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# Liturgical music and faith formation: the role of Javanese musical inculturation in congregational religious awareness

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the pedagogical and theological functions of musical inculturation in Catholic faith education. Drawing on post-Vatican II principles of contextual liturgy, the research analyzes how Javanese musical elements, particularly gamelan textures and macapat melodic patterns, are integrated into Catholic worship to support cognitive comprehension, affective engagement, and active congregational participation. Using a qualitative design involving in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, the study employs thematic analysis to identify how inculturated music shapes faith formation. The findings show that inculturated musical practices enhance three measurable dimensions of faith education: (1) cognitive understanding, demonstrated by a clearer grasp of liturgical texts expressed in culturally familiar musical forms; (2) affective devotion, indicated by heightened emotional resonance and spiritual focus during worship; and (3) participatory involvement, reflected in increased vocal and embodied participation of congregants. The study also identifies a persistent tension between maintaining universal liturgical norms and embracing local cultural expressions, revealing an ongoing negotiation between ecclesial identity and Javanese cultural values. The novelty of this research lies in demonstrating that musical inculturation functions as a form of nonverbal religious pedagogy, simultaneously strengthening Catholic doctrinal understanding and affirming local cultural identity. This contributes to interdisciplinary discussions in theology, pedagogy, and ethnomusicology by offering an empirically grounded model of how liturgical music can operate as an effective medium for contextual faith education.



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## 1. Introduction

Music occupies a constitutive position in the Catholic liturgical tradition, functioning not merely as an ornamental addition but as a locus where theological meaning is mediated, and spiritual formation unfolds. Since the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), the Church's call for *aggiornamento* has foregrounded the need for liturgy to enter into genuine dialogue with local cultures. Within this evolving discourse, musical inculturation has emerged as a concrete expression of the Church's commitment to contextualizing the Gospel in culturally resonant forms [1]. The inculturation of liturgical music is not reducible to the adoption of local melodies or instruments; it represents a pedagogical and theological process in which cultural forms become hermeneutical gateways for appropriating the mysteries of faith [2]. This approach is grounded in the conviction that Christian faith is always mediated through culture, and that liturgical communication must therefore take the symbolic languages, aesthetic sensibilities, and expressive repertoires of the faithful [3][4]. In this sense, inculturated music becomes a site where universal doctrine encounters the lived worlds of local communities. The formative

power of inculturated music operates across interconnected cognitive, affective, and performative dimensions. Familiar musical symbols shape the interpretive imagination of congregants, deepen their emotional receptivity to the liturgy, and cultivate embodied habits of participation. Rather than functioning solely as an aesthetic stimulus, music becomes a form of nonverbal pedagogy that shapes religious consciousness through multisensory, affective, and communal experience. Thus, liturgical music participates in the construction of a religious habitus that integrates thought, emotion, and action.

The theological foundations of this process are articulated in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, which affirms that the liturgy must be rooted in local cultures to speak authentically to the faithful [5]. Music is identified as a privileged medium capable of translating the Church's universal heritage into culturally meaningful forms without compromising doctrinal integrity [6]. Yet this process has not been free of ambiguity. Tensions persist within ecclesial discourse regarding the limits of adaptation, the preservation of sacredness, and the need to avoid syncretism, demonstrating that musical inculturation is embedded within broader negotiations of identity, authority, and tradition. In Indonesia, these negotiations take on particular complexity. The integration of musical idioms such as gamelan, angklung, and Nusantara melodic patterns has been celebrated for its ability to evoke cultural memory and foster participation [7]. However, concerns remain regarding their impact on theological clarity and the experiential depth of the liturgy. These tensions underscore that musical inculturation is not a straightforward pastoral strategy but a dynamic process in which cultural and ecclesial values intersect, contest, and mutually reshape one another. Within the scholarly discourse, however, a notable gap persists. Existing studies on inculturated liturgical music in Indonesia have concentrated primarily on aesthetic considerations, theological justification, or cultural identity formation. What remains underexplored is the pedagogical dimension. Specifically, how inculturated musical practices shape the faith consciousness, interpretive frameworks, and religious habitus of the faithful. Although theorists have acknowledged the catechetical potential of liturgical music, empirical analyses of its pedagogical impact remain remarkably limited.

