

Contextualising Church music with traditional *Karungut* music in Central Kalimantan



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Church music commonly used in worship services in Indonesia tends to follow musical traditions originating from outside the local culture, particularly Western traditions. As part of society, churches have generally not made significant contributions towards contextualisation through the use of traditional music. This study employs qualitative data using a cultural and church music approach. The *Gereja Kalimantan Evangelis* (GKE) [Evangelical Church of Kalimantan] was chosen as the research site because it is one of the dominant Protestant churches in Central Kalimantan and has actively contributed to contextualising church music through the integration of *karungut*, a traditional form of orally transmitted music that functions as a cultural identity marker for the Dayak Ngaju people. *Karungut rohani* refers to *karungut* compositions specifically adapted for use in worship, intended to support and strengthen the faith of congregants. Its transformation into church music requires intentional lyric composition aligned with Christian theology, a serious performance attitude, and motivations focused on glorifying God rather than self. The process of contextualising *karungut rohani* in worship involves three primary groups: church leaders or pastors as policy-makers, *karungut rohani* artists as cultural agents and the congregation as listeners and participants.

Contribution: The novelty of this study lies in the discovery of the concept, application and form of *karungut rohani* as church music. The contribution of this research is to serve as a reference for the contextualisation of church music and to encourage church communities to integrate traditional music with church music in worship services, so that the congregation can experience worship more deeply and meaningfully within their own cultural context. The contextualisation of worship through *karungut rohani* is expected to serve as a new concept or model for the development of church music and liturgy using traditional musical forms.

Keywords: Church music; contextualisation; *Karungut*; traditional music; *karungut rohani*; Dayak; Kalimantan; liturgy.

Introduction

The phrase *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*, which means 'the church will always be reformed', is a well-known expression from the period when the church underwent the history of renewal or Reformation. This movement sought to critique the teachings and Christian faith in the early 16th century by church reformers of that time, led by Martin Luther and John Calvin in Western Europe (Kadarmanto 2018). Other important figures in the Reformation, such as Huldrych Zwingli in Switzerland and John Knox in Scotland, also contributed to developing unique theology and church practices, enriching the diversity of the emerging Protestant movement (Todorović 2019).

Reformation or renewal in the church can be achieved through a contextual approach, also known as contextualisation, which involves making adjustments in line with the cultural context in which the church operates. H.A. Pandopo more clearly defines contextualisation as the effort to place something in its context so that it no longer feels foreign but can intertwine and blend with the whole, like threads in a textile. In this context, contextualisation is not limited to cultural traditions alone, but also encompasses social situations and conditions (Sopater 1987).

The use of the term contextualisation in the church has become increasingly widespread since it appeared in a Christian theological document published by the Theological Education Fund (TEF) in 1972, under the auspices of the International Missionary Council (IMC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC). Contextualisation is defined as not ignoring the cultural context, but also taking into account the processes of secularisation, technology and the human struggle for justice (Hesselgrave & Rommen 2009:48–51). E. Gerrit Singgih, an Indonesian theologian from the Gereja Protestan Indonesia Bagian Barat (GPIB) church, proposed the use of the term contextualisation and not the term inculturation in Protestant Christian theology because of its

broader and more dynamic meaning, which is not merely an effort to indigenise theology but contextualisation using a broader cultural context, both in traditional cultural and modern cultural contexts, and even in the context of fighting for human dignity. The term 'contextual in theology' or 'contextual theology' refers to the concrete responses of Christians to the gospel, which makes contextualisation dynamic rather than static. As a result, we can imagine that contextualising theology will be a constant challenge in theology (Singgih 2000:17–19). According to Stephan Bevans, the contextualisation of theology is an effort to understand the Christian faith from the perspective of a particular context. What makes theology contextual is the recognition that theology has sources other than sacred texts and tradition, namely the experiences of people today (Bevans 2002:2).

The effort to contextualise liturgy or church worship can be done through renewal and adaptation in various elements of liturgy, such as language, clothing, spatial arrangement, symbols, music and others. Liturgy carried out in routine Sunday worship activities in Protestant churches has not undergone many changes or reforms towards contextualisation, especially in terms of the local cultural context. The existing liturgical patterns still often use the cultural heritage of the Western church, including the musical elements used, both vocal and instrumental music.

