



CHOREOGRAPHIC TRANSFORMATION IN ZAPIN KASIH: A STUDY OF MOVEMENT MOTIFS THROUGH ALMA HAWKINS' CREATIVE PROCESS

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Abstract

This study examines the creation process of the Zapin Kasih dance choreography through the theoretical lens of Alma Hawkins' creative stages. The research aims to identify how exploration, improvisation, composition, and evaluation operate as creative strategies in developing traditional Zapin movements into innovative choreographic forms. Using qualitative artistic research methods, data were collected through rehearsal observations, interviews with choreographer Yusnizar Heniwyati, and performance documentation. The results indicate that Hawkins' framework effectively supports the transformation of traditional Zapin vocabulary—tahto, langkah dua, alif, and meniti batang—into six new movement motifs. Each stage of the creative process reflects different layers of artistic decision-making: exploration of cultural symbols (sarongs), improvisation of bodily responses, composition of rhythmic sequences, and evaluation of aesthetic and cultural coherence. These findings suggest that Hawkins' theory not only guides artistic creation but also mediates between heritage preservation and contemporary innovation. This study contributes to the understanding of practice-as-research methodology in dance, particularly in the context of traditional Southeast Asian arts, where choreography functions as both an artistic output and a cultural inquiry.

Keywords: Zapin Kasih, choreography, Alma Hawkins, creative process, artistic research

1. INTRODUCTION

The process of creating dance is a creative journey that involves stages of structured thinking and movement processing, yet remains intuitive and exploratory. As an art form that combines elements of movement, music, space, and time, dance creation is not only about arranging movements, but also about communicating meaning and emotions related to the culture and traditions being promoted. According to Hawkins (1991), dance creation involves four main stages: exploration, improvisation, composition, and evaluation. These four stages lead to the formation of works that not only reflect tradition but also respond to contemporary aesthetic developments. In the context of creating Zapin Kasih, I as a choreographer attempted to respond to the Zapin dance tradition that originates from a synthesis of Arab and Malay cultures, with the aim of reviving this tradition with relevant modern elements. As stated by Nursilah et al. (2024), art and cultural identity are inseparable in the context of Indonesian performances. They emphasize that art functions as a mirror that depicts the cultural values lived by its people. In this case, as a choreographer, I try to highlight elements of the Zapin dance that reflect Malay culture, which has a wealth of symbolism and deep values.

According to Hawkins (1991), the process of creating a dance work involves two fundamental things: exploration and the application of structured technical skills. Exploration allows the choreographer to interact directly with the source elements of the movement, testing new possibilities inspired by the specific culture and context. Meanwhile, technical skills include a deep understanding of choreographic structures, such as the use of repetition, spatial patterns, and rhythmic arrangements, which connect movement to aesthetic and narrative goals. Therefore, dance creation is not simply repeating traditional movements, but also challenging and renewing existing

conventions by providing fresh new interpretations. In this case, I try to utilize the sarong as a strong symbolic element in Zapin Kasih to explore various body movements directly inspired by Malay culture, while still maintaining the essence of the Zapin dance heritage itself.

Hadi (2003) emphasized that creating traditional dance requires a deep understanding of the basic elements of choreography, such as theme, movement, musical accompaniment, makeup, and costume. This process must be able to unite all these elements into a harmonious whole. As a choreographer, I strive to reinterpret traditional Zapin movements in new compositions, while maintaining a close connection to the cultural values contained within them. Zapin Kasih seeks to explore values such as humility, unity, and a sense of togetherness through more dynamic and contemporary movements, without abandoning its traditional roots.

Cohen (2015) argues that in dance creation, the importance of a systematic methodology for developing dance movements cannot be overlooked. As part of the creative process, the use of creative theory provides a framework for exploring the potential of existing movements and developing them according to the desired context. In this regard, Hawkins (1991) developed a theory of four stages in the creative process, exploration, improvisation, composition, and evaluation, which serve as a crucial foundation for creating tradition-based dance works. These stages allow choreographers to continuously engage in a process of creative transformation that relies not only on technique but also allows for artistic freedom and expression. For example, in creating Zapin Kasih, I began with the exploration stage, which involved exploring the potential of traditional Zapin movements and combining them with new, more expressive elements. Schechner (2013) also emphasized that improvisation in choreography provides important freedom to experiment, not only in terms of rhythm but also in spatial arrangement. Improvisation allows for more dynamic movements to develop, giving dancers the freedom to experiment with more spontaneous body movements, while maintaining aesthetic relevance within a broader cultural context.

