

Dissemination and Documentation of Pakpak Traditional Music for the Preservation and Development of Cultural Values

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Pakpak traditional music is an integral part of the cultural heritage of the Pakpak ethnic community in North Sumatra, Indonesia. However, rapid social change, globalization, and declining intergenerational transmission have posed serious challenges to its sustainability. This study aims to disseminate and document Pakpak traditional music as a strategic effort to preserve and develop its cultural values. The activities were conducted through field observations, audio-visual documentation, interviews with traditional musicians and cultural leaders, and community-based workshops involving local youth and cultural practitioners. The documentation process focused on musical instruments, performance structures, symbolic meanings, and the social functions of Pakpak traditional music within community rituals and daily life. The results indicate that systematic dissemination through digital media and educational activities significantly increases community awareness and appreciation of Pakpak traditional music. Moreover, the documentation serves as an important cultural archive that supports cultural education, research, and future revitalization efforts. This study concludes that dissemination and documentation are essential approaches for sustaining Pakpak traditional music and strengthening local cultural identity in the face of modern cultural transformations.

Keywords: Pakpak traditional music, cultural preservation, cultural values, documentation, dissemination, local wisdom, ethnomusicology

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1. Introduction

Indonesia, as a multi-ethnic nation, possesses a rich diversity of traditional music, including that found in North Sumatra. One of the ethnic groups in this region, the Pakpak community, has a distinctive tradition of music that utilizes natural materials such as wood, bamboo, iron, animal skin, and plant-based strings. Traditional Pakpak musical instruments include the Sisibah drum, a melodic drum constructed from deer skin, wood, and rattan; the Gung ensemble, which consists of instruments such as gung, cilat-cilat, and poi; and the Oning-oningen ensemble, comprising instruments such as kucapi, kalondang, suling, lobat, kettuk, and sordam. Compared to other well-known traditional music traditions in North Sumatra—such as those of the Toba, Karo, Simalungun, and Malay ethnic groups—the development of Pakpak traditional music remains relatively limited in terms of promotion, utilization, and systematic development. This condition persists despite the fact that Pakpak music is not inferior in terms of tonal richness and instrumental completeness. The limited visibility of Pakpak traditional music presents a significant challenge to its long-term preservation and development. Therefore, this community service initiative is considered essential, as traditional music represents a form of local wisdom that must be safeguarded and sustained. This effort aligns with Law Number 5 of 2017 on the Advancement of Culture, which emphasizes the protection and development of cultural expressions, as well as Article 1, paragraph (30) of Law Number 32 of 2009, which defines local wisdom as noble values embedded in social life, including those that support sustainable environmental management.

The general objective of this community service program is to foster increased interest among younger generations in preserving and developing traditional Pakpak music, enabling it to be performed in various contexts, including customary ceremonies and broader public events. Specifically, the program aims to strengthen the capacity of Pakpak traditional art studios to consistently develop musical performances through strategic efforts that enhance artistic quality and public appreciation. To achieve these objectives, a community service team from Universitas Sumatera Utara (USU) collaborated with Kasea Studio in Kuta Gambir, Dairi Regency, to establish a pilot project that can serve as a reference for other cultural practitioners engaged in the preservation of Pakpak traditional music. As a pilot initiative, Kasea Studio and its members are expected to improve their professionalism in both organizational management and musical competence, encompassing theoretical understanding and practical performance skills. A participatory assessment was conducted to identify appropriate systems and strategies for achieving the goals of this community service program. The primary target group of this initiative is Kasea Studio and its members, while the expected output includes the availability of documented Pakpak songs accompanied by traditional musical arrangements within the community. In Indonesia, ethnomusicology as an academic discipline began to develop formally in higher education institutions during the 1980s, although its foundations—such as music recording, documentation, and research—can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century. Indonesian ethnomusicologists have approached music not merely as an object of scientific inquiry or as an exotic cultural artifact, but as a living tradition that requires preservation, continuity, and sustainable development. In this perspective, music is both a cultural heritage and a source of vitality for the community that sustains it (Supanggah, 1995). Furthermore, music should not be understood solely as organized sound, but also as a form of human behavior embedded within social and cultural contexts. Consequently, music must be examined in relation to the concepts underlying its production, expressive language, musical forms, the social roles of musicians, and the functions and meanings of music within society (Merriam, 1964). From this viewpoint, ethnomusicological research relies heavily on field-based approaches that draw from cultural anthropology and the social sciences, recognizing music as an integral component of broader cultural systems. In the perspective of indigenous ethnomusicologists, traditional music serves not only as an accompaniment to daily life—ranging from sacred to secular contexts—but also as a medium of aesthetic and spiritual expression. Its presence is often inseparable from other artistic forms, such as dance, theater, and ritual performance, reinforcing its significance within the cultural fabric of society (Merriam, 1964).