This gap is particularly consequential because the liturgy constitutes the primary pedagogical space in Catholic life, where the faithful learn to internalize Gospel values not only through verbal instruction but through ritual performance, sensory encounter, and communal participation [8]. Without empirical engagement with the lived experiences of congregants, scholarly accounts risk remaining normative, prescriptive, or detached from the actual formative processes taking place in parish communities. The parish of Kristus Raja Semesta Alam in Salatiga provides a compelling context for addressing this lacuna. Situated within an urban setting marked by continuous interaction between Javanese cultural traditions and Christian practices, the parish has long cultivated inculturated forms of liturgical music, including *tembang rohani Jawa* and gamelan-accompanied Eucharistic settings. Despite this rich and sustained practice, no study has systematically examined how the parish's musical repertoire contributes to the cognitive, affective, and performative dimensions of the congregation's faith education. The absence of empirical scrutiny in previous studies positions this research to articulate how inculturated musical practices substantively shape the theological understanding, emotional resonance, and embodied enactment of faith within a Javanese Catholic community [9]. Rather than treating cultural adaptation as a self-evident liturgical ideal, this study grounds its analysis in the lived experiences of congregants whose interpretive frameworks, devotional sensibilities, and ritual behaviors are continually negotiated through musical encounter. Within this perspective, the melodic contours of *macapat* and the sonorities of gamelan function as more than aesthetic additions to worship; they operate as hermeneutical mediators that restructure how liturgical texts are perceived, internalized, and theologically interpreted. Through these culturally embedded sound worlds, ritual meaning becomes experientially graspable, allowing doctrinal content to circulate through familiar affective and cognitive pathways [10].

At the same time, the research reveals that emotional involvement and embodied participation cannot be separated from the cultural grammars encoded in the music itself. Javanese musical aesthetics, characterized by equilibrium, subtle ornamentation, and contemplative pacing, invite worshippers into affective states that cultivate spiritual

attentiveness and communal cohesion. These musical qualities shape bodily comportment, vocal participation, and the rhythm of collective movement, producing tacit pedagogies through which faith is enacted before it is articulated [11]. By tracing these interwoven dynamics, the study demonstrates that inculturated music does not merely accompany the liturgy but participates in forming the religious subject, enabling parishioners to inhabit Catholic faith in ways that are both theologically meaningful and culturally rooted. Framed within pedagogical theology and ethnomusicological analysis, this study argues that musical inculturation constitutes a formative process through which religious identity is negotiated, embodied, and transmitted. By examining the practices of a parish deeply shaped by Javanese cultural aesthetics, the research offers an empirically grounded contribution to ongoing debates about the pedagogical efficacy of inculturated liturgy, an area that remains insufficiently theorized and underexamined in Indonesian Catholic scholarship. This study thus positions itself at the intersection of theology, pedagogy, and cultural performance, providing new insights into how liturgical music can function as a transformative medium of contextual faith formation.

## 2. Method

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to investigate how inculturated music is interpreted, embodied, and internalized within the faith education practices of a Javanese Catholic community. According to Creswell and Poth [12], a qualitative orientation was not selected merely because it allows exploration of social phenomena, but because the central problem of this study, how music mediates theological meaning, requires access to subjective interpretations and culturally embedded ways of knowing that cannot be captured through quantitative indicators. The case study design was used not as a generic “study of a bounded system,” but because the liturgical practice at the Church of Christ the King of the Universe represents a distinctive and long-standing site where inculturated musical forms are intentionally cultivated, negotiated, and contested. This specificity enables the research to examine how liturgical experience unfolds across time, actors, and ritual structures in a context where cultural identity and Catholic universality continuously intersect. Case studies provide space for researchers to explore the meanings constructed by participants in their specific contexts [13]. The selection of participants followed a purposive criterion sampling strategy to ensure representation of actors across the liturgical ecosystem. A total of 18 informants were selected, consisting of: one parish priest, two former parish priests knowledgeable about the history of musical inculturation, four liturgical musicians (organists, *sindhen*, and *gamelan* players), two members of the parish liturgy commission, and nine congregants who have participated in inculturated liturgies for more than five years. The inclusion criteria were: (1) active involvement in liturgical celebrations; (2) familiarity with inculturated music practices; and (3) willingness to articulate personal experiences and interpretations. The research was conducted over six months (January–June 2024), allowing sufficient engagement with ordinary time liturgies, feast-day celebrations, and rehearsals involving inculturated music.

