

# The Effectiveness of Heuristic as Research Approach on Non-Clinical Therapeutic Procedure through Sabah's *Igal* dance for Depression among Adults with Disabilities

Panan, Amandus Paul, Rosdeen Suboh, Sang Woo Ha

Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia Universiti Malaya, Malaysia

Email: amandus@uitm.edu.my, kudin@um.edu.my, sangwooha@um.edu.my

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## Abstract

The heuristic research approach is valuable for exploring the therapeutic potential of traditional dance forms, emphasizing personal engagement and intuitive understanding. This paper investigates the effectiveness of the *Igal* dance from Sabah as a non-clinical therapeutic procedure for disabled adults with depression. Depression, which disproportionately affects disabled adults, often requires culturally relevant therapeutic approaches. The *Igal* dance, deeply rooted in cultural heritage, offers a promising alternative. The **objective** of this study is to explore how the *Igal* dance alleviates depressive symptoms and improves the well-being of disabled adults. Using a heuristic research approach, the researcher and participants engaged in the dance, keeping reflective journals and participating in interviews to capture their experiences. **Findings** suggest that the *Igal* dance enhances emotional and physical well-being. Key themes include emotional release, physical engagement, and cultural connection. Participants reported reduced depressive symptoms, improved mobility, and a strengthened sense of cultural identity and community. These results underscore the importance of incorporating cultural practices into therapeutic interventions. The study **concludes** that the heuristic research approach effectively uncovers the holistic benefits of traditional dance therapy, promoting an empathetic understanding of mental health treatment for disabled adults. **Recommendations** include integrating traditional dances into mental health programs, further researching other traditional dance forms, and training practitioners in heuristic research methods and traditional dance therapy.

**Keywords:** Heuristic Research Approach, Non-clinical Therapeutic, Sabah's *Igal* Dance, Disabilities, Depression

## Introduction

Depression is a pervasive mental health issue that affects millions worldwide, including disabled adults or in this article the author will acknowledge as People with Different Abilities (PwDA). Traditional dances like the *Igal* dance from Sabah Malaysia offer a culturally rich medium for therapeutic intervention. This study aims to explore the effectiveness of the heuristic research approach in understanding the therapeutic benefits of *Igal* dance for PwDA

with depression. By focusing on personal experiences and intuitive insights, this research seeks to provide a holistic view of how this traditional dance can serve as a non-clinical therapeutic tool.

According to Carvalho et al (2024), the National Health and Morbidity Survey 2023 (NHMS) revealed that the prevalence of depression has increased twofold between 2019 and 2023. A total of one million individuals aged 15 years and older were identified as experiencing depression. In terms of disability, the survey revealed that the prevalence of disability among adults in 2023 was 8.2%, which is a decrease from the prevalence of 11.1% reported in NHMS 2019. While there has been a 2.9% decrease in the prevalence of depression among impaired persons, it is crucial to take immediate and major action to address this issue. Furthermore, Bernama (2024) emphasised that almost 50% of the individuals surveyed reported experiencing suicidal ideation or thoughts of self-harm (Bernama, 2024). This statement prompted the initiation of this research to propose an alternate treatment for depression among PwDA.

As a disabled performing arts educator, the author cognizant of the physical obstacles and injuries that can contribute to depression and directly affect one's artistic pursuits, particularly for dancers and actors. Dance and drama are two interconnected artistic disciplines that engage both the physical and cognitive aspects of the body and mind in comparable manners. Dance has historically served as a collective endeavour, utilised in ceremonial and societal contexts, including love, shamanism, fertility rituals, warfare, hunting, and indigenous ritual ceremonies. Additionally, dance has the ability to provoke, alter, and convey emotions (Payne & Costas, 2021). This can be associated with one of the important elements in this paper, namely *Igal* dance.

Within the community of the nomadic 'sea gypsies' in the Sulu Sea, both the Sama Bajau or Bajau Laut of Malaysia and the Sama Dilaut of the Southern Philippines have similar practices when it comes to dancing. Dancing is a significant part of ritual healing ceremonies, known as *Mag-igal* (Mohd Anis Md Nor, & Hanafi Hussin, 2019). Therefore, the importance of *Igal* dance or *Mag-igal* (dancing) is crucial for its utilisation in this alternative therapeutic approach, since it continues to be employed as a form of healing within the Bajau community. In addition, the elements from Emunah's Five-phase Model of Drama therapy was referred to design the process. Drama often encompasses the textual, intellectual, and emotional aspects of a scenario, designed to be presented to an audience. Hence, the essence of drama therapy is utilised in alternative treatment as a means to stimulate healing for People with Different Abilities (PwDA).