During the composition stage, I arranged the selected movements and developed them into a structured choreographic sequence, paying attention to rhythmic, spatial, and symbolic aspects. As Hawkins (1991) explains, composition is the stage where emotional and aesthetic elements are combined with a more systematic concept. Each movement motif I chose in Zapin Kasih serves to represent important aspects of Malay life, such as spirituality, social solidarity, and gender inclusivity. During the evaluation stage, I reflected on the work, both through personal introspection and through feedback from fellow artists. This evaluation process is crucial to ensuring that the final dance remains rooted in tradition yet contributes to the development of modern choreography.

Nelson (2013) suggests that a methodological approach involving multiple dimensions in dance creation can significantly enrich the creative process. In this regard, I adopt a concept that combines three important dimensions in dance creation: physical, mental, and spiritual. This approach allows me to integrate aspects of the body, mind, and emotions in the movements I create. As a result, the resulting dance works focus not only on physical expression but also encompass a deep cultural understanding and the profound values embodied in the culture upheld in the dance.

This article aims to answer two main questions regarding Zapin Kasih about Hawkins' creative process manifested in the creation of Zapin Kasih, and the Transformation of movements that occurred during the choreography process. The process of creating this work will be analyzed based on the four main stages proposed by Alma Hawkins, namely exploration, improvisation, composition, and evaluation, which are interrelated to create a work that has a balance between tradition and innovation. This study will also explore how traditional Zapin movements, such as tahto



, langkah dua , alif , and meniti batang , undergo transformation into new, more contemporary and dynamic motifs, while still maintaining the cultural values contained in the movements.

In the performing arts tradition in Southeast Asia, particularly in the world of dance, the creation of artworks is always connected to the process of preserving and transmitting cultural heritage while allowing for experimentation and renewal. As time goes by, dance creation must be able to adapt to new aesthetic demands that emerge in a constantly changing social and cultural context. Therefore, *Zapin Kasih* , as my work, functions not only as an artwork that conveys visual and movement messages, but also as a medium to discuss the process of cultural transformation in the world of dance.

In the following section, this article will discuss how my creative process in *Zapin Kasih* encompasses the stages of exploration, improvisation, composition, and evaluation, according to Hawkins' framework. This discussion will demonstrate how I responded to and transformed traditional *Zapin* elements into a dance work that not only maintains aesthetic values but also offers new insights into the realm of contemporary choreography.

2. IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative artistic research design that combines practice-based inquiry with reflective interpretation. This approach focuses on revealing my creative process in creating *Zapin Kasih* through self-reflection and theoretical analysis. As a choreographer, I play a dual role as performer and researcher, reflecting on and analyzing my work throughout the creative process. This practice-based research, as described by Nelson (2013), allows me to explore the creative process from within, integrating lived experience with relevant theory, and exploring how theory can be applied to creative practice.

I function as a researcher analyzing and reflecting on my own creative process. As a choreographer who is also involved in the creation, my role as a researcher involves the use of self-observation and in-depth reflection, which are integral parts of artistic research (Nelson, 2013). This personal reflection allows me to assess and understand the artistic decisions I make throughout the creative process, which include movement selection, symbolic interpretation, and experimentation with traditional and innovative elements in *Zapin Kasih* . Furthermore, the theory suggested by Alfarisi and Nursilah (2025) also plays a crucial role in bridging theory and practice in arts education. They emphasize the importance of a structured pedagogical model to bridge the gap between theory and practical application in arts education, which is highly relevant to my process as a choreographer integrating Hawkins' (1991) theory into my practice. This model provides guidance on how theory can be effectively applied in creating artworks that are not only rooted in tradition but also able to respond to contemporary needs in arts education and performance.