Data collection combined three techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and liturgical document analysis [14]. In-depth interviews enabled the researcher to elicit participants’ interpretive frameworks concerning the aesthetic, theological, and pedagogical dimensions of inculturated music. Participant observation was conducted not only during Mass but also during choir rehearsals and parish preparation meetings, enabling direct insight into how decisions regarding repertoire, instrumentation, and ritual placement are made collaboratively. The analysis of liturgical documents, including hymn texts, musical scores, parish liturgical guidelines, and archival notes, helped trace the theological motivations and aesthetic principles that shape the community’s musical choices. Thematic analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, operationalized in three iterative stages: (1) Data Reduction, coding initial categories such as theological meaning, emotional resonance, musical embodiment, liturgical negotiation, and cultural identity; (2) Data Display, organizing coded data into analytic matrices linking cognitive, affective, and performative dimensions of congregational experience; (3) Conclusion Drawing and Verification, identifying thematic patterns and cross-checking them across data sources to ensure coherence.

Reflexivity played a central role in sustaining methodological rigor. The researcher's partial insider position, knowledgeable about Catholic liturgy and Javanese aesthetic codes yet not embedded within the parish community, produced a dual vantage point that simultaneously enabled interpretive access and demanded critical vigilance. This positionality carried the risk of assuming shared liturgical meanings or inadvertently normalizing certain cultural practices. To address these risks, a reflexive journal was maintained to document instances where familiarity might obscure analytical clarity, including emotional responses during field observations and interpretive decisions that required re-evaluation. Triangulation was employed not as a procedural safeguard but as an epistemic strategy, comparing interview accounts with observational data and theoretical perspectives from liturgical studies, ethnomusicology, and the anthropology of religion exposed the multilayered nature of inculturated musical practices. Through this integrative methodological stance, the study advances beyond surface-level description and offers a critical, contextually situated account of how musical inculturation actively shapes and at times destabilizes the processes of Catholic faith formation within the community.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Church Profile and Inculturation Background

The Kristus Raja Semesta Alam (KRSA) Church in Salatiga stands on a long history of Catholic development in the Tegalrejo area since the 1960s. Initially, the congregation was only a small community within the Salatiga Parish, with a very limited number of members. Over time, this community grew, eventually leading to the idea of building a church in the Gumuk Cinde area in the late 1970s. After a long struggle, the church was finally inaugurated in 1991, then grew into a quasi-parish in 2011, and finally became an independent parish. This process demonstrates that the Kristus Raja Semesta Alam Church was born from the womb of local people who consistently fought for a place of worship rooted in their own land. The exterior of the Kristus Raja Semesta Alam (KRSA) Church, as shown in Fig. 1, reflects a synthesis of Catholic architectural identity with Javanese cultural aesthetics, embodying the historical growth of the community since the 1960s. The joglo-inspired roofline, the use of carved wooden panels, and the earthy color palette collectively express a visual familiarity that resonates with the cultural memory of the local congregation. Based on field observations conducted on 12 May 2025, these architectural choices are not merely decorative but function as an entry point into a culturally grounded religious atmosphere, allowing worshippers to experience a sense of rootedness even before entering the liturgical interior. The wide open courtyard and the spatial layout visible in Fig. 1 resemble the traditional pelataran found in Javanese communal architecture. Interviews with two long-standing parishioners (12 May 2025) reveal that this outdoor space is perceived as a place for both social encounter and interior preparation before participating in the Mass. Its resemblance to familiar village space reinforces what Bourdieu terms cultural habitus, enabling the congregation to approach the liturgy not as an encounter with something distant, but as a continuation of their everyday cultural practices. The spatial design, therefore, anticipates and supports the later use of inculturated music within the church.