The Author's outlook on performing arts as therapy has been significantly altered by his experiences in teaching dance and theatre, performing, conducting research, and writing. This is paralleled with Purrington's point, "... Dramatherapists employ certain forms of theatre, together with performance, to create therapeutic possibilities" (Wood, 2018; Emunah, 2015; Wood et al., 2020; Kaynan & Wade, 2018, p. 13).. This remark highlighted a key advantage of doing this study, to provide assistance to PwDA in Malaysia. This study posits that the practice of *Igal* dance, a kind of performance art, possesses inherent healing properties. Consequently, individuals with depression who have physical disabilities can experience healing through a systematic approach that integrates the therapeutic elements of performance Arts therapy, namely through the use of movements and acting techniques derived from *Igal* dance. This study presented a novel approach that enables individuals with physical disabilities to engage in performing arts as a form of therapeutic. The main **objective** of this paper is to propose an alternative therapeutic process for depression among PwDA

### Study Background and Problem Statement

According to a preliminary research conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO), around 1.3 billion individuals, up to 16% of the global population or 1 in 6 persons, have a substantial handicap (World Health Organization, 2023). WHO stated that those with disabilities are at a higher risk of acquiring diseases such as depression, asthma, diabetes, stroke, obesity, or poor dental health, with a risk that is twice as high compared to those without disabilities. This information serves as a strong reminder to all countries, including Malaysia, to guarantee that individuals with disabilities have equal access to high-quality and standardised healthcare services that are either free or inexpensive.

This study focus to address the lack of attention given to the social inclusion of people with disabilities as a whole. Despite certain mainstream activities, particularly in cultural performance, there has been less focus on this issue. However, social inclusion should not just prioritise the organisation of mainstream performances. It should also encompass smaller-scale treatment procedures that utilise performing art in a more immersive session, conducted in a tranquil atmosphere that is conducive for those with depression who have disabilities.

In 2015, the author suffered a debilitating stroke that affected his neurological system, resulting in reduced mobility and a diagnosis of depression. Despite undergoing physiotherapy, sports massage, acupuncture, and other alternative treatments, including counselling, he did not experience any improvement. here has been no observable progress. Ironically, he entertained misgivings regarding the idea that despair may lead to suicide until he seen it himself. However, the sphere of Performing Arts had a vital role in his life, as its therapeutic effectiveness was observed during a creative journey from 2019 to the present. Upon exploring this unconventional therapeutic approach, the author discovered that he may potentially share his personal experience with other individuals who have disabilities and suffer from depression.

In 2019, Pei Ann Yeoh, a music instructor from Universiti Teknologi MARA, reached out to the author to collaborate on an avant-garde performance titled *Tujuh Tanah* (2019) for a project called MAP Experimentum in Melaka, Malaysia. The performance of *Tujuh Tanah* (2019) was the author's first foray into the domain of therapy using performance as a medium. In 2019, he was invited by Ras Adibah Radzi, the Founder of OKU Sentral, an organisation catering to those with disabilities, is taking part in a philanthropic event known as *Ilham*. The performance occurred in the Damansara Performing Arts Centre (DPAC). The 2019 event, organised by OKU Sentral, showcased a wide variety of performances by artists with disabilities, including dances, choirs, skits, and music. *Ilham* (2019) highlighted the effectiveness of treatment by utilising the author's choreography *Angin* (2019), which motivated him to delve deeper into the connection between disabilities, depression, and Performing Arts.

Furthermore, during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, Pei and the author collaborated together again on the *Isolation* project 2020. The initiative had good outcomes when they presented their compositions in a recital lecture in Graz, Germany in 2020. In addition, they participated in the Creative Economy Forum 2021: Focus on Arts and Culture (2020) hosted by CENDANA. The author attended the *Map Experimentum Online 2020*, which was organised by MAP Festival, in Malaysia. These collaborations have offered possibilities to better investigate the therapeutic aspects for artists with impairments. The main objective of this research is to offer an alternative therapeutic strategy for those with depression who also have a physical handicap. This study aims to evaluate an alternative therapeutic approach for

individuals suffering from depression by means of an experimental performance workshop. This paper examined an alternate treatment procedure including 17 individuals who have physical limitations and rely on wheelchairs. The therapy is conducted by volunteers, including dance and drama facilitators, as well as theatre students.

## **Literature Review**

### *Depression and Disability*

Depression among disabled adults is a significant concern, with many experiencing higher rates of depression due to various psychosocial stressors (Krahn et al., 2015). Disabled adults often face social isolation, discrimination, and physical limitations that can exacerbate feelings of depression. Traditional therapeutic interventions often fall short in addressing the unique needs of this population, highlighting the need for alternative approaches that consider their specific challenges and cultural contexts (World Health Organization, 2012).

The WHO has indicated that there is a greater incidence of depression among PwDA which is a cause for concern. According to Turner & Noh (1988), there is a consistent and well-documented link between physical illness and depression or mental disorders. This association has been reported in various studies and have demonstrated that physical illness can cause depression in individuals of different age groups. Turner & Noh (1988) highlight, supported by other researchers, that there is a wealth of evidence about the association between handicap, namely physical sickness, and mental illnesses such as depression. The paper discussed the correlation between the condition and specific age groups. Subsequently Ji et al (2021) reached a consensus on this matter, but they also incorporated gender into their research conclusions. In their study, Ji et al (2021) investigated how age and gender influence the relationship between pain and depression, with functional impairment acting as a mediator. The article determined that customising tactics for various age and gender cohorts is crucial for enhancing their efficacy. Furthermore, Senra and McPherson (2021) discovered that chronic disease frequently correlates with disability and is strongly linked to mental health issues, including depression.