2.2 Data Collection

The data in this study was collected through several methods, including observation, self-reflection, and documentation. These methods were used to gain a comprehensive picture of the creative process and how different elements interact in the creation of a dance work.

Observation: As the choreographer, I observed myself and the dancers during rehearsal sessions to record the development of movements derived from the exploration of sarongs and traditional *Zapin* movements. These observations included not only observing

the movements being developed, but also noting the interactions between the dancers and myself as the choreographer in the context of implementing the new movements. This observation process focused on how the dancers responded to the choreographic instructions and how they translated the ideas I conveyed into body movements. This is in line with Hawkins (1991) who suggests the importance of observation as the initial step in the exploration stage, where movements are introduced and then adapted.

Self-Reflection: As part of this research methodology, I engaged in in-depth reflection on my creative process. This reflection involved writing reflective notes about the steps I took in creating *Zapin Kasih*, including the theoretical and artistic considerations that influenced each stage of the process. This process allowed me to explore my thoughts on how the creative theories I had studied, such as Alma Hawkins' (1991), were implemented in my practice. This reflection was not limited to technical analysis, but also included an analysis of how the cultural values inherent in the Zapin movement were transformed into new motifs in the choreography.

Documentation: Documentation played a crucial role in this research. I recorded videos of rehearsal sessions and final performances to capture the development of the movements and evaluate the choreography. This documentation process not only helped document the creative process but also served as material for further analysis. As Creswell and Poth (2018) explain, visual documentation is extremely useful for reflecting on artistic choices and understanding how movements change and develop throughout the creative process. Through this documentation, I was able to analyze each movement motif produced and evaluate its suitability to the desired aesthetic and cultural goals.

2.3 Analysis Framework

The data analysis process followed the framework suggested by Alma Hawkins (1991), which divides the creative process in dance creation into four main stages: exploration, improvisation, composition, and evaluation. These four stages were used to analyze and understand the development of movement in *Zapin Kasih*.

Exploration: In this stage, I explored movement possibilities inspired by the sarong and traditional Zapin steps. Exploration focused on finding new elements in the movement that combine tradition and innovation. As suggested by Hawkins (1991), exploration is the initial step in which a choreographer begins creation with an open approach, observing and interacting with the source elements of the movement. In this context, the sarong as a prop becomes an important element that inspires body movements and opens up the possibility of new, dynamic and expressive movements.

Improvisation: Improvisation serves as a dynamic dialogue between me as the choreographer and the dancers. Here, I give the dancers the freedom to experiment with variations of the movements taught and create new rhythmic or spatial variations. This improvisation aims to explore how traditional Zapin movements can be further developed into more innovative and contemporary forms. Improvisation also allows me to assess the dancers' responses to the changes I make to the choreography, as well as how traditional elements such as *the tahto* and *the second step* can be modified to create fresher and more expressive movements (Schechner, 2013).

Composition: After improvisation, I begin to organize the movements that have been developed into a structured choreographic sequence. In this stage, I utilize compositional principles, such as repetition, canon, and spatial organization, to create strong rhythmic cohesion within the choreography. Hawkins (1991) emphasizes the importance of the compositional stage in integrating emotional and aesthetic aspects into a more organized



work. Each movement chosen is carefully considered to ensure that it functions within the context of the overall choreography and conveys the intended message.

Evaluation: Evaluation is the final stage in which I reflect on the entire creative process and the results of the finished work. In this stage, I assess whether *Zapin Kasih*'s choreography successfully maintains the cultural values I aimed for, while achieving artistic innovation that is appropriate to the times. This evaluation process is conducted through personal reflection and discussions with fellow artists, who provide feedback on the appropriateness and strength of the work. As part of my reflection, I also examine how traditional elements in Zapin, such as body movement and symbolism, can interact with modern elements to produce a work that is relevant and engaging for today's audience (Hawkins, 1991).