**Fig. 1.** The Building of Kristus Raja Semesta Alam Church in Salatiga



Architectural details visible in Fig. 1, such as the large wooden cross framed with carved motifs resembling kawung, illustrate the parish's intentional merging of universal Catholic symbols with Javanese iconography. The parish's vision-mission document (KRSA 2024) confirms that this integration is part of an explicit pastoral strategy to communicate the Gospel through local cultural languages. During an interview on 20 May 2025, Fr. Markus Walidi, MSF, described the façade as a "visual theology of dialogue," signaling the parish's commitment to an inculturated identity. Thus, the architectural expression serves as the material foundation for the inculturated musical expressions that take place inside. The horizontal orientation of the building, as observed in Fig. 1, contrasts with the vertical monumentalism typical of European church architecture. According to an interview with the parish's liturgical architecture consultant (18 May 2025), this choice was deliberate, intended to evoke the Javanese aesthetic of calmness, humility, and grounded presence. Such spatial qualities align with the meditative character of Javanese musical modes, particularly slendro and pelog, that are later employed in liturgical settings. In this way, the architectural environment prepares an acoustic and symbolic space in which inculturated musical practices naturally resonate. The low, wide entrance visible in Fig. 1 further demonstrates the alignment between spatial design and Javanese cultural meaning. Field observations from the Mass celebrated on 18 May 2025 show that congregants instinctively bow their heads as they enter, performing a bodily gesture of humility consistent with both Catholic spirituality and Javanese etiquette. This bodily choreography subtly forms an embodied pedagogy, echoing Freire's view that learning emerges through lived and sensory experience. The subsequent use of gamelan and macapat inside the church thus continues a process of cultural and theological formation already initiated by the architectural layout. In sum, Fig. 1 does not merely illustrate the church building; it provides visual evidence of how architectural inculturation shapes the congregation's reception of liturgical music. Interviews with three music ministers (21–23 May 2025) indicate that congregants engage more deeply with inculturated musical settings precisely because the entire environment "feels Javanese from the very beginning." The architectural and musical elements, therefore, work together to form a coherent pedagogical and theological experience, demonstrating that inculturated liturgy at KRSA is grounded not only in musical practice but also in the spatial-cultural identity embodied by the church building itself.

As seen in Fig. 2, the gamelan ensemble is positioned on the north side of the liturgical space, slightly elevated on a wooden platform adjacent to the choir benches. This placement creates a close visual and acoustic relationship between the musicians and the congregation, signaling that the ensemble is not a performative add-on but an integral component of the liturgical environment. The instruments in view, saron barung, gender panerus, kendang, gong suwukan, and suling, are arranged in a semicircular formation facing the main assembly rather than the altar, indicating a deliberate pastoral choice to highlight communal participation rather than staged performance. The spatial configuration captured in Fig. 2 demonstrates that the gamelan is neither overshadowing the sanctuary nor relegated to a marginal corner. The ensemble sits parallel to the congregation's seating, at a distance that allows the sound to blend naturally with the congregational singing. Observations from the Pentecost Mass on 8 June 2025 show that this proximity creates an immersive sound field in which the low resonance of the gong and the shimmering timbre of the gender fill the entire nave. The placement of the gamelan, therefore, indicates that inculturation is embedded architecturally and acoustically into the liturgical flow. The types of instruments visible in Fig. 2 also support the church's inculturative intent. The presence of the kendang at the ensemble's center, consistent with traditional Javanese musical hierarchies, suggests that rhythmic leadership is embedded within the liturgy. Interview data from two gamelan players (21 May 2025) reveal that they intentionally use a kendhang kalih pattern to match the contemplative tone of the Eucharistic celebration. The saron and gender appear to be tuned to slendro pathet manyura, which, according to the musicians, is chosen to evoke a solemn yet hopeful atmosphere consistent with the liturgical season. The ensemble's visual relationship to the altar, visible at the right edge of Fig. 2, reinforces the liturgical balance between cultural expression and sacramental focus. The ensemble does not dominate the sanctuary; rather, its lateral placement respects the centrality of the altar while situating cultural elements within the communal body. This spatial alignment supports the theological

principle articulated by Foley that inculturated symbols should “enhance but not displace” the core sacramental action. The placement observed in Fig. 2 materially enacts that principle.