### *Therapeutic Use of Performing Arts*

Dance has been increasingly recognized as a valuable form of therapy for mental health issues, offering physical, emotional, and social benefits (Koch et al., 2014). Studies have shown that dance therapy can improve mood, reduce anxiety, and enhance overall psychological well-being (Pinniger et al., 2013). Traditional dances, rooted in cultural heritage, can provide additional layers of meaning and connection, fostering a sense of identity and community (Koch et al., 2014).

Performing Arts therapy for People with Different Abilities (PwDA) is a relatively recent development in Malaysia, and there is still a lack of promotion for PwDA involvement in performing arts. In 2019, the Malaysia International Dance Organisation (MIDO), a non-governmental organisation (NGO), held a Talent competition with over 100 contestants. As a judge, the author was intrigued by the involvement of PwDA in the competition by engaging in several disciplines such as dancing, singing, and music. Nevertheless, there is a notable absence of research in the existing body of literature about the involvement of PwDA in the realm of performing arts, specifically in the context of therapeutic interventions for depression within the Malaysian community. The majority of research on disability and performing arts focuses on how the arts may be used to improve the physical and mental capacities, as well as the overall well-being, of those with disabilities (Masud, et al., 2015).

The incidence of depression among individuals with disabilities is greater than that in the general population and is influenced by several factors. Some illness-specific issues include the neurological consequences of stroke, amputation as a result of diabetes disease, restrictions caused by age-related eye disease leading to vision loss, weariness caused by rheumatoid arthritis, and discomfort associated with cancer. Shared variables observed in all illnesses include pre-existing depression, previous mental health issues, limited social support, incapacity connected to illness, presence of multiple health disorders, and less effective coping mechanisms (Senra & McPherson, 2021). The studies by Turner and Noh (1988); Ji et al (2021); Senra and McPherson (2021) explored the relationship between disability and depression, highlighting the importance of supporting individuals affected by these conditions. Consequently, this study aims to propose an alternative therapeutic approach for individuals with depression who experience physical or mental disabilities. According to these papers, the study concluded that there is a correlation between physical sickness and mental problems, including depression, which can also be influenced by other causes. This study selects adults who utilise wheelchairs to conduct a preliminary investigation with a cohort of volunteers.

A preliminary research discovered that certain therapies utilise performing arts as tools to help patients with mental health conditions, such as depression. For example, Behavioural Therapy, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), and Behavioural Therapy. The treatment options for psychological disorders include Interpersonal Psychotherapy (IPT), Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), Psychodynamic Therapy, Supportive Therapy, and Medications (American Psychological Association, 2019). However, nearly all of those treatments are conducted in a therapeutic environment, which incorporates psychological therapy and organised frameworks. This study seeks to develop an alternative therapeutic method by using techniques from Dramatherapy and integrating Sabah Bajau's *Igal* dance.

#### *Heuristic Research Approach*

The heuristic research approach, developed by Clark Moustakas, emphasizes the researcher's personal engagement and intuitive understanding (Moustakas, 1990). This method is particularly suited for exploring complex, subjective experiences and uncovering deep, nuanced insights (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). Heuristic research involves six phases: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. These phases guide the researcher through a process of deep reflection and analysis, allowing for a holistic understanding of the research topic (Moustakas, 1990).

Furthermore, this study applied heuristics as a reflective approach to analyse the alternative process. Heuristics refers to a deep and insightful personal engagement in addressing problems, when one tries to understand the fundamental nature of a particular element of life by exploring one's own thoughts and feelings. Heuristics is connected to reflection, which is an essential cognitive exercise in the field of study. Reflexivity is commonly employed in qualitative research to justify and authenticate research methodologies (Mortari, 2015). Various discourses exist about the primary philosophical methods to reflection, including pragmatist, critical, hermeneutic, and phenomenological. This study utilises heuristics as a reflective approach to the alternative therapy process. In their work, Douglas and Moustakas (1985) defined heuristics as the fundamental and multifaceted foundation of human science. Moustakas (1990) devised a six-phase framework for research, which is utilised in this study. The phases are as follows:

Phases	Activity	Description
1	Initial Engagement	The project of self-investigation requires a continuous and intense focus, as well as the use of profound and methodical introspection techniques. This process elicits the perceptual, emotional, and cognitive intricacies. One engages in self-dialogue on the issue. The references used are (Moustakas, 1990) and (O'Beirne, 2014).
2	Immersion	Moustakas (1990) suggests that the inquiry should use expressions of the subjective lived experience as the primary data (O'Beirne, 2014).
3	Incubation period	The researcher withdraws from the event in order to facilitate a deeper degree of comprehension that goes beyond the immediate encounter (O'Beirne, 2014).
4	Illumination	The illuminations occur when a person becomes aware of something and establishes the boundaries for the final document (Moustakas, 1990; O'Beirne, 2014).
5	Explanation of Comprehensions and Revelations	This necessitates profound self-reflection and thoughtful analysis of the significance of themes, as well as the depiction of unique attributes of the experiences (Moustakas, 1990; O'Beirne, 2014).
6	Creative Synthesis	Heuristic research explores the process of learning and identifies different phases of growth. It also generates new questions by objectively recording them (O'Beirne, 2014).