Vocal music or hymns used in worship still largely employ hymn-style music, which is merely translated into Indonesian, and spiritual pop songs that generally use the diatonic scale of Western music. Instrumental music as accompaniment for congregational singing also uses Western musical instruments, such as the piano, organ, keyboard and/or a full band. As an example of contextualisation renewal in the field of church music, traditional musical instruments could be selected as liturgical music tools to support worship activities in the church.

For example, contextualisation in the field of church music can actually be done by starting to use traditional musical instruments as a means of liturgical music to support worship activities in churches. The use of traditional music as liturgical music in churches is still rare, and this is not without reason. There are indeed challenges in its implementation, such as: a lack of instruments, a lack of human resources, differences in tuning or tonal systems between accompaniment music and congregational singing, low interest in learning traditional music, and so on. Despite its unpopularity and rarity, there are still churches that strive to contextualise by using traditional music as liturgical music in church, typically in specific worship services, such as ethnic-themed special services, Christmas and Easter commemorations, and so on.

From various previous studies related to this writing theme, there are still gaps in research that can be explored (Creswell 2013:40). Some previous studies related to the contextualisation of church music include: Labeti (2020), Tigoi (2014), Listya:(n.d.), and studies on *karungut* music

include: Haryanto (2013), Taruna (2016), Fajriyah (2021), Norlaila et al. (2022), and Irawan, Dharmayanti and Hanafi (2019). The contextualisation study in this research differs from previous studies in that it examines the contextualisation of church music, and more specifically uses traditional *karungut* music, referred to as *karungut rohani*, as its object of study. The novelty of this study lies in its empirical and conceptual findings on the application of contextualisation and the form of *karungut rohani* music, linking contributions from previous research both theoretically and empirically. This study is expected to serve as a reference and insight for churches in their efforts to develop church music using traditional music in accordance with the local cultural context, particularly traditional *karungut* music in Kalimantan. This study is also expected to contribute to efforts in the conservation of traditional music, particularly *karungut* music in Kalimantan.

Research methods and design

This study employs a qualitative research design using an ethnotheological approach, which integrates cultural and theological perspectives (Mawikere, Hura & Bonde 2022). The cultural approach aims to explore the social background and behaviour of church communities that use traditional *karungut* music – referred to as *karungut rohani* – as part of their worship practices. Meanwhile, the theological approach, particularly in the area of church music, is applied to examine the contextualisation, conceptual foundation and musical forms of *karungut rohani* as used within the church setting.

Data were collected using three main methods. Firstly, participant observation was done during regular worship services and church events to see how *karungut rohani* is used in practice. Secondly, interviews were conducted with pastors, church elders, *karungut rohani* artists and church members to explore their views on its meaning, use and challenges. Thirdly, document analysis involved reviewing song lyrics, recordings and liturgical materials from the church.

The data were analysed thematically, focusing on how *karungut rohani* functions as church music – its structure, meaning and differences from traditional *karungut*, especially in terms of lyrics, performance and spiritual purpose. The goal was to assess how well *karungut rohani* fits the role of sacred music in Christian worship and to identify the challenges in preserving and using traditional music in church.

To ensure reliable results, triangulation was used by combining various data sources and methods. The researcher also acted as a participant observer. Observations and interviews were recorded and supported with video and audio documentation. Data analysis followed the model of Miles and Huberman, involving data reduction, display and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman 1994).

This study will focus on research conducted within the synodical scope of the *Gereja Kalimantan Evangelis* (GKE)

[Evangelical Church of Kalimantan], specifically in congregations that incorporate traditional *karungut* music into church worship. As one of the largest church organisations in Central Kalimantan, GKE oversees more than 1200 congregations and has a regional reach that includes South Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan, West Kalimantan and East Kalimantan (<https://official.gkecenter.com/>). Every GKE activity involving the use of traditional *karungut* music in church settings will be observed, recorded and analysed.

