

**Learning Sign Language through *Bisindo*-based
Choreographic Process**
(*Belajar Bahasa Isyarat melalui Proses Koreografi Berbasis Bisindo*)

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Article Info

Article history:

Received: 17 Januari 2026
Revised: 30 Januari 2026
Accepted: 31 Januari 2026

Keywords:

Choreography
Bisindo
Inklusivity
Learning Medium
Contemporary Dance

Kata Kunci:

Koreografi
Bisindo
Inklusivitas
Media Belajar
Tari Kontemporer

Abstract

Creating dance requires movements vocabularies as well as the proficiency of choreographic technique. The significant forms intent to present some visual codes or signs for the spectators to capture the hidden messages. Contemporary dance vocabularies can be obtained by elaborating visual codes that exist in everyday life, including codes used by the Deaf for communication. Contemporary choreography using Bisindo is used as a medium for dance students to learn sign language, as part of their contribution to inclusivity at Gorontalo. This research implicates a qualitative phenomenological perspective on studio work that involve an artistic-based research as method in analysing the process of dance creation. Referring to Hadley, Humphrey, Smith, and Lavender in organizing contemporary dance repertoires in the context of the Deaf – Hearing intersection, this research integrates the basic elements of Bisindo as prime movement vocabularies. The research completed the artistic process, but has not reach the choreographic construction to integrate the Deaf with her Hearing mates. The results of the research are a dance movement vocabulary based on Bisindo, an inclusive arts learning model, and a contemporary dance repertoire. The choreography process and a dance piece entitled 'Tanda Tanda Berkata' provide an artistic medium for dance students to learn basic sign language, thus it also bridge the communication gap with deaffriends.

Abstrak

Mencipta tari membutuhkan kosakata gerak selain penguasaan teknik koreografi. Bentuk-bentuk signifikan bertujuan untuk menyajikan beberapa kode visual atau tanda bagi penonton untuk menangkap pesan tersembunyi. Kosakata tari kontemporer dapat diperoleh dengan mengelaborasi kode-kode visual yang ada dalam kehidupan sehari-hari, termasuk kode-kode yang digunakan oleh Tunarungu untuk berkomunikasi. Koreografi kontemporer menggunakan Bisindo dapat dipergunakan sebagai medium bagi mahasiswa tari untuk belajar bahasa isyarat, sebagai bagian dari kontribusi mereka terhadap upaya inklusivitas di Gorontalo. Penelitian ini mengimplikasikan perspektif fenomenologis kualitatif pada kerja studio yang melibatkan penelitian berbasis artistik sebagai metode dalam menganalisis proses penciptaan tari. Merujuk pada Hadley, Humphrey, Smith, dan Lavender dalam mengorganisasi repertoar tari kontemporer dalam konteks persimpangan Tuli – Dengar, penelitian ini mengintegrasikan elemen dasar Bisindo sebagai kosakata gerak utama. Riset ini menyelesaikan proses artistik sebagai bagian dari tujuannya, tetapi belum mencapai konstruksi koreografi yang mengintegrasikan mahasiswa Tuli dengan teman-teman dengarnya. Hasil penelitian adalah vokabulari gerak tari berbasis Bisindo, model belajar seni inklusi, dan satu repertoar tari kontemporer. Proses