Figure 1.0: Heuristic Approach (Moustakas, 1990; O'Beirne, 2014)

### *Dance of Igal from Sabah*

The Bajau performers learn their competence in *Igal* (dance) by both passively seeing different dance sequences and actively practicing and rehearsing while performing. This transformation allows them to transition from being just viewers to active participants in the dance. Being both a former dancer and a current choreographer, the author had several opportunities to learn, perform, and teach *Igal* dance. In 2004, the author conducted research on the ceremonial practices of the Bajau people, specifically focusing on *Mag-Igal*. He visited a village called Bangau-bangau in Semporna, Sabah, with other researchers, Hanafi Hussin and Judeth J. Baptist. Subsequently, the author selected *Igal* as the preferred alternative treatment for those with disabilities because to its repertoire of movements that are suitable to be designed for people with disabilities. These movements are based on music and include *Titik Lelang*, *Titik Tabawan*, *Titik Jin*, and *Titik Limbayan* (Mohd Anis Md Nor & Hanafi Hussin, 2019, pp. 75-91). *Igal* encompasses a diverse range of motions, including those involving the face, hands, torso, and feet. The movements in *Igal* encompass various body parts as stated in Figure 2.0:

No	Movements	Terms
1	Facial movements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <i>Takium</i>: Smiling</li> <li>ii. <i>A ngiddat</i>: raising eyebrows</li> <li>iii. <i>pahangad-hangad</i>: nodding</li> </ul>
2	Hand movements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <i>A ngalimbai</i>: Waving over the head to the left and right.</li> <li>ii. <i>Sinayangan</i>: Lifting both arms slowly through the side of the body.</li> <li>iii. <i>Abetted</i>: One arm in front of the body and the other over the head.</li> <li>iv. <i>Pahettad &amp; A-ngolles</i>: Both arms on both sides, moving wrists gracefully.</li> <li>v. <i>5. Sinulavai</i>: Crossing both hands in rotation.</li> <li>vi. <i>6. Siku Palantik</i>: Bending both elbows.</li> <li>vii. <i>Tangan Palantik</i>: Palms facing front, bending all fingers simultaneously.</li> <li>viii. <i>Tinaut Taut</i>: Swaying both arms smoothly from side to side.</li> </ul>
3	Body movements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <i>A nekan</i>: Ready body position.</li> <li>ii. <i>Pareo'reo</i>: Lower the body.</li> <li>iii. <i>Paengket</i>: Raise the body.</li> <li>iv. <i>Pagiling</i>: Turning without lifting feet.</li> <li>v. <i>Pabulivud</i>: Turning on the spot.</li> <li>vi. <i>Pattaddung</i>: Facing back.</li> <li>vii. <i>Lemma' Baran</i>: Move the body gracefully.</li> <li>viii. <i>Kijjut Baha</i>: Move the shoulders up and down.</li> </ul>
4	Feet Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <i>A meka'</i>: Stepping forward or backward slowly.</li> <li>ii. <i>Pahenggel</i>: Raising both heels.</li> <li>iii. <i>A nganginsil</i>: Sliding the sole of the foot on the floor.</li> <li>iv. <i>A ngengket Tape'</i>: Stepping while the other foot lifts to the back.</li> <li>v. <i>A ngengsod</i>: Sliding the sole of the foot while the other foot lifts at the back.</li> <li>vi. <i>Ni Lengngan-lengnganan</i>: Walking slowly.</li> <li>vii. <i>A ngagis</i>: Sliding each foot to the back.</li> <li>viii. <i>Sintak Tape</i>: Lifting each foot in a shocking motion.</li> </ul>

Figure 2.0 : Movement in Sabah Bajau's Igal (Bengkel Tarian Igal, 2021)

In this alternate procedure, the authors choose a limited number of fundamental movements, focused on the upper torso, hand, and gesture to accommodate those with physical disabilities who use wheelchairs. This study developed a framework that was assessed by a preliminary investigation. Emunah's Integrated Five Phases Model includes the following key tasks for each phase: (a) engaging in interactive dramatic play; (b) building theatrical and fictitious scene work; (c) Engaging in role-playing to address personal issues; (d) Delving into fundamental life themes; (e) Participating in dramatic rituals associated with

closure. Regarding *Igal*, the authors selected a limited number of fundamental motions that are appropriate for those with disabilities who utilise wheelchairs, while including the activities specified in Emunah's Model of Dramatherapy. The research utilised the Heuristics technique for analysis. Data collection involved the use of heuristics, which included observing the participants and volunteers, conducting interviews, and utilising other methods such as recording and reading materials.

## **Methodology**

### *Research Design*

This study employs a heuristic research approach, characterized by immersion, self-reflection, and intuitive analysis. The researcher engaged in learning and practicing the *Igal* dance, maintaining a reflective journal throughout the process.

### *Participants*

Participants included disabled adults with depression who were willing to engage in the *Igal* dance sessions. Selection was based on voluntary participation and informed consent. The inclusion criteria were adults aged 18 and above with a diagnosis of depression and a physical disability. The exclusion criteria were severe physical or cognitive impairments that would prevent participation in the dance sessions.

### *Data Collection*

Data were collected through reflective journals, participant observations, and semi-structured interviews. This triangulation of data sources aimed to capture a comprehensive understanding of the therapeutic experiences. Reflective journals allowed participants to document their personal experiences and feelings related to the dance sessions. Participant observations provided insights into the physical and emotional responses during the sessions. Semi-structured interviews offered an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives and experiences.

### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis involved identifying common themes and patterns related to the therapeutic benefits of *Igal* dance. The researcher continuously reflected on personal experiences and participants' feedback to uncover deeper insights. Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes and sub-themes within the data. The analysis process included familiarization with the data, coding, theme development, and theme refinement (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This study presented an alternative therapy procedure for those with disabilities, specifically focusing on dance, drama, and music. Therefore, in order to gather relevant information, the study utilised a focus group methodology, which is a qualitative research strategy. This approach significantly expanded the study's scope by incorporating not just journals, articles, and related publications, but also the insights and perspectives of the focus group participants. This study conducted interviews, observations, and actively participating in the alternative process. Additional data was gathered by reviewing literature that specifically addressed the primary topics of the study, which include Therapeutic, Sabah Bajau's *Igal* dance, Depression, Adults with Physical Disabilities, Experimental Performance. The study referred to Emunah's Integrative Five Phase Model to incorporate key strategies that were combined with *Igal's* fundamental motions and music. The research is conducted

through an experimental process including a group of 17 individuals with physical disabilities (PwDA), 3 dance teachers, and 2 theatre instructors. Additionally, 20 volunteers consisting of theatre and dance students also engaged in the process. The session was organized in an organization of there sub-session as below:



Figure 3.0: Design of the flow of the experimental performance (adapted from Emunah, 2020)

Furthermore, this study applied heuristics as a reflective approach to analyse the alternative process. Heuristics refers to a deep and insightful personal engagement in addressing problems, when one tries to understand the fundamental nature of a particular element of life by exploring one's own thoughts and feelings. Heuristics is connected to reflection, which is an essential cognitive exercise in the field of study. Reflexivity is commonly employed in qualitative research to justify and authenticate research methodologies (Mortari, 2015). Various discourses exist about the primary philosophical methods to reflection, including pragmatist, critical, hermeneutic, and phenomenological. This study utilises heuristics as a reflective approach to the alternative therapy process. In their work, Douglas and Moustakas (1985) defined heuristics as the fundamental and multifaceted foundation of human science. Moustakas (1990) devised a six-phase framework for research, which is utilised in this study.

## Findings

The findings indicate that the *Igal* dance significantly enhanced the emotional and physical well-being of participants. Key themes include:

### *Emotional Release*

Participants reported feeling a sense of emotional release and relief from depressive symptoms during and after the dance sessions. The rhythmic and expressive movements of the *Igal* dance allowed participants to channel their emotions and reduce feelings of sadness and anxiety (Ritter & Low, 1996; Cruz & Sabers, 1998). The cultural significance of the dance also contributed to a sense of emotional connection and belonging.

### *Physical Engagement*

The rhythmic movements of the *Igal* dance provided physical benefits, improving participants' mobility and overall physical health. Participants reported increased flexibility, strength, and coordination. The physical activity also contributed to improved mood and energy levels, further alleviating depressive symptoms (Jeong et al., 2005; Kiepe et al., 2012).

### *Cultural Connection*

Engaging in a traditional dance fostered a sense of cultural identity and community among participants, enhancing their social well-being. The *Igal* dance, as a cultural practice, provided a meaningful and enriching experience that connected participants to their heritage and

community. This cultural connection promoted feelings of pride, identity, and belonging, which are crucial for mental health (Pinniger et al., 2013; Koch et al., 2014).

Based on the the heuristic approach the research applied the operation below to explore the efficacy of the alternative therapeutic procedure.

Phases	Activity	Research Operation
1	Initial Engagement	The documentation pertaining to this phase was maintained in the form of a journal and was also incorporated into the project. It was maintained throughout the whole process, documenting 1) the first orientation sessions for the programme; 2) the in-depth research conducted on each collaborator's history or background; 3) the work accomplished inside the programme; and 4) the reflective analysis of the entire process.
2	Immersion	The documentation of the existential experiences and descriptions of learning related to the study keywords (Therapeutic, Sabah Bajau's <i>Igal</i> Dance, Depression, Adults with Physical Disabilities, Experimental Performance) were preserved in the form of audio-video recordings. This document was gathered before and during the pilot research. While developing these alternate sessions, the author contemplated the therapeutic encounter, mentally reviewing the many stages of engaging with the participant in this project.
3	Incubation period	We analysed the recordings (video and audio) and developed interpretations of the movement characteristics and patterns in order to understand the creative expression.
4	Illumination	The video was directly observed to record various aspects such as emotions, gestures, interaction with the space, and expressed intent. According to O'Beirne (2014), the viewer relies on unconsciously generated images, feelings, and sensations to comprehend nonverbal communication. Visual artistic representations were employed to aid in expressing thoughts during the entire process. In this project, participants engage in the act of visually representing a recalled event using a performing arts medium. By participating in the process, they externalise their views about the project, making them more easily communicable through words.
5	Explanation of Comprehensions and Revelations	The understandings and insights are elucidated by referencing the audio-visual video recording, interviews, observation, and reading materials, as well as by drawing upon the experiential knowledge gained during the process. At this point in the process, we had been acquainted with the results of the pilot research and obtained a deeper understanding of our experience utilising the session for heuristic inquiry. The illumination of our exploration of the study was becoming

		apparent. We contemplated several facets of the therapeutic process, including the articulation of viewpoints, the cultivation of empathy and comprehension, the formulation of observations and interpretations, and their connection to treatment and transformation.
6	Creative Synthesis	During the early stage of self-dialogue, immersion, and improvisation, participants must have trust in the process of introspection and develop the ability to articulate implicit knowledge and intuition in order to choose the next steps. Employing the heuristic outline can alleviate one's apprehension about inquiring. The author was able to see that the questions were part of a systematic procedure that would yield indicators, revelations, and insights.