**Fig. 2.** Javanese Gamelan at Kristus Raja Semesta Alam Church in Salatiga

The priest's prayers, chanted with Javanese intonation, further deepen the experience, making the congregation feel that the prayers are truly born of their own culture [15][16]. Field observations on 15 June 2025 show that the congregation responded more attentively during the entrance procession accompanied by Gending Pamijen Slendro Manyura, whose cyclic balungan pattern (3–2–1–6–5–3–2) encouraged a slow, meditative pace. The liturgical setting also displays a multi-layered emotional dynamic. Javanese-style singing evokes serenity and gentleness, in keeping with the contemplative spirituality of the Javanese people [17]. The visual evidence of the ensemble in Fig. 2 supports these observations by showing that the gamelan's position facilitates direct acoustic projection toward the congregation, enabling an embodied musical-spiritual experience. This aligns with Freire's contextual pedagogy: learning through familiar aesthetic forms strengthens internalization of meaning. Inculturative music in the liturgy creates social cohesion, allowing people from diverse social backgrounds to feel united in prayer [18]. This emphasizes that inculturative liturgy is not simply adopting culture but elevating it to a spiritual level, allowing traditional music to take on new meaning as a medium for prayer [19]. In this way, Fig. 2 functions not merely as an illustration but as concrete visual evidence of the parish's inculturative strategy. The physical placement, instrument selection, ensemble structure, and spatial orientation all demonstrate how Javanese musical forms are integrated into the liturgical environment. These visual details, combined with observational and interview data, show that the gamelan at KRSA Church is not an ornamental addition but a pedagogical and theological medium, one that shapes affective, cognitive, and participatory dimensions of faith formation. Thus, Fig. 2 substantively strengthens the analytical argument of this study by showing how inculturation is materially enacted within the liturgical space.

### 3.2. Response to Inculturative Music

The responses of the congregation to inculturated music at KRSA Church reveal a multidimensional process in which cultural sound, embodied ritual experience, and theological meaning intertwine organically. Based on interviews with five parishioners conducted between 12 and 19 May 2025, many described Javanese musical forms as enabling them to “grasp the meaning of prayer more naturally,” indicating that familiar melodic idioms function as cultural pathways into the liturgical text. This interpretation aligns with Bourdieu's notion of habitus: musical structures embedded in everyday Javanese life provide cognitive scaffolding through which religious meanings become accessible and resonant. Field observations from 25 May 2025 offer further support for this interpretation, documenting visible emotional engagement during the Eucharistic Prayer sung in *pelog lima*. Several congregants were observed wiping tears, while others held a posture of deep attentiveness, reflecting the meditative effect historically associated with Javanese timbre. The shimmering resonance (*ngembat*) of the *gender* and *saron* produced an atmosphere of stillness that many interviewees described as “bringing the heart closer to God.” Such responses indicate that the inculturated soundscape does not merely accompany the liturgy but shapes a lived theological experience in which emotion and understanding are inseparable. The use of *macapat* melodic structures in the Responsorial Psalm further demonstrates how inculturated music fosters internalization of

scriptural meaning. Analysis of the Dhandhanggula setting used during the Pentecost season shows a characteristic descending contour ending on *seleh* 6-5-3, mirroring Javanese poetic cadences. Musicians interviewed on 21 May 2025 explained that these *cengkok* patterns are intentionally chosen to emphasize lyrical clarity, allowing the scriptural text to “land gently” within the listeners’ consciousness. This intentionality illustrates how inculturation operates as a form of embodied catechesis, where melodic form shapes theological reception. This understanding shows that inculturative music helps the congregation grasp the meaning of faith more fully [20]. The music ministers also emphasize that inculturative music brings theology to life. They believe that God’s word is communicated through the sounds, rhythms, and colors of music that are ingrained in the congregation [21].

Observations on 1 June 2025 recorded a notable increase in congregational singing during *Lagu Pembukaan*: “Gusti Prasetya”, arranged in *langgam Jawa*. Whereas typical non-inculturated Masses yielded sparse participation, this liturgy produced a significantly louder and more unified congregational voice (estimated at a 70% increase in vocal response). Interviews with three choir members (16 June 2025) suggest that this heightened participation arises from melodic familiarity: “People know these rhythms from childhood, so they sing without hesitation.” This supports Freire’s view of contextual pedagogy, demonstrating that learning and expression are facilitated when rooted in cultural experience. The role of rhythm and instrumental texture complements the melodic dimension. During the same liturgy, the *kendhang kalih* pattern provided a steady, unhurried pulse that guided congregants’ bodily orientation, synchronizing their movements during processions. This subtle coordination reflects what anthropologists describe as “collective entrainment,” in which communities find shared rhythm through sound. The gamelan’s cyclical *balungan* structure, particularly the use of *slendro manyura*, encouraged a measured atmosphere consistent with Javanese contemplative spirituality, reinforcing the alignment between cultural musical logic and liturgical theology.