koreografi dan karya berjudul Tanda Tanda Berkata menyediakan media artistik bagi mahasiswa tari untuk mempelajari bahasa isyarat dasar, serta dapat mengatasi kesenjangan komunikasi dengan teman Tuli.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The communication gap of the deaf community is now being established as study programs such as Pendidikan Luar Biasa (PLB) at UNY and UNJ, Sekolah Guru Pendidikan Luar Biasa (SGPLB) at UPI, Inclusive Education Study Program (Pensif), and integrated curricula with the concept of inclusivity (Bentara Campus, 2024). The implementative concern of inclusive education is outlined in National Government Regulation Number 70 of 2009, which provides opportunities for every Child with Special Needs (ABK) to study in regular educational institutions (Purbasari et al., 2022). However, inclusive education in Indonesia remains a challenge to be solved. In a formal school, children with special needs often be guided to “become normal.” The children with hearing disability placed in “uncomfortable” communication, directed to learn to pronounce words assuming that being deaf does not mean being unable to speak (Ratnadi & Adnyani, 2023). On the other hand, the Deaf students in Sekolah Luar Biasa (SLB) were taught to learn Indonesian Sign Language System (*SIBI*) in a non-comprehensive way, limited understanding to letters and simple concepts. Meanwhile, the Deaf community in Gorontalo communicates independently using a local sign language, called Indonesian Sign Language (*Bisindo*). Therefore, after graduating from SLB, the Deaf find them difficult to communicate with each other, because even though there are some similarities in code, *Bisindo* is fundamentally different from *SIBI* (interview with Podungge, Gorontalo, 2024).

My previous research revealed important findings upon our short films featuring *Bisindo*. First, we identified the richness of expression and linguistic complexity of *Bisindo*, which serves as a dynamic communication medium among deaf people. Second, *Bisindo* in the dialogue of short films serves as a means to foster greater understanding and appreciation of the local culture and identity of the deaf community. Third, we highlighted the role of short films as a powerful platform for advocating for deaf empowerment and social change towards an inclusive society. By embracing *Bisindo* and promoting its use in other media forms, we can create a more inclusive and equitable society for all. Crucially, deaf people are able to optimize their talents and intelligence, enabling them to become agents of humanistic art (Sitharesmi & Rumambie, 2023).

Regarding the present of a Deaf student in Jurusan Pendidikan Sendratisik at UNG since 2024, this research imperatively seeking a new approach towards learning process. The artistic practices within the routines and “surface” performances, will unique challenges in fostering inclusive communication and cultural expression for Hearing students and Deaf Students. Therefore, the main issue addressed in this research is how *Bisindo*-based choreography can be developed and utilized effectively as a sign language learning medium for art students at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, thereby promoting inclusive education and cultural expression. This formulation identifies gaps in current educational practices, highlights the cultural and educational potential of integrating *Bisindo* with a non-traditional choreography, and establishes a foundation for developing and assessing this innovative approach.

Creating a dance work based on *Bisindo* exploration is conceptually an inclusive education which represents the open attitude of hearing students towards their deaf colleague. By exploring the *Bisindo* as vocabularies in making dance, the students familiarising themselves with non-verbal languages. The process of choreographing is valuable as a strategy and the model in promoting the effective of creating dance while also learning a type of “new language” that is responsive to the various actual needs of students (Nielsen, 2015). *Bisindo* is cultural since it utilizing the gestures represent local icons, codes and symbols. Within this context, this research aims to enhance the pedagogical approach in learning sign language through artistic performances. Exploring sign language in choreographic process, is necessarily considered as an alternative method for dance students to learn sign language (Alshutwi et al., 2020).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a hybrid methodology that combines artistic phenomenology and artistic-based research to develop Bisindo vocabulary into dance gestures and motifs, ultimately forming a dance composition. I use Bisindo for its metaphoric gestural and expression which dominate the message delivery. It was another sign language commonly used amongst the Deaf members in local sphere, and differ from SIBI. While SIBI used hand fingers fully to form the non-verbal language, Bisindo emphasises the expression, metaphor, and gesture to represent the cultural iconics and symbols (Imaduddin, 2022). The creation of contemporary choreography is a creative process that also serves as a medium for learning sign language for students majoring in Dance Education at Gorontalo State University. This method ensures a holistic approach, within in-depth insights gained from phenomenological inquiry, and the iterative nature of artistic-based research. It is an attempt to address problematic questions about the epistemology of dance practice, regarding how it develops original insights, as well as the contribution to the claim that choreographic research has the same quality as other, more traditional forms of academic research in producing distinctive forms of knowledge (Pakes, 2009). Subjectivity plays a central role in cultural studies, which are interpretive and contextual, and thus the interpreter's subjectivity often encompasses acceptance, sensitivity, common sense, and open cultural depiction (Endraswara, 2003). The exchange of views between cultural owners and researchers is a form of intersubjectivity that is crucial for art, culture, and philosophy research to achieve scientific objectivity. The concept of interpretation, which refers to a part of "local interpretation" offered by experts and source person through extensive discussions and conversations, is a direct way of recording and representing that provides ample space for intersubjective relationships (Fountain, 2014).