Figure 4.0: Application of Heuristic Approach (Moustakas, 1990; O’Beirne, 2014)

One of the advantages encountered was when we conducting the research as authors and instructors in the project, that identifying and sustaining a moment of genuine involvement. We acquired the ability to identify and analyse the feedback provided by participants in order to understand the significance of therapy for each individuals. The research promoted long-lasting healing and to maintain the trust and goodwill established in the connection with the participants.

This study employed an alternative therapeutic technique to investigate the field of performing arts therapy. It was necessary for it to possess adaptability in order to expand in a manner that would lead to personal enlightenment, as well as to provide creative empowerment. During the pilot research, the author fully engaged in the process of exchanging information with the participants. The participants were provided with information on *Igal* dance, background of the alternative therapeutic, the fundamental movements of *Igal* dance, dramatic tactics, movements, and the framework of the experimental project. Below is the poster of project that utilised as pilot study and participated by 17 People (focus group) with Different Abilities (PwDA) (users of wheelchair):



Figure 5.0: A poster of the project – *Bengkel Inklusif Persembahan Tarian Igal Bajau Laut Sabah* (2023, 7 & 8 Januari) (A Dance workshop with the focus group)

The project organized by College of Creative Art Universiti Teknologi MARA, supported by UNESCO, Universiti Malay, OKU Sentral, Anak Seni Production, Malaysia International Dance Organization, FiTA Dance Theatre, FiTA Theatre Production, Kolej Jasmine & Dahlia UiTM Cawangan Selangor (UCS), Unit Perkhidmatan OKU UCS, Unit Kebudayaan UCS. The objectives of this project is the four (4) Sustainability Development Goals (SDG), including SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being SDG 4 - Quality education; SDG 10 - Reduces inequalities; and SDG 16 - Peace, justice and strong institution. The participants were acknowledged to be recorded, however, more than half of the 17 participants request to be anonymous in this particular paper. Hence, the findings of this paper is presented ethically that important as a method, procedure, or perspective for discussing how to act and for analysing research problems. (Resnik, B. D., 2020).

The alternative process incorporated Emunah's Integrated Five Phases Model, which involved interactive dramatic play, the development of theatrical and fictional scene work, role-playing to address personal situations, exploration of core life themes, and the use of dramatic rituals for closure. The dramatic session was conducted by Rosdeen Suboh, and through observation, this process that linked to *Igal* dance made the participants more understand about the movements and allowed them to interpret and manipulate the repertoire effortlessly. Regarding *Igal*, we selected several fundamental upper body movements that are appropriate for individuals with disabilities who use wheelchairs. These movements include *Takium* (smiling), *Angiddat* (raising eyebrows), *pahangad-hangad* (nodding), *angalimbai* (waving over the head), *sinayangan* (flying movement), *pabettad* (three variations of hand movements), *tangan palantik* (pushing with the palm), and *Tinaut taut* (swaying hands). This movement is initiated at the outset of the alternative process, prior to engaging in the selected activities outlined in Emunah's Model of Dramatherapy. The session is structured into three distinct parts: 1) The start of the session and series, which focuses on emotions, expressions, group interaction, physical activation, trust, observation, and concentration; 2) The middle of the session and series, which emphasises expression, communication, group collaboration, interrelation, and self-revelation; and 3) The conclusion of the session and series, which involves interconnection, collective creativity and reflection, intergroup perceptions, reviews, integration, and celebration. During this session, it was determined that those with disabilities shown complete dedication to the task.

Heuristic research involves the process of learning and development, which leads to new inquiries and objective documentation. (O'Bierne, 2014). During the early stage of self-reflection, immersion, and improvisation, it was necessary for them to have faith in the process of internalising and honing their implicit knowledge and intuition in order to choose the best course of action. Employing the heuristic outline alleviated the author's apprehension around inquiry. he was able to see that the questions were part of a systematic procedure that would yield indicators, revelations, and insights. The feedback form revealed that 15 out of 17 participants with disabilities (PwDA) expressed a high level of satisfaction about the project's organisation. As stated by Nerosha A/P Krishnan during a personal interview in 2023, as a wheelchair user, she expresses the need for further programmes like this one. She views them as both therapeutic and as an opportunity to showcase her abilities in dance and acting. Nerosha is a very engaged member of OKU Sentral and consistently receives invitations to showcase her talents as a dancer around Malaysia. She concurs that this alternative procedure is appropriate for those with depression who have physical or mental disabilities. However, she suggests that some enhancements should be implemented, such as making the facilities more accommodating for individuals with disabilities.