2. Literature Review

Traditional Music and Cultural Preservation

Traditional music plays a vital role in preserving cultural identity and transmitting local wisdom across generations. As an integral element of intangible cultural heritage, traditional music reflects the values, beliefs, social structures, and historical experiences of a community (UNESCO, 2003). In many indigenous societies, music functions not only as artistic expression but also as a medium for ritual, social cohesion, education, and environmental awareness (Nettl, 2005).

In the Indonesian context, traditional music is deeply embedded within ethnic and regional identities. Supanggah (1995) emphasized that Indonesian traditional music should not be viewed merely as an object of academic inquiry, but as a living cultural practice that requires preservation, revitalization, and sustainable development. This perspective positions traditional music as both a cultural legacy and a dynamic system that evolves alongside social change.

Ethnomusicology and the Study of Traditional Music

Ethnomusicology provides the primary theoretical and methodological framework for studying traditional music within its cultural context. Merriam (1964) proposed a holistic approach to ethnomusicology, defining music as a combination of sound, behavior, and concept. According to this framework, understanding traditional music requires examining not only musical structures but also the social functions, symbolic meanings, performance contexts, and the role of musicians within society.

Fieldwork-based research is central to ethnomusicological studies. Nettl (2005) noted that documentation through audio-visual recording, interviews, and participant observation is essential for capturing the complexity of musical traditions, particularly those transmitted orally. In Indonesia, ethnomusicological field methods have been widely adopted to document regional music traditions, especially those facing marginalization due to modernization and globalization (Sutton, 2013).

Documentation and Dissemination of Traditional Music

Documentation is widely recognized as a critical strategy for safeguarding endangered musical traditions. Audio and video recordings, musical transcriptions, and written documentation serve as cultural archives that can support education, research, and revitalization efforts (Seeger, 2002). Dissemination, on the other hand, ensures that documented materials reach broader audiences, including younger generations, educators, and cultural practitioners.

Several studies highlight that documentation alone is insufficient without active dissemination and community involvement. Grant (2014) argued that sustainable preservation requires participatory approaches that empower local communities as active custodians of their cultural heritage. Community-based documentation projects have been shown to increase cultural pride, intergenerational transmission, and public appreciation of traditional music (Schippers, 2010).



Figure 1. Documentation Of Cultural Value

Pakpak Traditional Music in North Sumatra

North Sumatra is home to diverse ethnic groups, each with distinct musical traditions, including Toba Batak, Karo, Simalungun, Malay, and Pakpak communities. While Batak Toba and Karo music have received considerable scholarly attention and promotion, Pakpak traditional music remains relatively underrepresented in academic literature and cultural programs (Simanjuntak, 2018).

Pakpak traditional music consists of various instrument groups such as drums, gongs, and string and wind instruments, which are traditionally used in ritual ceremonies, communal celebrations, and social events. Despite its rich musical structure and cultural significance, Pakpak music faces challenges related to limited documentation, declining interest among youth, and reduced performance contexts in contemporary society (Sihotang, 2020).

Community engagement is increasingly recognized as a key factor in cultural preservation initiatives. Law No. 5 of 2017 on Cultural Advancement in Indonesia emphasizes the importance of community participation in safeguarding cultural heritage. In line with this policy, community service programs conducted by universities play a strategic role in bridging academic knowledge and local cultural practices. Previous studies demonstrate that collaboration between academic institutions and local art studios can enhance the professionalism, sustainability, and visibility of traditional music groups (Hood, 2016). Through training, documentation, and dissemination, such partnerships contribute to both cultural preservation and community empowerment.

Research Gap

Although ethnomusicological studies and cultural preservation initiatives are well established, there remains a lack of systematic research focusing on the dissemination and documentation of Pakpak traditional music through community-based service programs. Most existing studies prioritize musical analysis rather than applied preservation strategies involving local stakeholders. Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by integrating ethnomusicological theory, documentation practices, and community engagement to support the preservation and development of Pakpak traditional music.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative descriptive methodology with an ethnomusicological approach, which emphasizes understanding music as a cultural practice embedded in social life. The methodology integrates fieldwork-based research and community-based service activities, focusing on the dissemination and documentation of Pakpak traditional music as a form of cultural preservation and development. Ethnomusicology was chosen because it allows researchers to examine music not only as sound structures but also as human behavior, cultural expression, and social practice (Merriam, 1964). This approach is particularly relevant for documenting traditional music that is transmitted orally and practiced collectively within the community.