The research method is structured into three main phases. The first phase is collecting the data with the exploration of Bisindo as primary data, and literature review for secondary data. Literature review and contextual analysis, conduct comprehensive review of existing literature on Bisindo, choreography, and its integration in educational settings. The interviews and focus groups discussion with key source persons, including deaf students, and the Bisindo instructors, and sign language interpreter (JBI) implement the phenomenological Inquiry to understand the lived experiences regarding the use of sign language outside the Deaf community. In this case, the documentation and analysis of these experiences to identify themes and insights that will inform the development of the choreography. The second phase is analysing the data within the development of artistic process, a collaborative workshop conducted through a studio process involving the researcher as choreographer, students as dancers, and sign language experts to co-create Bisindo-based choreography. This phase uses an iterative cycle of creation, feedback, and refinement to develop a choreography that seamlessly blended Bisindo with exploratory motifs (Hadley, 2021). Recording and documenting the studio process were conducted to capture the creative process and the coherence of the choreographic work. An artistic-based experiments were conducted by asking students to actively engage in constructing motif development and sequences. I encouraged the students to a reflective practice, where they continuously documented the experiences, challenges, and outcomes of their creative process (Carroll & Banes, 1982). Documentation was carried out effectively using video recordings, photographs, and reflective journals to capture the embodied knowledge and practical insights gained through this process.

In this phase, ten dance student participants take an artistic-based research on dance making, reconstructing and deconstructing Bisindo elements. The choreographic process allows the students to analyse their "personal" relationships with dance, and share their perceptions to obtain intersubjective understanding. The exploration as an integrated stage of choreographic process between developing the chosen phrase and reading their respective journal and other supporting literatures. In the context of dance composition, exploration is a choreographer's experimental action in a broad range to fully understand the movement and the feelings/meanings connoted. Jacqueline Smith emphasizes that, in exploration, the choreographer consciously or intuitively experiences the expressive aspects of movement, opening up the potential for ideas that can stimulate composition, while improvisation is required to experience various ways of treating movement from feeling to knowing what is meant. Next is evaluating – shaping the movement, namely analyzing it and capturing the complexity of the relationship between movement and phrase to begin to create a dance (Smith-Autard, 2010). The choreographer's subjective attitude towards the aesthetic elements of Bisindo can be understood through evaluating how he responds to uniqueness and develops it into a generic phrase: diction (delivery of the chosen movement), dynamics, clarity, and intent. Each stage of evaluation reaches the choreographer's accumulative experience, thus getting closer to the progress of dance creation.

The third phase is presenting the data implemented in the act of evaluation and choreographic performance. The evaluation phase involves performance and feedback by presenting raw choreographic works to the deaf community to gather audience reactions and perceptions, focusing on the impact of the performance on their understanding and appreciation of Bisindo and the dance (Kuppers, 2019; Ashley, 2012). Reflective analysis involves analyzing reflective journals, video recordings, and the dancers's