Traditional *karungut* music in Central Kalimantan

Karungut is one of the traditional musical arts originating from the Dayak tribe of Central Kalimantan. It is a type of vocal music, consisting of pantuns sung in the Ngaju Dayak language. The lyrics of *Karungut* songs can be referred to as poetry because they are sung in verse form. Sri Hastanto explains that *karungut* music consists of recited poetry that can tell any story, sung by a singer or *pangarungut* (or two people in alternation), accompanied by two zithers, a drum and a gong. Each poem consists of four lines, and each line typically contains approximately nine syllables divided into two phrases. The melody of the song is structured in a repetitive manner; when repeating the song, instrumental music is used as an interlude between song sections (Hastanto 2005:80).

Pangarungut, the performer of *karungut*, is distinguished into two types of performance: spontaneous singing and singing by reading the lyrics. Spontaneous *karungut*, historically, was the first type to emerge and remains a distinctive feature of *karungut* music to this day. *Pangarungut* or singers do not use any written notation when singing *karungut*, but rely on their musical intuition. This requires unique talent and skills in singing, such as fluency in the Dayak Ngaju language, a melodious voice, and the ability to produce the characteristic melodic sounds that frequently appear in each verse and are a hallmark of *karungut*. *Karungut* lyrics are like poetry with consistent vowel endings in each line. There are four lines in each verse, and each line typically has 3 to 5 words with 8 to 10 syllables. The fixed rules of the rhyme system are also clear: the syllables at the end of each line must sound the same if they are to form a pattern of 'a a a a' or 'b b b b', and so on. The chosen words that support the meaning and follow the rhythm are the ones used. The number of verses is determined by the composer's preference (Umberan et al. 1994).

Karungut is the most well-known traditional oral music heritage or symbol of identity for the Dayak Ngaju tribe in Central Kalimantan. The Central Kalimantan provincial government has designated *karungut* as one of the symbols of traditional music or an icon of the cultural identity of the Dayak Ngaju tribe in Central Kalimantan. This is evidenced by its use as a welcome song for guests every day at the arrival area of Tjilik Riwut Airport in Palangka Raya, Central Kalimantan.

Recognition of traditional *karungut* music on a broader scale has also been granted by the Indonesian central government

through the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, which issued Decision No. 238/M/2013 dated 13 December 2013, designating traditional *karungut* music as one of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage. Furthermore, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as an international body of the United Nations, also designated *karungut* as the cultural heritage of the Dayak Ngaju tribe of Central Kalimantan as an intangible cultural heritage of the world in 2013. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization's recognition as an intangible cultural heritage of the world provides international recognition of the cultural value of *karungut* and the importance of its preservation efforts.

Karungut rohani

A song is created with a specific purpose and message that the composer wants to convey. Soedarsono has a theory of the primary functions of performing arts, which consist of: ritual function, entertainment function and aesthetic function (Soedarsono 2001). Spiritual songs, as part of church music, are included as a ritual art function, namely songs that focus more on the purpose of enhancing spirituality and bringing oneself closer to God through singing. Spiritual songs are not merely praises that can be sung; more than that, a song also has the power to influence someone. This is based on several theological elements of spiritual songs, where the lyrics focus on biblical values and are formed into a song that has the ability to convey a message, express feelings and serve as a form of praise to God. On the other hand, spirituality is often associated with the spiritual context, where through spirituality, a person is not only able to live in connection with God but also apply it in daily actions. Many people believe that spiritual songs can enhance a person's spirituality (Trianto 2023).

Kapoyos, Suharto and Syakir (2022) explain in their research that traditional music can also be used as a religious tool in churches, and its use is felt to be closer to the lives of the congregation because it aligns with their cultural context. Lebaka (2015) also concluded in his research that the use of traditional music in worship has also been able to increase the attendance and participation of church members. Oral tradition is a tradition rich in cultural and spiritual values that can serve as a bridge between religion and culture (Juanda, Sunkudon & Tjandra 2025), as is the case with the use of *karungut* in church music in Central Kalimantan. The church is also expected to play a role in the mission of using local culture, as explained by Widyawati, Lon and Midun (2025) in their research, which further explains and highlights the church's involvement in preserving local culture in religious practices.