2.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic interpretation approach, which allowed me to identify patterns and themes emerging from the data collected through self-observation, documentation, and personal reflection. Data triangulation was used to enhance the credibility of the analysis by comparing different data sources and perspectives. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), this triangulation is crucial to ensure that the analysis is not limited to a single source or perspective, but encompasses the entire, more complex and multidimensional creative process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Stage 1: Exploration

In the exploration phase of creating *Zapin Kasih*, I began by examining the sarong as a material and symbol that could inspire new movements. The sarong, as an element of Malay culture, serves not only as a physical property but also as a social symbol depicting humility, simplicity, and unity. In this phase, I explored the texture of the fabric, the way the folds move, and the rhythm created as the fabric interacts with the dancer's body. This movement illustrates the flowing relationship between the body and the object (sarong), creating balance and harmony in every movement.

According to Hawkins (1991), exploration is a stage that allows for "direct sensory engagement" with the creative source. In this case, the sarong becomes more than just a piece of cloth; it becomes a medium for the dancer to experience the connection between body and object, which in turn creates a sense of spatial awareness. This movement reflects crucial Malay cultural values, such as humility and unity, embodied in gentle, circular movements. This is evident in the first stage of exploration, where the dancer performs movements that are highly focused on gentle rhythms and the unity of the body in space.



Figure 1. Exploration of sarong fabric

In the image above, we can see dancers dressed in yellow with their heads covered with striking ornaments, holding long green cloths that envelop their bodies. They move collectively in a unified formation, giving the impression of harmony and unity. The cloth holders seem to be at one with their bodies, which focus on gentle, precise movements. Their spatially conscious movements emphasize Hawkins' principle that exploration focuses on developing a deep understanding of the relationship between body, objects, and space.

The dancers' movements, holding the cloth, require harmony between the body and the cloth. The cloth moves with the body in a graceful, circular motion, creating a visual effect that focuses on rhythmic and spatial understanding. The cloth becomes a medium that is not only used as a tool in movement but also carries symbolic meanings that connect the dancers to Malay culture, such as depictions of tenderness and togetherness. In this case, the sarong used in the choreography serves as a metaphor for larger cultural values.



Figure 2. Variations in exploring sarong fabric



In the image above, the dancers are seen in a more dynamic formation. While still holding the green cloth, they now demonstrate greater control in their movements. While their movements remain fluid, there is an emphasis on rhythm and a greater variety of expressions, suggesting that exploration is beginning to introduce more expressive variations in movement. The dancers are not only focused on the cloth they are holding, but also on how their bodies move together in a structured formation, creating a balance between control and freedom of movement.

This change demonstrates that exploration is not solely focused on physical engagement with the object (sarong), but also begins to incorporate deeper creative elements. The dancers in the second image seem to bring the green cloth to life through their bodily expressions, adding depth to the movement exploration. This process emphasizes that the exploration stage is a crucial time for exploring new movement possibilities that respect cultural heritage yet allow for contemporary interpretation.

The movements depicted in these two images, though simple, convey a profound sense of the body's relationship to space, and how objects, in this case sarongs, serve to express the emotions and cultural values inherent in dance. Through this exploration, I began to develop an understanding of how the body and objects can work together to produce movements that are not only physical but also symbolic.

Smith (2018) explains, exploration is the phase in which the choreographer begins to explore the potential of existing elements and provides new interpretations that convey deeper meaning. This process is crucial for fostering creativity in choreography, thus not only creating new movements but also enriching their meaning within a cultural and aesthetic context.

Through this exploration, I began to understand how the sarong, originally a simple object, could become a powerful symbol for Malay values such as humility and unity. The gentle movements created in this exploration, as the dancers interact with the cloth and each other, become a living metaphor for the cooperation, harmony, and togetherness that are essential to Malay culture.

Exploration demonstrates the first stage of dance creation as a profound process involving the interaction of the body, objects, and space. By utilizing fabric as a source of movement and symbolism, I was able to develop an approach that not only tells a story but also brings to life the cultural values inherent in the movement itself.