comments to rethink the effectiveness of Bisindo-based choreography as a medium for learning sign language. During the studio works, I simplify choreographic operations to reconnect its cycle with a more familiar artistic creation model: Improvising, Developing, Evaluating, and Assimilating (IDEA). This IDEA is not a method for creating dance, but rather an operational model that can be adapted to integrate with choreographic methodological stages, such as the instructional methods of Alma Hawkins or Jacqueline Smith. This operational model, similar to Hawkins', is a circular spiral that works from the base (widening) and gradually moves to the peak (tapering). By implementing this operational cycle, choreographers must experience artistic work as an intrinsic process of dance creation, preparing for any challenges that may arise at any time, rather than imposing a rigid staged progression (Lavender, 2009).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The stages of artistic-based research have been undertaken as a single choreographic process, intertwined with a phenomenological approach to observe its immediate use in the effort to teach sign language. The process of dance creation also adopts the style of Doris Humphrey's "The Art of Making Dance." Humphrey's theoretical teachings, according to Myron Howard Nadel, have been tested throughout her dancing career at the Denishawn Company and her own Humphrey-Weidman Dance Company. She encouraged her students to expand and experiment with the professional skills taught in technique classes to discover their own dance language through improvisation, thus making their movements new, personal, and organic. Humphrey, along with her contemporaries, valued the sensing, discovery, and development of movement that stemmed from the dancer's natural bodily responses (Nadel, 2019).

3.1 Bisindo Construction as Dance Movement Vocabulary

The first result of the research is dance phrases produced by the Bisindo exploration. As an experimental action, the exploration allowed us to broadly reach the elements of movement, deeply experience them, and then feel the connoted meaning. In this study, I am also a choreographer, collaborates with students as co-choreographers and models (dancers) to consciously and intuitively explore and experience the expressive dimensions of movement together. We have captured the aesthetic aspects of several Bisindo vocabulary words, re-selected them for development potential, and then conveyed dance phrases. Students responded by discovering for themselves the uniqueness/specificity of the Bisindo vocabulary given, and developing them into generic phrases, which are manifested through diction (delivery of the selected movements), dynamics, clarity, and intent. The exploration phase is carried out in 3 (three) effective meetings delivering Bisindo material, and elaborating it into activities to construct the elements and essence of basic Bisindo vocabulary into dance movement motifs, both gestural and motional (Figure 1).

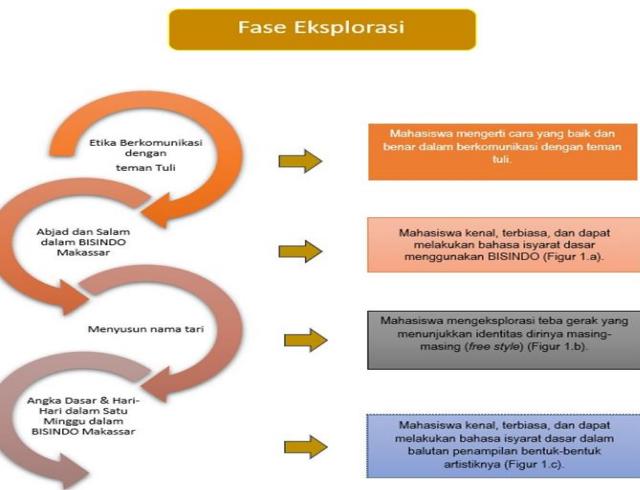


Figure 1. A diagram of creative process in exploration phase (Doc. Sitharesmi, 2024)

The selected basic *Bisindo* as dance vocabulary underlies each development in movement motifs, and becomes the main feature in the overall form of the work. The *Bisindo* used as vocabulary is *Bisindo* developed by the Indonesian Sign Language Development Center (*PUSBISINDO*) of South Sulawesi, which is based in Makassar. *Bisindo* Makassar was chosen because it has a scheduled training program that can be attended by participants from other regions in Sulawesi, both offline and online. This was also done by considering the limited allocation of time and funding for the implementation of this research, which cannot wait for the preparation of the training and Bisindo Gorontalo dictionary which is currently being planned by GERKATIN Gorontalo.

The studio works in the exploration phase produces: a) short and simple movement motifs that are gestural (original manifestations of basic *Bisindo* elements in composition), as well as motional (artistic manifestations of basic *Bisindo* elements after undergoing stylization, distortion, and variations in form in the processing of space (floor design and air design), time (dynamics, rhythm, and tempo play), and energy (the quality of emphasis on certain movements); b) students' understanding of several basic *Bisindo* vocabulary, which is indicated through the ability to construct simple sentences.