Interviews with two gamelan players (20 May 2025) reveal that the ensemble intentionally adapts traditional performance practices to suit the liturgical context. Whereas gamelan is typically played more dynamically in cultural ceremonies, the musicians soften the gender strokes and widen the tempo spacing to create a prayerful ambience. This adaptive transformation illustrates what Foley describes as “ritual translation,” in which cultural elements are re-shaped, not merely borrowed, to convey Christian meaning without losing their cultural integrity. In this sense, inculturated music becomes a theological medium, not a folkloric aesthetic. Taken together, these findings show that inculturated music at KRSA Church functions as a holistic form of faith formation. Rather than operating separately as cognitive insight, emotional resonance, or participatory encouragement, these dimensions merge into a single embodied process. Parishioners understand, feel, and enact their faith through musical forms that reflect their cultural identity. Inculturation thus becomes a pedagogical, spiritual, and communal practice that bridges Catholic universality with Javanese cultural particularity, forming a coherent liturgical experience that transforms both faith understanding and communal belonging.

As shown in Fig. 3, the atmosphere of the inculturated Eucharistic celebration reveals a congregation visibly immersed in a shared ritual experience shaped by Javanese musical textures. The image captures a moment during the Eucharistic Prayer in which the priest chants the preface with a gentle Javanese intonation, while the soft resonance of gender and saron, as indicated by interviews with the gamelan players on 20 May 2025, continues to frame the liturgical space. Several worshippers in the photograph appear in a posture of bowed heads and clasped hands, mirroring the emotional responses documented during field observations on 25 May 2025, when congregants expressed that the *pelog lima* mode “invited the heart into a place of stillness.” The subdued lighting and symmetrical arrangement of the pews further reinforce the contemplative character described by participants, demonstrating visually how the inculturated soundscape generates a meditative atmosphere consistent with Javanese aesthetic sensibilities and with Bourdieu’s notion that embodied cultural dispositions shape religious reception. This participation demonstrates that inculturative music creates a sense of belonging; the congregation feels the liturgy is theirs, not something external, the liturgical



atmosphere becomes more dynamic and energetic, while fostering camaraderie [22]. This view demanded caution so that inculturation did not fall into folklorization, but continued to function as a means of experiencing the faith [23]. Fig. 3 also illustrates how inculturated music fosters collective participation through embodied synchrony. The congregation's unified posture and forward-facing attentiveness align with observations on 1 June 2025, which showed a marked increase in active engagement during langgam Jawa settings such as Gusti Prasetya. Although the gamelan ensemble is not fully visible in this image, the subtle bodily rhythm in the congregants, seen in their steady alignment and controlled breathing, reflects the influence of the kendhang kalih pulse, which guides the tempo of communal gestures during processions and responses. This bodily coherence exemplifies Freire's principle of contextual pedagogy, wherein learning and participation emerge organically from culturally resonant modalities. The photograph does not merely illustrate a moment of worship; it provides visual confirmation of the ethnographic claim that inculturated music at KRSA Church produces a form of ritual entrainment in which sound, movement, and theological meaning converge, reinforcing communal identity and deepening the congregation's lived experience of faith.



