving force in the revitalization of local culture in art history learning based on an interdisciplinary approach. The results indicate that when students are given space to express their voice, choice, and ownership in their learning process, they become not merely passive participants but active agents, playing a role in researching, interpreting, and communicating local cultural values creatively and reflectively. Empowering student agency has been shown to strengthen the relationship between art learning and local cultural preservation, as students learn to understand their cultural roots while simultaneously innovating to project them into the present.

The interdisciplinary approach in this research serves as an effective bridge between art and other disciplines. This cross-disciplinary integration enables students to view art not only as an aesthetic expression but also as a dynamic social and cultural representation. Thus, the learning process becomes more contextual, collaborative, and meaningful, fostering transformative agency—namely the ability of students to become creators, developers, and preservers of local culture through contemporary visual works and research.

Scientifically, this research confirms that the application of student agency in art history learning has multidimensional impacts. First, cognitively, students develop a deeper understanding of the history and aesthetic values of culture. Second, affectively, they develop a strong sense of cultural pride and identity. Third, socially, students become active participants in a cultural community oriented toward preservation and innovation. These three domains mutually reinforce each other, creating learning that is not only academic, but also humanistic and contextual.

As a follow-up, this research recommends the development of a student-agency-based art history learning model utilizing interactive digital technologies such as digital storytelling, virtual galleries, and augmented reality. This innovation is expected to expand student participation in reviving local cultural values while strengthening the role of arts education as a means of sustainable cultural preservation and revitalization in the era of globalization.

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