Figure 2. The students discover *Bisindo*'s expression and gestures during the initial exploration of movement elements (Doc. Sitharesmi, 2024)



Figure 3. Reconstruction of the basic *Bisindo* into dance movement motifs (Doc. Sitharesmi, 2024)

3.2 Intertwining Artistic Work in a Learning Context

The second result is a potentially artistic model for learning sign language and contemporary dance repertoire. Although ideal choreographic work is actually achieved through a circular process, back and forth work, or even often overlapping between exploration, development, and evaluation/formation (Sitharesmi, 2020), this research applied a structured-gradual process to accommodate the achievement and measurement of student competencies. Visually, from the dancing body, a measured and real dance form can be captured in which the body becomes an instrument of art by transcending itself deeply – intimately, thus providing a very beautiful beauty of form and movement combination (McCutchen, 2016). By constructing the *Bisindo* element as the main feature of creating contemporary dance works, the students have carried out the level of learning sign language to the level of understanding and minor implementation.

Since the first phase, the research has been designed as a space for a semi-informal learning process. Sign language material as the main vocabulary for the concept of creating contemporary dance works is very rational, considering that sign language is symbols and codes that must be displayed through body movements and facial expressions (Drake, 2019). The dynamics of sign language body movements are dominated by the upper body, so it is very possible to be elaborated, constructed, and deconstructed if necessary, in choreographic processing together with modern dance techniques such as flooring, crumpling, swirling, and jumping. Just as the exploration phase produces both practical – artistic elements and cognitive elements for the achievement of a complete work, the development phase produces: a) an understanding of the essence of coding used by *Bisindo* to present certain signs such as fruit names, city names, and adjectives; b) an increase in students' ability to recognize and memorize *Bisindo* signs by orienting themselves to the coding concept; c) significant artistic elements as building blocks for choreographic structures with *Bisindo* nuances as the main feature (Figure 2).



Figure 3. A diagram of creative process in the development phase (Doc. Sitharesmi, 2024)



Figure 4. An intermediate reconstruction of the basic *Bisindo* into its artistic form by Fahrurrozy A. Harun & Nazly F. Pakaya (Doc. Sitharesmi, 2024)



Figure 5. As intermediate reconstruction of the basic *Bisindo* into its artistic form by Firman Sadapu & Nurlia Herman (Doc. Sitharesmi, 2024)

3.3 The Contemporary Dance as the Artistic Significance of Inclusivity

The last result is a dance piece titled "*Tanda Tanda Berkata*", created simply to identify the dance work that does not need to be thought about what it represents. Like non-literal dances by experimentalist choreographers such as Doris Humphrey (Water Study), Alwin Nicolais (Dance Theatre), and Merce Cunningham (Suite by Chance) (Burt, 2017), "*Tanda Tanda Berkata*" is a study of the close and logical relationship between movement, time, and space. Furthermore, the purpose of compiling the work is as a medium for learning sign language, motivating and inspiring students to find the unique "fun" in sign language, and continuing it at the level of everyday communication with their Deaf mate. A formative

evaluation emphasised a complete structure of the work using a non-literal choreographic approach. The concept of a non-literal dance work is identical to an abstract representation that also represents the style or aesthetics of contemporary dance. Its analogy in fine art is abstract painting, impressionist sculpture, and other visual works that process technical play, color, and new ideas. Margery J. Turner conveys that the idea of a non-literal dance work is intended to exist for itself, and not to convey narrative stories. Its aesthetic quality lies in the existence of movement-motion-space-time creations that unite kinetic matrices into a pure and complete organic unity (Carroll & Banes, 2018).

The nature of "*Tanda Tanda Berkata*" as a non-literer dance come as follows: a) it emphasis on the kinetic development of the source of the vocabularies – in this case *Bisindo*, which opposes overly intellectual choreographic planning; b) the absence of dramatic emotional behavior that produces understanding or tendencies; c) it is multi-dimensional, dynamic, complex coordination, and direct communication; d) an artistic form that produces a unique quality of movement feeling; d) it allows to liberal choreographic principles that give freedom to the choreographer in executing his ideas according to his own artistic concepts (D'Amato, 2021).