From the above-stated research articles, it can be concluded that the use of traditional music is important for contextualising church music, showing that the integration of music such as *karungut* can strengthen the spirituality of the congregation and increase participation in worship.

Soedarsono (2001) emphasises that spiritual songs function as ritual art that brings the congregation closer to God, while Trianto (2023) states that spiritual songs can influence individual spirituality. Kapoyos et al. (2022) found that traditional music is more relevant to the cultural context of the congregation, thereby increasing attendance at worship services. Lebaka (2015) also notes that the use of traditional music attracts more church members. Thus, the use of traditional music in worship not only enriches the spiritual experience but also preserves local culture, making the church a bridge between faith and cultural traditions.

The GKE, as a Protestant church widely spread across Kalimantan, seeks to place church music within the cultural context of the Dayak community. Sanon outlines six mission paradigms of GKE, with the fourth mission emphasising the importance of becoming a contextual church (Sanon 2015). *Gereja Kalimantan Evangelis* actively seeks to contribute to the contextualisation of church music by incorporating traditional music into worship – specifically through the use of *karungut*, a traditional Dayak Ngaju form of oral poetry expressed through melodic chanting. *Karungut* was chosen as church music because it is widely recognised and more culturally prominent among the Dayak Ngaju people of Central Kalimantan.

The *karungut* used in church music is referred to as *karungut rohani*, which is *karungut* music specifically created for church use, thus classified based on its functional purpose as *karungut* for Christian religious rituals. *Karungut rohani* is a form of contextualisation of church music derived from the traditional music of the Dayak ethnic group in Central Kalimantan, and its use contributes to religious rituals within the church community. The application of traditional *karungut* music in the form of *karungut rohani* as church music in the GKE has helped local congregations become more familiar with and connected to their cultural heritage as Dayak people in Central Kalimantan. The use of *karungut rohani* in worship enables the church's culture to become more integrated with the local culture of the Dayak community.

The application and form of *karungut rohani* in the *Gereja Kalimantan Evangelis*

Based on the type of creative process, *karungut rohani* is classified as non-spontaneous *karungut*, meaning that the creator of *karungut rohani* will plan and write the lyrics before singing them. Preparation is necessary to ensure that the theme and form of the song are appropriate for the worship service, in terms of the type of lyrics, pattern, theme and rhythm of the song. Spiritual hymns can be sung directly by their creators or by others. *Karungut rohani* is a church song in the form of poetry, so in its creation, to make it beautiful with unique lyrics, special skills are required to accurately determine the number of words and the rules of vocal rhyme in each line (Suharto & Subroto 2014).

The creation of *karungut rohani* within the GKE has been carried out by *karungut* artists, including pastors, church

elders, GKE congregation members as well as artists from other churches. Reverend Sergius Paulus Tigoi and Reverend Kristianus Unting are examples of GKE pastors who have composed *karungut rohani*, which is sung as church music during worship – either performed by themselves or by others. These pastors are also *karungut rohani* artists who not only love traditional music but also actively compose and use it in church worship. As Dayak pastors within GKE, they are aware of and hopeful that traditional *karungut* music can become an integral part of local church worship. Although their contributions are not yet made on a regular basis, they represent examples of church leaders who have initiated the contextualisation of church music – courageously creating and using *karungut rohani* so that church music is not solely dominated by Western musical forms.

The presentation of *karungut rohani* is generally sung by one person (solo) or sometimes performed by two people (duet). The accompaniment for *karungut rohani* typically uses a simple kecapi instrument, but can also be enhanced with more complete accompaniment, such as: *garantung*, *katambung*, flute and *rebab*. In *karungut rohani* performances, it is not uncommon for the singer to also be the musician, accompanying their own voice with the kecapi. With the advancement of technology, if there are no musicians available to accompany the *karungut rohani*, recorded music from YouTube can sometimes be used instead. The purpose of *karungut rohani*, as it is used as church music, differs from traditional *karungut*. The purpose of *karungut rohani* is not for the singer or musician to glorify themselves, but rather the opposite – it requires a humble attitude as a servant tasked with serving the congregation and focusing on the glory of God. Singers and musicians of *karungut rohani* are also required to behave politely and dress neatly as worship servants.