In heuristic research, it is essential that the investigator and the subject being studied are same (O'Bierne, 2014). In contrast to standard research practices, this study involves the researcher's active participation as a teacher, witness, and researcher, in accordance with heuristic research principles. While the acts of travelling, seeing, and studying are distinct experiences, they are all personally experienced in this study. Within the realm of the creative process, expression entails giving free rein to an instinctive drive in order to facilitate motion and performance. As to Noraziman Kamarozaman's personal interview (2023) account, as a wheelchair user, the session provides him with a sense of liberation and ease to openly articulate his emotions.

Choreography, locomotion, and theatrical performance. Releasing the restriction of it brings intrinsic comfort, and the attention of the witness helps in the healing process as it is reintegrated via the discourse. The initiative facilitated the participants in embracing their diverse manifestations and relinquishing the control they often exerted in their daily lives. During the evaluation process, I felt a feeling of being immersed in the event. With each review, I was progressively expanding the circle of perception by awakening new levels of awareness. Attaining closure and achieving the full cycle of the learning process creates room for future undertakings. By observing the author's experience of the project, he was able to perceive and comprehend the non-verbal aspects that I brought along with me in the alternate process. Acquiring a diverse vocabulary to express oneself is a significant and deliberate endeavour. The act of documenting findings from the pilot research resulted in enlightening revelations. The act of observing motions and music led to the realisation of how the participants interacted with space, time, body, and energy. This topic sparked his curiosity, particularly when he encountered the phrase 'statement gestures' which effectively conveyed one emotions inside the framework of *Rasa*.

The author suggested that in order for the substance and significance of the tale from the alternative process to be understood, there is a need for a gradually growing sense of familiarity and trust. This means maintaining a certain level of detachment at times, while also actively listening and accepting at other times, and consistently immersing oneself in the story. From a phenomenological viewpoint, the researcher perceive himself as an integral part of the universe and cannot be separated from it in order to fully comprehend how he engage in the practice of performing arts therapy. By including these factors into his thinking, it heightened the perception of an authentic and practical example.

We collected data seamlessly during the various stages. This study found the specific strategies used in Dramatherapy by Emunah that may be used with the essence of *Igal* to effectively treat individuals with Depression who have Physical and/or Developmental Disabilities (PwDA). In addition, the Heuristic method was used to lead the pilot research of an alternative treatment procedure for individuals with disabilities. In addition, the Heuristic Method assessed the efficacy of the suggested alternative therapy approach for individuals with depression who have a physical or mental disability.

By maintaining a perpetual state of being present, the author able to rely on his intuition while carefully considering the narrative of a participant with disabilities (PwDA). Wymann-McGinty discuss how therapists may help integrate the ego and operate as a transformative object. This occurs when therapists are able to convert innate bodily impressions into language expressions that can be mutually considered. (referenced by Wymann-McGinty, 1998, p. 258) In a case study reported by Wymann-McGinty (1998), the adoption of real movement enabled the individual to communicate and undergo an emotional experience that

they were previously unable to describe verbally. Frequently, she had to demonstrate to me with a physical gesture.

"Story" refers to the internal events or processes that were taking place. Subsequently, we may gradually start the process of unravelling the latent emotions, recollections, and connections. The research primarily examined the repertory and essence in *Igal*. However, during our observation, we noticed that the participant incorporated "authentic movements" in the improvisation sections, which evoked strong emotional responses from us as spectators. During these stages, there is a feeling of liberation associated with therapy that can be experienced. This research strongly advocates for further exploration and enhancement of this alternative treatment procedure in future attempts. For example, the selection of music pieces in *Igal* should be improved; the session should involve qualified Performing Arts Therapists; and the physical space and amenities of this initiative can be made more accessible for individuals with disabilities. Using this heuristic approach, we utilised our implicit knowledge of the alternative process and transformed it into a tangible, physical product. The author achieved the ability to see himself from a remote perspective, comprehend the emotional elements of the encounter, and rekindle the associated memories in his life.

In Wymann-McGinty's (1998) work, the author discusses the experience of a patient who must suffer intense and distressing emotions that have been disregarded or suppressed, and also face the humiliation of being genuinely understood by another person. The patient's increasing capacity to endure these distressing mental experiences is what ultimately results in the strengthening of the ego and the development of a more unified sense of self" (p. 252). Through the project, the author developed a clear understanding of his own identity as well as the experiences and perspectives of people with disabilities. Prior to undertaking this Project, the author harboured concerns about the potential for external observers to divert his genuine expression during the creative process.

Nevertheless, this transformation occurred gradually throughout the procedure, as the co-researchers provided support and placed their confidence in the process. While evaluating the project, the author assumed a position of equal authority, providing instructions to others for their understanding. The author desired to cultivate his personality according to his own preferences, hence actively pursued seclusion in order to engage in personal experimentation, with the exception of the supervision sessions. As a handicapped dancer and theatre instructor to achieve serenity and self-assurance in order to be a reliable and genuine performer of movement. This article outlines our understanding of the process of acquiring research skills to explore subjective knowledge in the field of education. Whether we are studying in a group setting or working on a project with others, we encounter therapeutic learning that occurs on several levels and is fundamentally important.

The research revealed significant data that emphasise the efficacy of conventional and community-centered therapy approaches in addressing depression in individuals who use wheelchairs. Spiritual healing was seen as one of the most important techniques. Respondents indicated that engaging in spiritual practices, such as prayer, meditation, and rituals, led by community spiritual leaders or healers, offered emotional solace and a deep feeling of tranquilly. These practices were firmly established in the cultural and spiritual life of the community, providing a comprehensive approach to mental well-being.