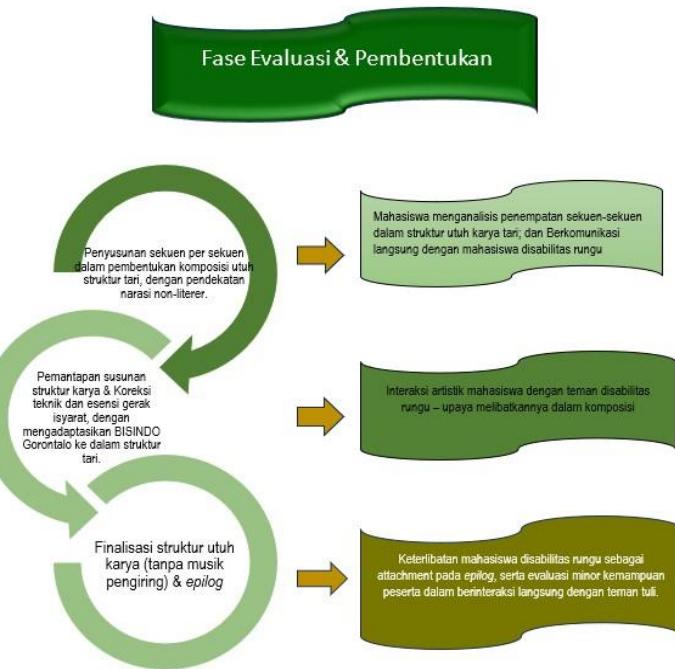


Figure 6. A diagram of creative process in the evaluation and formation phase (Doc. Sitharesmi, 2024)



Figure 7. One of the sequences in the structure of "*Tanda Tanda Berkata*" (Doc. Sitharesmi, 2024)



Figure 8. *Tanda Tanda Berkata* initial performance at the 2024 International Sign Language Day (ISL) commemoration, organized by GERKATIN Gorontalo (Doc. Sitharesmi, 2024)

3.4 Discussion

In each individual assessment, students progress or develop their work process separately, depending on their individual responses to the *Bisindo* material presented. This assignment involves investigating the results of the exploration, whether they embrace the intrinsic values of traditional elements and local wisdom or engage more in kinesthetic processing. Within the space of directed exploration, the "play" between Hawkins' instructions and Lavender's model allows choreographers to discover their own tendencies (Sitharesmi, 2022). The artistic-based research is implemented into the Dance Choreography III course as the final level of choreography courses in the dance arts major. The learning process is practical in nature, relying on theoretical investigations in its subjective analysis, which is directed at experimental experiences as its learning outcomes. The artistic work process itself accommodates a balanced integration between practical and cognitive competencies. The final result can be a complete choreographic project (a dance piece), or the most significant manifestation of the final stage of a series of artistic-based research processes. The concept of "non-traditional" can be understood as "contemporary" to refer to the meaning of "currently ongoing or actual," so that creativity is directed to explore the potential for "newness" in all possible choreographic aspects (Cvejić, 2015; Murgiyanto, 2018).

The sensory effects are obtained from visual and kinesthetic responses, imaginative effects are obtained from ideational responses or ideas regarding history and socio-cultural background, and emotional effects are obtained from atmospheric responses to the atmosphere captured by the senses. Aspiring young choreographers are motivated and guided to find their own organic-significant forms in their creative process of creating dance. The exploration of new experiences is achieved through experimental research creating sequences of dance movements within the circle of understanding the meaning and special values of the selected elements of tradition and local wisdom. In this case, inner understanding as an indirect effect of experience plays a role as a primary stimulant in creating dance (Sitharesmi, 2024). Literature investigations strengthen the concept of compiling the artistic aspects that serve more as references, information, and confirmation than as operational work guidelines. However, Deaf Sign Language as a Language for the Stage by Lib Taylor and writings based on artistic work experiences with deaf performers from other dance scholars guide researchers to be able to move back and forth between choreographic investigation and theoretical analysis of the work results (Taylor, 1995).