The application of *karungut rohani* in the church serves as a medium of ritual and worship, aiming to support and strengthen the faith of congregants as members of the Christian community. Unlike traditional *karungut*, which primarily functions as entertainment, *karungut rohani* is intended to support various aspects of church life in alignment with its spiritual mission – namely *koinonia* [fellowship], by facilitating communal worship gatherings; *marturia* [witnessing], by becoming a vehicle to share the love of Christ; and *diakonia* [service], by encouraging acts of service to others. The lyrics of *karungut rohani* are purposefully crafted in accordance with Christian doctrines and values. Although the musical structure closely resembles that of traditional *karungut*, the performance style is adapted to reflect sacred church music – sung with reverence, devotion and heartfelt expression as a manifestation of Christian faith. A more detailed comparison between *karungut rohani* and traditional *karungut* is presented in Table 1.

Table 2 presents an example of a *karungut rohani* song used in the contextualisation of church music, composed by Reverend Sergius and performed during worship services in the GKE. The song is titled '*Salam Sejahtera*' [Peaceful Greetings], and is presented along with its translation.

This song consists of six verses, each with the same melody that is repeated. *Karungut rohani* songs have the same form as other *karungut* songs, namely: they have a one-part structure, with each part consisting of 10 bars, and each part containing one verse of poetry that is sung and repeated up to six times. Each verse contains four lines and ends with the same vowel sound. The lyrics of the song combine the Dayak Ngaju language and Indonesian. The Dayak Ngaju language is the local language commonly used in *karungut* songs, while Indonesian is used so that congregants who are not from the Dayak Ngaju ethnic group and do not understand the language can still grasp the meaning.

The contextualisation of Church music through *karungut rohani*

The process of contextualising church music using traditional *karungut rohani* music in GKE was carried out as an effort to adapt to the cultural context of church members who originated from the Ngaju Dayak tribe. Church music, which was accustomed to using Western musical instruments, was modified with the use of *karungut rohani*, which uses traditional music from Central Kalimantan. The process of contextualising church music in worship at GKE involves three groups of actors: church administrators or pastors as policy-makers, *karungut rohani* artists as performers and the congregation as listeners or art enthusiasts.

Church administrators and pastors compose the liturgy according to the planned theme and offer *karungut* artists the opportunity to fill the worship service with relevant songs. *Karungut* artists, consisting of *pangarungut* and musicians, prepare their performances by creating or selecting songs that fit the theme of the worship service, as well as arranging the lyrics and music. The song creation process involves determining the theme, writing the lyrics and adapting them to the rules of *karungut* songs. Once the song is complete, the *pangarungut* seeks out musicians to accompany the performance, either live or using recordings. The musicians coordinate with the *pangarungut* to prepare the musical instruments and arrangements. Joint rehearsals are conducted to ensure mastery of the song and preparation for the performance, including technical and non-technical arrangements. On the day of the performance, members of the *karungut rohani* group worship together with the congregation, recognising that they are not concert artists, but servants tasked with serving the liturgy. *Karungut rohani* performances are an important part of the congregation's spiritual experience, creating closeness to God and strengthening understanding of faith, as well as making worship more meaningful and connected to local culture.

A unique aspect of the *karungut* performance is the spontaneous response from the audience to perform the manasai dance. Similarly, in the use of *karungut rohani* at GKE, there are sometimes spontaneous responses from some members of the congregation who rise from their seats and move forward to perform the manasai dance. The manasai

TABLE 1: Differences between *karungut rohani* and traditional *karungut*.