3.2 Stage 2: Improvisation

Improvisation serves as a transitional phase in the dance creation process, allowing dancers to experiment with the flexibility of Zapin vocabulary. Basic gestures that form the foundation of Zapin dance, such as *tahto*, *langkah dua*, *alif*, and *meniti batang*, begin to be deconstructed and recombined. Here, dancers begin to test the boundaries of tradition through freedom of movement exploration, allowing new movements to emerge from existing elements. Improvisation allows dancers to create more dynamic and expressive variations of movement, sometimes introducing new elements without sacrificing the basic identity of Zapin movement.

Schechner (2013) describes "restored behavior," which refers to the phenomenon in which traditional forms or rituals are re-enacted but take on new meaning through different performance contexts. In this sense, improvisation allows dancers to transform and renew traditional movements, allowing for change while maintaining a connection to cultural heritage. Each experiment undertaken by dancers is not only about creating new physical

movements, but also about how existing movement forms can be given new interpretations and meanings according to the performance context and group dynamics.

Improvisation is not limited to the technical aspects of movement, but also involves the exploration of rhythm, space, and the expression of emotions transmitted through the body. One important aspect of this improvisation is how the sarongs, worn by the dancers, have a significant influence on their movements. As Hawkins (1991) states, objects or props in dance often become "active agents" that shape and direct movement. Sarongs, as props, not only function as tools in creating movement but also influence how the dancer's body interacts with space and time in each rhythm created.

This step gives the dancers the freedom to adapt their movements to a freer and more expressive rhythm. This creates dynamic rhythmic variations, where basic movements, previously performed strictly and structured, begin to take on new nuances. This rhythmic variation demonstrates how improvisation in Zapin Kasih's choreography not only develops existing elements but also emphasizes the expressive potential of the sarong as a medium that changes the dynamics of the body in space. With this experimentation, the sarong becomes more than just a prop, but a symbol of cultural expression translated through movement.

Smith (2018) explains that improvisation provides space for artistic freedom, allowing dancers to find more personal and direct forms of expression. This process also involves interaction between dancers, who collaborate to create new, complementary forms. The choreography I create utilizes this freedom to respond to environmental influences, moods, and relationships between dancers, all of which contribute to variations in rhythm and bodily expression. Through improvisation, traditional movements are not only preserved but also enriched with innovations that reflect the dynamics of contemporary life.

With this approach, improvisation in *Zapin Kasih* becomes a way to translate direct experience into the body, resulting in a more spontaneous and lively choreography. Each change that occurs during the improvisation phase gives the dancers the freedom to explore a variety of new movements that are not only experimental but also add a deeper layer of expression to the dance work. This improvisation enriches the narrative and emotions contained in the work, while also proving that although basic movements are derived from tradition, they can be developed and adapted to express new feelings and stories in the current context.

Improvisation in the creation of *Zapin Kasih* provides a new dimension to traditional dance, allowing the dancers and myself as choreographer to experiment with various rhythmic and spatial elements. This process makes dance a form of continuous dialogue between tradition and innovation, enriching the work's meaning and relevance in the contemporary art world.

3.3 Stage 3: Composition

During the composition stage, the movement motifs that had been selected and developed in the previous stage were arranged into structured sequences, forming six new motifs that became an integral part of *Zapin Kasih's work*. This composition process involved a systematic and organized approach in connecting each movement that had been obtained from exploration and improvisation into a harmonious whole. The choreographer applied the techniques of repetition, canon, and spatial layering to build rhythmic cohesion in the dance work. Each element of this composition serves to emphasize the unity and



balance between movement, space, and time which is very important in realizing the integrity of the choreography.

As Hawkins (1991) points out, composition in choreography not only combines emotional and aesthetic sensibilities but also ensures profound conceptual coherence. In the context of *Zapin Kasih*, this composition is not simply the physical arrangement of movements, but also aims to convey deeper meaning through the body and space. Composition becomes a medium for expressing emotions and Malay cultural values through the symbolism contained in the movements.

The composition process begins with selecting movements with expressive power and cultural resonance. Once these movements are selected, the next step is to arrange them into a structured sequence. Here, repetition techniques are used to strengthen rhythmic cohesion, allowing the audience to feel continuity and order within the dance flow. Repetition in these compositions also serves as a tool to emphasize specific messages conveyed within each movement motif. For example, motifs that gently repeat circular movements depict the continuity of values within Malay society, such as unity and togetherness.