Several thoughts of the authors in the literature Disability Arts and Culture: Methods and Approaches with Petra Kuppers convey important discourse on the culture and paradigm of thinking of the disability community, so that the creative process does not abandon ethics in every treatment of sign language and the nature of its use. This *Bisindo*-based choreography emerges an emphatic way engaging the important discourse what Kuppers said as 'the insight and paradigm of disability culture' (Babiker et al., 2021; Kuppers, 2014). The inclusive learning model also allows the Deaf student to learn together with her Hearing mates, which impact psychologically to the development of self-confidence (self-esteem). Self-esteem is part of self-concept, which attempts to overcome the discrepancy between oneself and the desire to be what or who one wants to be (Alsalem & Alzahrani, 2023). With self-esteem, the Deaf student can recognize her own strengths and weaknesses, feel valuable, so she can also respect herself, while still accepting her shortcomings. Inclusive education is a humanistic paradigm that relies on an educational philosophy that accommodates all students according to their needs. Inclusive education is a non-discriminatory education that provides services to all students regardless of physical, mental, intellectual, social-emotional, economic, gender, ethnicity, culture, residence, language and so on (Wijaya et al., 2023).

In short, in an inclusive environment, communities must be prepared to change and adapt their environments and activities to accommodate everyone, taking everyone's needs into account. It is no longer the case that the Deaf student "forced" to adapt to normal settings and conditions; rather, it is the community that must "change" their own normality to fit within the Deaf world, allowing her to engage in activities in accordance with her rights and talents, while learning alongside each other. This requires flexibility, creativity, and sensitivity in implementing inclusive learning (Lane et al., 1996; Laukkanen, 2019).

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

In this research, the creative process of creating dance aims to address the initial problem faced by the Deaf student in an academic realm, so it explores the potential of Bisindo in bridging the communication gap, particularly in the context of art learning. The theoretical framework of this study draws on phenomenological theories, including those related to contemporary dance acquisition and sociocultural perspectives on artistic innovation. By examining the gestural icons, expression and cultural nuances of Bisindo, this study seeks to explain its efficacy as a tool to empower the Deaf community and promote inclusivity in the realm of media representation. The analysis of choreographies featuring Bisindo revealed several key findings. First, it observed the expressive richness and metaphoric complexity of Bisindo, which serves as a dynamic medium for communication between dance students in Jurusan Pendidikan Sendratasik UNG and their Deaf mate. Furthermore, it noted the importance of incorporating Bisindo into dance compositions as a means to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of deaf culture and identity. Furthermore, the study highlighted studio work as a powerful platform for advocating sign language empowerment and social change within deaf culture. By highlighting Bisindo as a movement vocabulary, the structure of the dance composition - Tanda-Tanda Berkata - has the opportunity to challenge stereotypes, promote diversity, and elevate the voices of the deaf community.

4.2 Suggestions/Recommendations

In closing, this exploration of the sign elements and essence of Bisindo in the artistic process of dance creation underscores its potential to promote cultural empowerment of engaging students and promoting inclusivity. The integration of Bisindo-based choreography into dance education presents a promising approach to enhance the learning experience for arts students at Gorontalo State University. This model is not only provides dance students a new experience of learning sign language, but also fosters a deeper connection with local traditions and cultural expressions. Further innovation and community engagement are crucial to the success and sustainability of this type of educational initiative. Moving forward, it is crucial for artists, academic, policymakers, and the wider public to recognize the value of Bisindo as a crucial component of communication bridging and cultural diversity. By embracing sign languages, particularly Bisindo Makassar and Gorontalo, and promoting their use in various media forms, we can work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society for all. Most importantly, talented students and scholars with disabilities themselves can become agents of the humanistic nature of art.

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