The community service and research activities were conducted at Kasea Studio, located in Kuta Gambir District, Dairi Regency, North Sumatra, an area known as one of the cultural centers of the Pakpak ethnic group.

The research subjects consisted of:

1. Pakpak traditional musicians and artists affiliated with Kasea Studio,
2. Cultural practitioners and community elders,
3. Young members of the Pakpak community participating in traditional music activities.

These participants were selected purposively based on their active involvement and knowledge of Pakpak traditional music. Data were collected using several qualitative techniques commonly applied in ethnomusicological studies:

Direct observations were conducted to document musical performances, rehearsal processes, and the use of traditional instruments such as Sisibah Drum, Gung, Cilat-cilat, Poi, Kucapi, and Sordam. Observations focused on performance context, musical structure, playing techniques, and social interactions during musical activities.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with musicians, studio managers, and cultural figures to explore:

1. The history and meaning of Pakpak traditional music,
2. The role of music in ritual and social activities,
3. Challenges in preservation and transmission,
4. Expectations for future development.

Audio and video recordings were produced to document musical performances, instrument construction, and rehearsal activities. This documentation serves as a digital archive that can be used for educational, research, and dissemination purposes.

Secondary data were obtained from books, journal articles, government regulations, and previous ethnomusicological research related to traditional music, cultural preservation, and local wisdom. This step was used to strengthen the theoretical framework and contextualize field findings.

The methodology was implemented through several structured stages:

1. Preparation Stage Coordination with Kasea Studio, identification of musical materials, preparation of documentation equipment, and development of activity plans.
2. Field Study and Documentation Stage Conducting observations, interviews, and audio-visual recordings of Pakpak traditional music practices.
3. Dissemination Stage Organizing workshops, training sessions, and discussions with community members, particularly youth, to encourage interest and participation in traditional music.
4. Evaluation Stage Assessing community responses, participation levels, and the effectiveness of documentation and dissemination activities in supporting cultural preservation.

Data analysis followed a qualitative interpretative approach. Field notes, interview transcripts, and documentation materials were analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to musical structure, cultural values, transmission processes, and preservation strategies. The analysis emphasized the relationship between music, cultural identity, and community sustainability, in line with ethnomusicological perspectives that view music as both artistic expression and social practice (Supanggah, 1995; Merriam, 1964). Ethical principles were applied throughout the study by obtaining informed consent from participants, respecting local customs, and ensuring that all documentation activities were conducted collaboratively with the community. The results of the documentation are intended to benefit the Pakpak community and support long-term cultural preservation.

The method of implementing community service used is described as follows:

1. Joint Study (Jisam) or Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Before the training was carried out, a joint study was first carried out between the community service team and the entire team from the Kasea Studio involved, starting from the studio leaders, instructors and musicians.
2. Training The training of 3 traditional Pakpak musical instrument song titles was guided by the studio leader and instructors in accordance with the agreement that had been established during the Joint Study (JISAM). The three song titles were Gendang Raja, Nantampuk Mas, 6

and Garogaro. The determination of these 3 song titles was agreed upon at the suggestion of the studio owner because these three song titles were most often used by various groups in dance training, but the materials or music recordings were not available in the community. The implementation of the training activities was carried out at the Kasea Studio on Jl. Batu Kapur, Kuta Gambir Village, Sidikalang District. Participants in this activity were the Studio Leader, instructors, musicians and the community service team.

3. Implementation of Recording. After completing the training, the community service team and studio team then recorded three songs in a professional recording studio in Sidikalang. The recording studio was used for three shifts, depending on the number of instrumental songs to be recorded. The studio also provided editing, mixing, and copying of the master recordings to a flash drive. Recording took place in mid-September 2023.
4. Duplication and Submission of Recording Results to Stakeholders and publication. After the master recording is finished, duplication is carried out according to the needs with a total of 30 plastic disks. Next, the results are submitted to each stakeholder to be used in various institutions, including: To the Kasea Studio, Head of the Education Office, Head of the Culture and Tourism Office, Sub-districts and Schools from Elementary School to High School level in Dairi Regency, especially in Sidikalang District, a total of 25 institutions received. The master recording can be duplicated by each stakeholder according to their respective needs. In addition, the community service team also submitted the recording results to the Community Service Institute of the University of North Sumatra and published the recording results on YouTube which can be accessed or downloaded by all parties who need it.