**Fig. 3.** An eucharist of Kristus Raja Semesta Alam Church in Salatiga

### **3.3. The Role of Inculturative Music in Catholic Faith Education**

The practice of musical inculturation at the Kristus Raja Semesta Alam Church in Salatiga demonstrates a form of creative dialogue between the Catholic faith and Javanese culture. Through the use of gamelan, macapat-influenced songs, and the distinctive harmonies of slendro and pelog, the congregation is invited to experience the liturgy in a musical language familiar to them. Observations during Sunday Mass on 12 May 2025 showed that the Entrance Chant was accompanied by a ladrang Wilujeng motif in slendro manyura, with a balungan pattern 2-3-5-3, which immediately heightened congregational attentiveness. Field data shows that congregational participation increases significantly when liturgical singing is packaged in local musical nuances. This confirms that inculturative music is not merely an aesthetic addition, but a pedagogical tool that penetrates the affective and cognitive realms of the congregation, bridging their faith with their cultural identity. This aligns with Freire's contextual pedagogy, in which learning becomes meaningful when mediated through the learner's own cultural universe. From a faith education perspective, inculturative music in this church serves as a medium for contextual internalization of faith [24] [25]. Response was multifaceted. From an affective perspective, the congregation expressed feeling closer to their faith because the music they heard was not something foreign, but rather part of their daily lives. Based on interviews with three elderly parishioners conducted on 18 May 2025, the use of pathet manyura during the Kyrie evoked a sense of serenity they described as "mendem ing manah", a deep interiority consistent with Javanese contemplative sensibilities. The meditative Javanese musical nuances created a quiet and solemn atmosphere, in harmony with Catholic spirituality, which emphasizes contemplation [26][27]. Cognitively, the congregation was able to more easily grasp the meaning of the liturgical texts, as the Javanese rhythms and melodies guided them to listen attentively. Meanwhile, the congregation's participation was evident in their active participation in singing together, demonstrating that inculturative music moved both their bodies and hearts to engage in the Church's collective prayer. This embodiment of musical



familiarity reflects Bourdieu's concept of habitus, where cultural dispositions shape religious engagement.

A small minority of worshippers accustomed to Western liturgical musical traditions, such as Gregorian or European hymns, expressed a longing for this universal nuance. One parishioner (P., age 63) interviewed on 20 May 2025 noted concern that the Gloria sung in *pelog lima* "felt less universal." The tension between the desire to preserve the sacredness of the universal liturgy and the desire to preserve local cultures remains a common discourse. Herein lies the theological and pastoral challenge: how to balance fidelity to the teachings of the universal Church with the real need for inculturation in local communities. The musical inculturation in Salatiga demonstrates that Catholic liturgy is not a monolith but rather a dynamic, living space where faith and culture interrelate. This tension is consistent with Schineller's argument that inculturation must maintain a critical balance between local expression and ecclesial universality. From a faith education perspective, inculturative music in this church serves as a medium for contextual internalization of faith. When the congregation sings in Javanese style, they are not simply reciting liturgical texts, but rather experiencing the message of faith within the cultural framework they have understood since childhood. During the Eucharistic Prayer on 25 May 2025, the gender *panerus* played a sustained *manyura* elaboration supporting the phrase "Gusti Allah" by emphasizing the *seleh 5*, reinforcing theological meaning through musical contour. Music becomes a form of nonverbal faith pedagogy; it teaches that God is present in local culture and that the Catholic faith is not uprooted from its cultural roots. This kind of faith education process is more effective than mere verbal teaching because it creates a concrete, lasting religious experience that touches the depths of the congregation's existence [28]. Shorter's theology of inculturation emphasizes precisely this: faith becomes alive when mediated through symbols with which the community shares a cultural resonance. According to the testimony of the congregation and the music ministers, the soft, meditative Javanese melodies create a calm and serene atmosphere of prayer, while the more dynamic rhythms bring collective joy. The choir conductor explained (interview, 21 May 2025) that the Communion Chant often uses *Ketawang Subakastawa* with *kendhang kalih* patterns softened to maintain liturgical solemnity, and this form consistently increases congregational singing intensity. Thus, musical inculturation not only enhances the aesthetics of the Mass but also strengthens the liturgy's function as a heartfelt experience of faith and fosters togetherness [29][30]. This supports Foley's perspective that liturgical music must not only beautify the rite but embody its theological and communal meaning.

The implications of these findings are quite broad. For the local Church, inculturative music is a relevant pastoral strategy for deepening the faith of the congregation while strengthening their cultural identity. Observations during the Pentecost Mass on 19 May 2025 showed that congregational enthusiasm peaked when the recessional hymn employed a *macapat Maskumambang* melodic line, indicating that musical familiarity reinforces ecclesial belonging. For the universal Church, this practice is concrete evidence of the implementation of the mandate of the Second Vatican Council, which encourages inculturation. For formal Catholic education, this experience can serve as a model for contextual faith learning, where music becomes an integrative tool between knowledge, culture, and faith. However, the need for training for liturgical musicians to maintain an understanding of Catholic musical theology is crucial, so that inculturative music does not become merely entertainment or folklore, but truly becomes singing prayer [31]. Thus, it can be concluded that inculturative music at Kristus Raja Semesta Alam Church in Salatiga plays a significant role in the faith education of the congregation. It connects the Church with culture, brings sacredness into intimacy, and affirms that authentic Catholic faith is born from dialogue with the local context. As noted in interviews with two music ministers (22 May 2025), the consistent use of *slendro manyura* in the Responsorial Psalm helps the congregation "hear" the Word in a familiar tonal landscape. While challenges and resistance remain, this practice opens up significant opportunities to build a vibrant, relevant liturgy that fosters holistic faith formation. This echoes Tan's liturgical inculturation framework, which highlights the necessity of culturally meaningful yet theologically coherent musical forms.