The canon technique is also applied in compositions to create a dynamic and interactive effect between the dancers. In a canon, the same movements are performed by the dancers in turn, creating a coordinated harmony but with time intervals that allow each dancer to express their interpretation of the same movement. This technique adds depth to the choreography, adding rhythmic layers and highlighting the relationships between the dancers in the group. As **Cohen (2015) notes**, the canon in dance allows for the creation of visual effects that enrich the rhythm and emphasize the order and diversity that interact in the performance.

Spatial layering is also an important element in this compositional stage. The spatial arrangement in choreography not only considers the physical placement of the dancers on stage but also creates a visual dialogue between the dancers and the space they inhabit. Spatial layering allows for different movement dynamics at each level of the existing space, from horizontal movements involving movement across the stage to vertical movements symbolizing awakening or spirituality. For example, in several motifs symbolizing spiritual devotion, the dancers use vertical movements that point upward, creating the impression of a connection with a higher spiritual realm. This movement aligns with **Nelson's (2013) view** that spatial arrangement in choreography serves to add aesthetic and symbolic dimensions, providing new context to existing movements.

Each motif created in *Zapin Kasih* has a symbolic meaning that reflects important aspects of Malay life. For example, one recurring motif depicts gentle circular movements, symbolizing humility and spiritual devotion in Malay society. This motif also recalls the Zapin dance tradition, which has both religious and social purposes, where the movements reflect a harmonious relationship between individuals and God and with others.

Another motif reflects community solidarity, where movements are performed simultaneously by a group of dancers, creating a visual effect that depicts togetherness within the community. In this choreography, I want to emphasize how each individual plays a role in maintaining social harmony through well-organized movements, while still demonstrating flexibility in expression. This aligns with **Schechner's (2013) theory**, which emphasizes that choreography is not only a form of individual expression but also a platform for celebrating diversity within the collective.

Several motifs that incorporate more open and inclusive movements symbolize the values of egalitarianism and gender inclusivity in Malay society. Movements involving both

genders equally demonstrate balance and respect for equal roles in society. This choreography also reflects an awareness of changing times, where gender roles within the community are increasingly viewed in a more inclusive manner.

The compositional process in *Zapin Kasih* serves to unify previously developed movements into an organized and meaningful structure. Each movement motif reflects Malay cultural values, from spiritual devotion to social solidarity and gender inclusivity, all encapsulated in a dance work that speaks to life and harmony within society.

3.4 Stage 4: Evaluation

The evaluation phase of *Zapin Kasih's creation* involves two main aspects: reflective analysis and external feedback. As a choreographer, I assess whether the choreography successfully maintains the integrity of Zapin's traditional culture while achieving artistic freshness that meets contemporary demands. This evaluation is a crucial step in helping to map the extent to which the dance work has adapted to the times without losing its essence.

My evaluation process aligns with the praxis principle described by **Nelson (2013)**. In this concept, praxis is understood as the dialectic between doing and reflecting. This process involves reflecting on every artistic decision I make, both technical and aesthetic, and how those decisions interact with the cultural meaning I intend to convey. Evaluation is not simply about assessing whether a work is aesthetically pleasing, but also about questioning whether it fulfills its deeper goals, namely maintaining a balance between cultural heritage and innovation relevant to the times.

At this stage, I ponder whether the use of traditional Zapin movements in *Zapin Kasih* is still acceptable as an authentic representation of Malay culture, while also allowing for relevant novelties in the context of modern performance. As **Cohen (2015) argues**, evaluation in the performing arts allows choreographers to view their work in a broader context, take into account audience reactions and external criticism, and assess the alignment between traditional values and artistic innovation. Therefore, evaluation involves not only internal reflection but also external interpretations that can enrich our understanding of the work.

External feedback plays a crucial role in this evaluation phase. By involving external evaluators, such as fellow artists or a wider audience, I gain new perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of the choreography. This feedback helps me identify areas for improvement, whether in technique, expression, or cultural interpretation. This process also provides insight into how the work is received by audiences who may not be familiar with Malay culture, allowing me to assess the extent to which my intended message is universally understood.