Aspect	<i>Karungut rohani</i>	Traditional <i>karungut</i>
Function	Enhances spiritual faith, expression of faith	Entertainment music, self-expression, commercial purposes
Lyrics or verses	Contains theological meaning	Secular or worldly
Theme	Related to Christian spiritual faith	Various themes, including love, life, and social matters
Performance attitude	Worshipful attitude or reverence towards God	Aesthetic attitude to entertain the audience
Creation process	Not spontaneous, involves written concepts	Spontaneous or performed without prepared texts
Artist profile	Religious or spiritual artist	General or traditional artist
Vocal music	1 to 2 persons	1 to 2 persons
Vocal accompaniment	Kecapi (lute), full ensemble, recorded music	Kecapi (lute), full ensemble, recorded music
Preparation process	Involves spiritual leaders; includes spiritual preparation for worship music	Without spiritual leaders; no spiritual preparation required
Context	Worship music	Concert music

TABLE 2: *Karungut rohani* 'salam sejahtera', composed by Reverend Sergius.

Language	Translation
Ngaju Dayak Language	
<i>Tabé nyampe beribu tabé</i>	Sending a thousand greetings
<i>Dengang ungkup je atun tege</i>	To the congregation
<i>Akan ketun je tambí bue</i>	To you, grandmothers and grandfathers
<i>Mina mama bawí hatue</i>	Aunts, uncles, sisters, and brothers
<i>Tara akan Tuhan Hatalla</i>	Praise be to God
<i>Awí paham kare asi Sinta</i>	For His great love
<i>Puna hanjak itah tuh kea</i>	Happiness for us all
<i>Awí itah tau hasupa</i>	Because we can meet
<i>Ibadah etnik je dayak ngaju</i>	Ngaju Dayak ethnic worship
<i>Itah malalus dengan katutu</i>	We take it seriously
<i>Manara Tuhan Hatalla ngambu</i>	Praise God above
<i>Atei itah puna batantu</i>	Our intentions are clear
Indonesian Language	
<i>Salam sejahtera bagi semua</i>	Peace and blessings to all
<i>Suka cita diberikanya</i>	Joy is given
<i>Tuhan kuasa berkatí kita</i>	May God bless us
<i>Sekarang ini dan selamanya</i>	Now and forever
<i>Mari kita selalu berdoa</i>	Let us always pray
<i>Pada Tuhan dan Allah kita</i>	To God and our Lord
<i>Kepada Dia kita percaya</i>	To Him we believe
<i>Hidup bahagia dan sejahtera</i>	For a happy and prosperous life
<i>Sampai disini karungut ini</i>	Here ends this prayer
<i>Mau menyapa saudara saudari</i>	To greet our brothers and sisters
<i>Mari kita selau memuji</i>	Let us always praise
<i>Tuhan Yesus memberkati</i>	May Jesus bless us

dance begins with the initiative of one or several congregants who stand up and move forward, followed by other congregants who also move forward to join in forming a circular line, following the movements of the manasai dance. The movements of the manasai dance are quite simple and easy to follow, involving alternating hand movements and walking in a circle, starting by facing inward, turning to the right while moving forward counterclockwise, facing outward, turning to the left, and moving forward (Hidayati, Qadariah & Lestari 2022). The manasai dance, originating from Central Kalimantan, symbolises joy and togetherness, evoking emotions that build and strengthen unity.

Karungut artists face several difficulties in preparing *karungut rohani* performances. Firstly, song creation is challenging, especially in selecting lyrics or words that must match the vowels at the end of the song, similar to what is commonly found in poetry. Secondly, the limited number of accompanying musicians in the church environment often forces them to seek musicians from outside the church or from community art centres, resulting in additional costs.

Thirdly, there is a limited number of people who are proficient in traditional *karungut rohani* music in the church, and even if there are, there is still a lack of awareness among *karungut* artists to contribute to church activities.

Karl-Edmund Prier quotes W. Blankenburg's writing, explaining that literally, church music means music used in church buildings or special worship music from the congregation as a church community (Martasudjita & Prier 2009:14). Hugh Milton Miller, in his work 'Introduction to music: A guide to good listening', first published in 1958 and translated into Indonesian by Triyono Bramantyo, categorises church music into two types: namely liturgical music composed for specific purposes within church ceremonies and non-liturgical music composed more for concert performances, although it has a serious religious nature (Miller 2001:172–176). Based on this definition, the author concludes that church music is music used to support church activities, whether it is music used in liturgical (worship) settings or outside of liturgy. Supporting church activities here means supporting the congregation in worship, with the benchmark being to increase the congregation's faith in Christ as the head of the church. Types of church music can be distinguished based on their purpose of use according to Miller's opinion, namely liturgical and non-liturgical church music. Generally, liturgy is understood as the order of worship performed in communal worship activities at church, while non-liturgical activities are church activities conducted outside of worship, such as competitions, music concerts, choir festivals and others.