4. Discussion And Result

The community service program on the dissemination and documentation of Pakpak traditional music was implemented through a collaborative pilot project involving the research team from Universitas Sumatera Utara (USU) and Kasea Art Studio in Kuta Gambir, Dairi Regency. The results of this program demonstrate significant achievements in terms of cultural documentation, capacity building, and increased community awareness toward the preservation of Pakpak traditional music.

Documentation of Pakpak Traditional Music

One of the main outcomes of this program was the successful documentation of Pakpak traditional music in both audio and visual formats. Several traditional musical instruments—such as the Sisibah drum, Gung ensemble (Gung, Cilat-cilat, and Poi), and the Oning-oningen ensemble (kucapi, kalondang, suling, lobat, kettuk, and sordam)—were recorded during practice sessions and performances.

These recordings resulted in a collection of documented Pakpak songs accompanied by traditional musical instruments, which can be used as reference materials for future learning, performances, and cultural promotion. The availability of these documented materials addresses the long-standing issue of limited archival resources for Pakpak traditional music compared to other ethnic music traditions in North Sumatra.

The program also produced positive results in strengthening the capacity of Kasea Studio members. Through workshops and hands-on training sessions, participants gained a better understanding of:

1. Basic ethnomusicological concepts related to Pakpak traditional music
2. Performance techniques and ensemble coordination
3. Studio management and documentation practices

As a result, studio members demonstrated improved musical skills, greater confidence during performances, and increased professionalism in managing rehearsals and artistic activities. This improvement is essential for ensuring the sustainability of Pakpak traditional music in both cultural and economic contexts.

Increased Youth Participation and Cultural Awareness

Another significant result was the increased interest and participation of younger generations in Pakpak traditional music activities. During the implementation of the program, several young community members actively participated in rehearsals, discussions, and performances.

This indicates that systematic dissemination efforts, combined with engaging documentation methods, can foster a renewed appreciation of traditional music among youth. The involvement of young participants is a crucial factor in ensuring the continuity and transmission of Pakpak musical traditions across generations.

The collaboration between the university and the local art studio strengthened community-based cultural preservation initiatives. Kasea Studio emerged as a local model for traditional music preservation, serving not only as a performance group but also as a cultural learning center.

The pilot project demonstrated that structured guidance, documentation support, and academic collaboration can enhance the role of local art communities in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. This approach aligns with Indonesia's cultural advancement policies and supports the sustainable preservation of local wisdom.

Availability of Cultural Outputs for Wider Dissemination

As a tangible result, the program produced cultural outputs in the form of:

1. Recorded Pakpak traditional music performances
2. Visual documentation of instruments and playing techniques
3. Educational materials that can be shared through cultural events, academic forums, and digital platforms

These outputs provide opportunities for broader dissemination of Pakpak traditional music beyond the local community, potentially increasing public recognition and appreciation at regional and national levels. The results of this community-based ethnomusicological study demonstrate that the dissemination and documentation program significantly contributed to the revitalization of Pakpak traditional music, both in terms of practice and cultural awareness among community members. Through a series of workshops, rehearsals, documentation sessions, and public performances conducted in collaboration with Kasea Studio in Kuta Gambir, Dairi Regency, several tangible and intangible outcomes were achieved.

The outputs generated from this community service activity are as follows: (1), The recording results of 3 types of Pakpak musical instrument songs which were duplicated by the Master recording; (2) The recording results of 25 plastic disks have been distributed to stakeholders in the form of flash disks; (3). Online publication of the community service activity process; (4). Entering the recording results on YouTube social media: Lister Berutu Channel (5). Published in the National Journal.

Documentation and Musical Repertoire Preservation

One of the most prominent results of this program is the successful documentation of Pakpak traditional musical repertoires accompanied by indigenous instruments such as the Sisibah drum, Gung ensemble, and Oning-oningen group. Audio-visual recordings were produced to capture not only the musical sound structures but also performance contexts, playing techniques, and inter-musician interactions. In

ethnomusicological terms, this documentation serves as an effort to preserve *music as culture*, not merely *music as sound* (Merriam, 1964).