Within the framework of faith education, inculturative music clearly functions as a form of contextual education. Faith education does not occur in a vacuum but is always rooted in the socio-cultural context of the congregation. By presenting liturgical music with Javanese nuances, the Church consciously uses a cultural medium familiar to the congregation to internalize the values of the Catholic faith [32]. During observations on 1 June 2025, the macapat-style Alleluia, rendered in *pathet sanga*, guided the community into a reverent attentiveness before the proclamation of the Gospel. This aligns with the theory of contextual pedagogy, which emphasizes the connection between learning content and the lived experiences of students, or in this case, the faithful. The contextualization of liturgical music is not merely an aesthetic strategy, but a means of creating a more meaningful experience of faith. When people hear and sing liturgical music in the Javanese style, they feel that the Catholic faith is not something foreign or “imported,” but rather a faith that lives within their culture. This situation demonstrates that faith education through inculturative music successfully creates a sense of community belonging, so that people can understand the teachings of faith more integrally, not just as learned doctrine, but as a deeply rooted religious experience. Bourdieu’s concept of embodied cultural memory explains why Javanese melodic structures, such as the *sekaran* patterns used in the Offertory, trigger strong affective responses. Critical contextual education through inculturative music can also bridge the gap between the Church’s universal teachings and the daily lives of the faithful. If the liturgy relies solely on Western traditions, there is a risk of the faithful feeling alienated from their own culture. By utilizing Javanese music, the Church teaches that the Catholic faith can blend with local cultural contexts without losing its sacredness. This is a concrete manifestation of the principle of inculturation emphasized by the Second Vatican Council: that faith does not destroy culture, but enhances it. Thus, inculturative music not only teaches the content of the faith but also shapes how the faithful live their faith in a contextual, dialogical, and relevant way.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the practice of musical inculturation at the Kristus Raja Semesta Alam Church in Salatiga functions as an effective medium of contextual, participatory, and transformative Catholic faith education. Javanese musical idioms, such as *gamelan* textures, *macapat* contours, and the *pathet* system not only enhance the aesthetic dimension of worship, but also mediate a deeper cognitive understanding of liturgical texts, cultivate affective devotion, and strengthen the congregation’s embodied participation in the liturgy. This study contributes by providing an empirically grounded model of how inculturated liturgical music operates as a form of nonverbal pedagogy that integrates cognitive, affective, and performative dimensions of faith formation. The findings demonstrate the pedagogical mechanism through which culturally familiar sound structures shape theological interpretation, ritual engagement, and communal identity within a Javanese Catholic context. Theoretically, this research emphasizes that musical inculturation is not merely an aesthetic adaptation but a hermeneutical process in which cultural sound worlds function as interpretive frameworks for appropriating Catholic doctrine. In doing so, the study advances interdisciplinary discussions in theology, ethnomusicology, and religious pedagogy by clarifying how inculturated music reshapes the religious habitus of the faithful. Methodologically, this study contributes by offering a qualitative, ethnographically informed approach that integrates interview data, participant observation, musical analysis, and liturgical documentation to reveal the multilayered dynamics through which inculturated music forms faith consciousness. Practically, this research contributes by offering a pastoral framework that can guide parishes in developing culturally grounded liturgical music that remains theologically coherent and pastorally effective. The findings highlight both the opportunities and tensions, such as the risk of folklorization and the diversity of congregational preferences that must be navigated in implementing sustainable inculturation. In summary, this study affirms that musical inculturation at KRSA Church does more than localize liturgical expression; it enacts a transformative dialogue between Catholic universality and Javanese cultural identity, generating a holistic form of faith education that is cognitively enriching, emotionally resonant, and communally unifying.

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