Karungut rohani in GKE has two functions: as liturgical music, that is *karungut rohani* used as liturgical music or incorporated into worship; and as non-liturgical music, that is *karungut rohani* used outside of worship, such as in competitions or spiritual music concerts. *Karungut rohani* in GKE as liturgical music has been practised, although not yet on a regular schedule. *Gereja Kalimantan Evangelis* strives to use spiritual songs in certain worship services, such as in special worship services with a Dayak ethnic flavour, worship services commemorating church holidays (Christmas, Easter, church anniversaries, evangelism days and others), in church meetings or conferences, and so on.

The Youth Arts and Sports Week (*Pekan Olahraga dan Seni, or Porseni*) of GKE youth and teens serves as an example of GKE's efforts to apply the contextualisation of church music through *karungut rohani*, functioning in this case as non-liturgical music. *Porseni* is an annual event organised by GKE at the regency or city level across Kalimantan, participated by Christian youth, both from within GKE and from other churches. *Karungut rohani* is included as one of the art competition categories, providing a platform for young people to become more interested in learning, appreciating and preserving *karungut* as part of Dayak cultural heritage within the church context. Indirectly, GKE also contributes to the education and transmission of traditional *karungut* arts among youth, especially in the face of the growing dominance of Western popular music culture.

Karungut rohani has a significant impact and benefit for both the congregation and the church. It strengthens the local cultural identity of the congregation, encourages active participation in worship and creates a lively and interactive worship atmosphere. In addition, *Karungut rohani* serves as a means of education and cultural preservation for the younger generation, while also fostering togetherness and solidarity among congregants. Sergius Paulus Tigoi, a pastor at GKE, recognises the benefits of *Karungut rohani* for the church, namely that *Karungut rohani* strengthens the contextualisation of worship by integrating local culture, preserving and developing traditional musical heritage, and expanding the mission's reach through the delivery of inclusive and relevant faith messages. This music also promotes creativity and empowerment of local artists and supports the sustainable development of the church and community through cultural preservation and the strengthening of social values. Thus, *Karungut rohani* becomes a strategic medium that not only enriches religious practice and faith strengthening but also reinforces the church's role as a centre for cultural preservation and harmonious community development.

The challenges faced in contextualising church music using *karungut rohani* include: traditional music remains less popular compared to Western music, churches generally rarely contribute to the use of traditional music as church music, the limited availability of *karungut rohani* artists and the high costs or fees for singers and musicians if they are hired from outside the church.

This study reveals the application and forms of *karungut rohani* within the GKE as an effort to contextualise church music by integrating traditional music into worship practices. *Karungut rohani*, a church song composed in poetic form, is created through careful planning and involves *karungut* artists from various backgrounds, including pastors. The findings demonstrate that *karungut rohani* functions not only as a medium of worship but also as a means to strengthen the congregation's faith and reinforce local cultural identity. The contribution of this research lies in its emphasis on the importance of integrating traditional music into church liturgy and highlighting the active role of artists and congregants in creating a more meaningful worship experience. The study's novelty lies in its identification of the challenges faced in the implementation of *karungut rohani*, such as the limited availability of human resources and funding, as well as the need to raise awareness about the importance of preserving traditional music in the midst of the dominance of Western musical influences. This research provides new insights into how traditional music can contribute to both spiritual development and cultural preservation within the context of the church.

Discussion

The contextualisation of church music in the GKE through *karungut rohani* reflects a deliberate effort to adapt Christian worship to the cultural context of the Dayak Ngaju community. This study shows that modifications to church

music – once dominated by Western instrumentation – now include traditional forms such as *karungut rohani*, affirming the relevance of indigenous expressions in faith practice. This aligns with Hesselgrave and Rommen (2009), who advocate for cultural awareness in religious expression.