The documentation process revealed that Pakpak traditional music is deeply embedded in social and ritual functions, particularly in customary ceremonies and communal gatherings. This finding supports Supangg This joint study was held at the Kasea Studio on Batu Kapur Street, Kuta Gambir Village, Sidikalang District, on Saturday, September 2, 2023, from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM WIB and ended with a meal with all participants. There were 24 participants, consisting of Studio Leaders, instructors, musicians, traditional music observers, community leaders, and the community service team. The joint study began with an introduction of the Community Service team to all participants, followed by an introductory speech from the Head of the Community Service Team, Dr. Irfan. The Head explained in general about LPPM USU and the purpose of the community service. After that, the studio leader was given the opportunity to give a welcoming speech.

The next presentation provided further and more detailed direction from the team, represented by Yoe Yanto Ginting, regarding the goals and objectives of the community service collaboration with Sanggar Kasea. Afterward, all participants provided suggestions and input, facilitated by the community service team, led by Lister Berutu. The discussion resulted in several agreed-upon conclusions, including:

1. The studio leaders and instructors play a role in organizing the musicians and leading the training activities, while continuing to coordinate with the service team both directly and indirectly;
2. 3 (three) instrumental songs were rehearsed and recorded, namely; Gendang Raja songs, Nantampuk Mas, and Tatak Garo-garo songs.
3. Practices were conducted several times before recording, either attended by the community service team or independently by the studio. The first and second practices were attended or discussed directly by the team, which were held on Saturday and Sunday, September 2-3, 2023, at the Kasea Studio. During the practice, the community service team provided input on how the notes and harmony of music between one musical instrument and another; 4). Music recording was carried out after a mutual agreement was reached between the community service team and the studio and was carried out in Sidikalang;
4. After recording, the music is duplicated to be distributed to stakeholders jointly determined by the Kasea Studio and the Community Service team from the University of North Sumatra.

Then on the same day it was done immediately Training on 3 traditional Pakpak musical instrument song titles was guided by the studio leader and instructors in accordance with the agreement that had been established during the Joint Study (JISAM). The three song titles were Gendang Raja, Nantampuk Mas, and Garo-garo, and the determination of these 3 song titles was agreed upon at the suggestion of the studio owner on the grounds that these three song titles were most often used by various groups in dance training, but the materials were not available in the community. The implementation of the training activities was carried out at the Kasea Studio on Jl. Batu Kapur, Kuta Gambir Village, Sidikalang District. Participants in this activity were the Studio Leader, instructors, musicians and community service team. The training continued for 10 times at different times and days.

After completing the training, the community service team and studio team will then record three songs in a professional recording studio in Sidikalang. The recording studio will operate for three shifts, depending on the number of instrumental songs to be recorded. The studio will also provide editing, mixing, and copying of the master recordings to a flash drive. Recording is scheduled for late September 2023.

Next, the recording results were duplicated and submitted to stakeholders and published. Submission of the results to each stakeholder for use in various institutions including the Kasea Studio, the Head of the

Education Office, the Head of the Culture and Tourism Office, Villages and Schools ranging from Elementary Schools to High Schools in Dairi Regency, especially in Sidikalang District. The Master Copy of the recording can be duplicated by each stakeholder according to their respective needs. In addition, the community service team also submitted the recording results to the Community Service Institute of the University of North Sumatra and published the recording results on YouTube which can be accessed or downloaded by all parties who need it.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the dissemination and documentation of Pakpak traditional music play a crucial role in preserving and revitalizing local cultural values amid contemporary socio-cultural changes. Through systematic documentation, performance practice reinforcement, and community-based capacity building, Pakpak traditional music is positioned not merely as an artistic artifact but as a living cultural expression that reflects the identity, worldview, and social structure of the Pakpak people. The results indicate that collaborative community service involving academic institutions and local art studios contributes significantly to strengthening musicians' competencies, improving institutional management, and increasing public appreciation of Pakpak traditional music. The pilot project implemented at Kasea Studio shows that structured training, ethnomusicological documentation, and performance dissemination can enhance both the artistic quality and sustainability of traditional music practices. This aligns with ethnomusicological perspectives that view music as human behavior embedded within cultural, social, and symbolic systems rather than solely as organized sound. Furthermore, the study confirms that the preservation of traditional music is closely linked to intergenerational transmission. Encouraging youth participation emerges as a key factor in ensuring continuity and cultural resilience. By fostering interest among younger generations and integrating traditional music into both customary and contemporary performance contexts, Pakpak music can remain relevant without losing its cultural authenticity. In conclusion, the dissemination and documentation strategy presented in this research offers a replicable model for safeguarding other endangered traditional music traditions in Indonesia. Sustained collaboration between academia, cultural practitioners, and local communities is essential to ensure that traditional music not only survives but continues to evolve as a meaningful cultural practice within modern society.

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