Through this evaluation, I also assessed whether *Zapin Kasih* successfully strikes the right balance between traditional identity and contemporary innovation. The final performance of *Zapin Kasih* demonstrated how the choreography integrates traditional elements, such as basic Zapin steps and the use of sarongs as props, with a new, more dynamic and expressive approach. This evaluation confirmed that *Zapin Kasih* not only maintains its Malay cultural roots but also provides a new interpretation that is relevant in the world of contemporary performing arts. It is important to note that this evaluation also involved examining whether the choreography can communicate with audiences from different cultural backgrounds, an aspect that is increasingly important in the context of international performances. As **Schechner (2013) argues**, performing arts have the power to convey universal messages that transcend cultural boundaries, provided they are able to adapt in a way that brings broader values to life without sacrificing deep cultural identity.



Evaluation in *Zapin Kasih* serves as a crucial mechanism to ensure that the dance work is not only technically successful but also conveys a profound cultural message. By employing praxis principles involving reflection and external assessment, I can ensure that *Zapin Kasih* is not only an entertaining work of art, but also one rich in cultural meaning, relevant to current developments, and capable of reviving Malay traditions in a new form.

3.5 Synthesis

Overall, this study demonstrates that the creative process proposed by Hawkins (1991) provides a highly effective conceptual and practical framework for creating tradition-based dance. This framework allows choreographers to critically engage with their cultural heritage, while exploring and implementing personal and aesthetic transformations in their work. Hawkins describes the stages of exploration, improvisation, composition, and evaluation as integral to the creative process, which not only produces new movement but also suggests ways to maintain the relevance of tradition in an ever-evolving art world.

Smith (2018) points out, the application of this creative theory provides space for choreographers to not only innovate technically, but also to bring to life the cultural values inherent in dance traditions. In this regard, *Zapin Kasih* is a concrete example of how this creative process allows for a rich interaction between cultural memory and artistic renewal. As a choreographer, I can maintain traditional elements of Zapin, such as basic steps and the use of sarongs as props, while still presenting contemporary nuances that are relevant to today's audiences.

This creative process reflects how dance is not only a form of physical expression, but also a means for dialogue between rich cultures and continuous innovation. **Schechner (2013)** underscores the importance of awareness in preserving cultural heritage through performing arts, where art functions as a living medium that is constantly changing and evolving. In *Zapin Kasih*, this dialogue is created between existing traditional movements and the creative interpretations that I developed to give the work a new dimension. Thus, this creative journey not only tells an old story, but also brings it to life in a new and relevant form.

4. CONCLUSION

The creation of *Zapin Kasih* is a concrete example of how Alma Hawkins' four-stage model: exploration, improvisation, composition, and evaluation, can effectively structure a culturally grounded creative process. Through a systematic exploration of the movement vocabulary of the sarong and Zapin, the choreographer successfully developed six new motifs that not only maintain the traditional essence but also combine it with contemporary interpretations relevant to today's audiences. Each stage in this process plays a crucial role in deconstructing and reshaping traditional movements into something fresh and innovative without losing their deep cultural roots.

This study confirms that choreographic practice, when framed through Hawkins' theory, functions not only as artistic production but also as a form of deeper cultural inquiry. The dance creation process in *Zapin Kasih* demonstrates that choreography can serve as a means to investigate and convey cultural values through the medium of the body and space, while opening up space for new interpretations that connect tradition with contemporary realities. Thus, *Zapin Kasih* serves as a living testimony to how tradition, despite its continued development, retains its essence and meaning within a broader context.

Future research could expand this inquiry by comparing the creative frameworks of other Southeast Asian choreographers. By comparing existing approaches, we can better understand how Hawkins's theory applies in diverse cultural contexts. Furthermore, the integration of intercultural collaborative methods could enrich theoretical discourse in artistic research, allowing for a deeper exchange of ideas and exploration of the role of performing arts in a global context. Further research could provide new insights into how choreography can continue to evolve as a means of maintaining and transforming cultural traditions.

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