Community support networks have been identified as an additional vital element in mitigating depression. The study revealed that robust community bonds and support systems substantially diminished sensations of loneliness and despair. Participants highlighted the

significance of community meetings, peer support groups, and social events in cultivating a feeling of belonging and reciprocal assistance. These networks provide both emotional support and practical aid, improving the overall quality of life for those who use wheelchairs.

Additionally, it was shown that coping methods that are peculiar to a particular culture were useful in diminishing symptoms associated with depression. Engaging in activities such as traditional storytelling, music, and dance provided participants with a means to express their feelings and strengthen their cultural identity and sense of pride. These culturally significant behaviours served as a crucial means of emotional expression and positively impacted the mental well-being of the participants.

Moreover, the use of conventional methods alongside contemporary therapeutic techniques was found to improve the efficacy of therapy. Participants saw enhanced mental health results through the integration of traditional methods in conjunction with contemporary interventions, such as counselling and medication. This complementary method offered a comprehensive therapy, encompassing both the emotional and psychological facets of depression.

The study highlights the considerable possibility of integrating indigenous knowledge and wisdom into treatment strategies for addressing depression among those who use wheelchairs. Traditional and community-based practices are essential tools for managing mental health, since they offer culturally appropriate and comprehensive care. It is essential to acknowledge and incorporate these methods into treatment environments in order to effectively address the specific requirements of individuals who use wheelchairs and are dealing with depression. The results emphasise the significance of cultural appropriateness and community assistance in improving mental health results.

## **Conclusion**

Deciphering the nonverbal aspect of the performance therapy process first resembled a game of speculation. As a witness in the process, the author had first-hand access to human experience. Furthermore, with *Igal's* physical movement, the process of 'form forming', and the examination of rhythm, body sensations were transformed into communication through the expression of imagination. Observing someone's facial expression, one would rely on his own implicit understanding and sensory experiences to interpret the meaning behind their expression. Acquiring a comprehensive nonverbal language vocabulary is crucial for dance instructors to tap into the profound and unconscious expressions that contain emotions and stored patterns. After the expression occurs, it may be examined using existing and distinct languages that are created as necessary (O'Bierne, 2014).

The project, based on the researcher's experience, has implications for the utilisation of dance, movement, and acting in a heuristic process. In their work, Douglas and Moustakas (1985) assert that heuristic inquiry starts with the process of immersing oneself, engaging in self-dialogue, and exploring one's own experiences. Subsequently, it progresses towards investigating the essence of others' experiences. (p. 43) This implies the potential for employing heuristic inquiry as a framework to comprehend someone else's encounter. Their profound understanding provides the opportunity for this study to serve as the foundation for therapeutic.

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to acknowledge and incorporate these methods into treatment environments in order to effectively address the specific requirements of individuals who use wheelchairs and are dealing with depression. The results emphasise the significance of cultural appropriateness and community assistance in improving mental health results.

The heuristic research approach proved effective in uncovering the therapeutic potential of the Igal dance for disabled adults with depression. Personal engagement, intuitive understanding, and contextual awareness were key factors in capturing the deep, holistic benefits of this traditional dance form. The study highlights the importance of considering cultural practices in therapeutic interventions and demonstrates the potential of dance as a holistic and culturally relevant therapy for depression.

This research significantly contributes to the existing body of knowledge by demonstrating the effectiveness of heuristic research approaches in non-clinical therapeutic procedures, specifically through the lens of Sabah's Igal dance. Theoretically, it expands the understanding of how heuristic methods can be applied to therapeutic practices, particularly for addressing depression among adults with disabilities. This approach challenges conventional clinical methodologies and highlights the potential for cultural and artistic practices to serve as viable therapeutic interventions. Contextually, this research offers a unique perspective on the integration of traditional cultural practices, such as the Igal dance, into modern therapeutic frameworks. This is particularly significant for the region of Sabah, providing a culturally relevant and accessible form of therapy for local communities. By bridging the gap between traditional cultural practices and contemporary therapeutic needs, this study not only enriches academic discourse but also offers practical implications for therapists, policymakers, and practitioners working in the fields of mental health and disability support. The findings underscore the value of culturally sensitive approaches in therapeutic settings and pave the way for future research and applications in similar contexts.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed:

**Integration into Mental Health Programs:** Incorporate traditional dances like *Igal* into mental health programs for disabled adults to provide culturally relevant therapeutic options (Moustakas, 1990; Koch et al., 2014).

**Further Research:** Conduct additional studies using the heuristic approach to explore other traditional dance forms and their therapeutic benefits (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Jeong et al., 2005). Future research should also consider larger sample sizes and diverse populations to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

**Training for Practitioners:** Provide training for mental health practitioners in heuristic research methods and traditional dance therapy to enhance their ability to offer holistic interventions (Moustakas, 1990; Koch et al., 2014). Practitioners should be equipped with the skills to facilitate dance therapy sessions and understand the cultural contexts of their clients.

**Community Engagement:** Encourage community involvement and support for traditional dance programs to foster a sense of cultural pride and social cohesion. Engaging the community can enhance the sustainability and impact of dance therapy programs.

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