This process involves three main groups: church leaders or pastors as decision-makers, *karungut rohani* artists as cultural practitioners, and congregants as listeners and participants. Church authorities design liturgies while collaborating with artists to incorporate culturally resonant songs. The creation of *karungut rohani* includes thematic planning, lyric writing and musical arrangement, exemplifying collective creativity within the church. Kapoyos et al. (2022) similarly argue that traditional music enhances congregational engagement.

Performances of *karungut rohani* evoke emotional connection, spiritual depth and community cohesion. Congregational responses, such as the joyful *manasai* dance, demonstrate how traditional forms can enliven worship and foster participatory experiences. Juanda et al. (2025) underscore the role of oral traditions in bridging religion and culture.

However, artists face significant challenges, including difficulties in composition, limited access to trained musicians and scarce traditional instruments. These barriers underscore the tension between preserving local music and prevailing Westernised church practices. Moreover, inconsistency in the application of *karungut rohani* across GKE congregations reflects broader challenges in inculturation efforts.

Karungut rohani serves dual roles in GKE: as liturgical music in worship services and as non-liturgical performance during events like Youth Arts and Sports Week (*Pekan Olahraga dan Seni*, or Porseni). Porseni offers a platform for youth to engage with and preserve Dayak musical heritage, in line with Singgih (2000), who stresses the need for dynamic and contextually rooted theology.

Obstacles to contextualisation include the lesser popularity of traditional music compared to Western genres, financial constraints in hiring musicians and low awareness among congregations. *Gereja Kalimantan Evangelis* is encouraged to develop training programmes, build congregational awareness and invest in cultural sustainability initiatives.

This study affirms the principle of *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* (Kadarmanto 2018), recognising the church's ongoing need for contextual renewal. It echoes Bevans' (2002) theological model, highlighting faith understood and expressed within local cultural frameworks.

Beyond ecclesial impact, *karungut rohani* contributes to cultural revitalisation. By transforming a secular art form into a medium of faith, it extends the value and relevance of *karungut* in modern society. This functional transformation fosters both spiritual growth and cultural resilience.

The strength of this research lies in its ethnotheological approach, integrating liturgical theology with indigenous culture. It offers a practical model for contextual worship that is theologically grounded and culturally authentic. Despite limitations – including geographic scope, inconsistent application and generational challenges – *karungut rohani* demonstrates how traditional music can enrich liturgy and preserve cultural identity.

In supporting Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 (cultural preservation), SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 8 (economic empowerment), SDG 16 (social cohesion) and SDG 3 (mental well-being), *karungut rohani* bridges sacred and social functions. It enhances the worship experience while contributing to sustainable development.

Future research should investigate the long-term spiritual and cultural impact of *karungut rohani* on youth engagement and ecclesial identity across broader regional contexts.

Conclusion

The contextualisation of church music in GKE involves placing *karungut rohani* within the worship context of Dayak congregations so that music used in worship does not feel foreign, but rather resonates with the traditional artistic expression of the Dayak community in Central Kalimantan. Although its use remains relatively limited, GKE continues to support the integration of traditional *karungut rohani* music in both liturgical and non-liturgical settings. Transforming *karungut rohani* into church music requires careful lyrical composition that aligns with Christian teachings, a sincere performance approach and a motivation centred on glorifying God rather than self-promotion. Structurally, *karungut rohani* closely mirrors traditional *karungut*, with the primary distinction found in the adapted Christian-themed lyrics. Several challenges hinder the full implementation of contextualised church music: limited popularity of traditional music, insufficient institutional support, a lack of skilled *karungut rohani* artists and restricted access to traditional musical instruments within church contexts.

The authors acknowledge that this study is not exhaustive and that opportunities remain for future researchers to explore the broader contextualisation of church music using traditional forms across the Central Kalimantan region.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

A.B.H. contributed towards conceptualisation, methodology, formal analysis and investigation. S. Sunarto contributed towards conceptualisation, and supervision. S. Suharto contributed towards conceptualisation, supervision and editing. A.C. contributed towards the methodology, supervision and editing.

Ethical considerations

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Data availability

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Disclaimer

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