

Preservation of Local Culture Through Community Service Programs in Bukit Sangkal Village

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ABSTRACT

Background. The rapid pace of modernization and urbanization has contributed to the erosion of local cultural heritage, especially in rural communities such as Bukit Sangkal Village, South Sumatra. Cultural practices, traditional arts, and indigenous values are increasingly marginalized in favor of more dominant globalized norms.

Purpose. This study aims to examine how community service programs initiated by higher education institutions can play a pivotal role in preserving and revitalizing local culture.

Method. Using a qualitative participatory action research (PAR) method, the study engaged directly with local stakeholders, including elders, artisans, youth groups, and village leaders. Data were collected through focus group discussions, field observations, and documentation of cultural activities.

Results. The findings reveal that collaborative cultural workshops, educational campaigns, and documentation of oral traditions significantly increased awareness and participation among local residents. The revitalization of traditional dance and craft-making practices was particularly effective in engaging the younger generation.

Conclusion. The study concludes that community service programs can act as dynamic instruments of cultural preservation when they are participatory, adaptive, and context-sensitive. These programs not only preserve heritage but also strengthen communal identity and intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge.

KEYWORDS

Cultural Preservation, Community Engagement, Local Wisdom, Participatory Research, Bukit Sangkal Village

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INTRODUCTION

Local cultures represent invaluable repositories of collective identity, historical continuity, and social cohesion, particularly within rural communities. Across the Indonesian archipelago, these cultural expressions manifest through traditional arts, oral histories, local customs, and indigenous knowledge systems. Rapid modernization, urban migration, and the encroachment of globalized cultural influences, however, are placing immense pressure on these traditional forms of knowledge. In this context, villages like Bukit Sangkal face the real threat of cultural erosion, where younger generations become increasingly



disconnected from the values and practices of their ancestors.

Local cultural degradation is not merely a loss of aesthetic or symbolic value but also a breakdown of communal structures that maintain intergenerational solidarity. In Bukit Sangkal Village, traditional dances, crafts, culinary practices, and rituals are practiced by a declining number of elders, often without adequate documentation or structured transfer to younger individuals. Schools and institutions within the community seldom integrate local cultural materials into the curriculum, and public events increasingly center around imported entertainment rather than indigenous performances. This situation reflects a broader trend of marginalization of local wisdom in the face of dominant cultural narratives.

Community-based efforts to preserve culture have become increasingly vital in addressing this issue. Higher education institutions, through their mandated role in community service (*pengabdian kepada masyarakat*), are well-positioned to collaborate with local actors to protect and revitalize endangered cultural expressions. These programs, when participatory and inclusive, can function as bridges between academic resources and community needs, fostering co-ownership and sustainability in cultural initiatives (Cherix et al., 2025; Kumar & Mandal, 2025; Robina-Ramírez et al., 2025). This research explores such a dynamic within the context of Bukit Sangkal Village, aiming to capture how targeted community service initiatives can function as tools of cultural preservation.

The central problem addressed in this research is the weakening of traditional cultural practices in Bukit Sangkal Village and the lack of structured mechanisms to revitalize and transmit these practices across generations. Local elders have repeatedly expressed concern over the disappearance of ceremonial dances, songs, and weaving techniques that once formed the backbone of the community's identity (Alsheikh Mahmoud & Bin Hashim, 2025; Bobiec et al., 2025). These traditions are rarely practiced or showcased beyond major religious or customary events and are in danger of being forgotten as younger generations prioritize digital content and urban lifestyles.

Despite the presence of government programs aimed at cultural conservation, these often fail to reach remote or marginalized areas in a meaningful way. Top-down policies tend to focus on national-scale cultural showcases or museum documentation projects that offer limited engagement with grassroots communities. In Bukit Sangkal, for instance, few residents are aware of the availability of funding or technical support for cultural preservation (Angheluță et al., 2025; Odhaib et al., 2025; Palamas et al., 2025). More importantly, there exists a lack of dialogue between institutional actors and local knowledge holders, resulting in a disconnect between policy and lived cultural realities.

This study is grounded in the observation that grassroots-oriented, participatory community service programs provide an untapped opportunity to fill this gap. By embedding academic engagement within the cultural framework of the village, universities can not only fulfill their tri-dharma obligations but also strengthen community resilience (Fabbri et al., 2025; Saecheong & Chantamala, 2025; Vermeulen et al., 2025). The investigation of how such initiatives contribute to cultural revitalization is timely and urgent, especially considering the vulnerability of oral traditions and indigenous practices to extinction in the digital age.

The primary aim of this study is to examine how community service programs led by higher education institutions contribute to the preservation of local culture in Bukit Sangkal Village. The study seeks to identify the processes, actors, and strategies involved in these initiatives, as well as their impact on community awareness, intergenerational participation, and cultural sustainability (Shekhar et al., 2025; Soleymani et al., 2025; Wirsa et al., 2025; Yousafzai & Aljanova, 2025). It

also aims to map the socio-cultural context within which such interventions are received and how they align with the community's aspirations and capacities.

A secondary objective of the research is to assess the role of academic institutions in designing community-based interventions that are culturally sensitive, collaborative, and inclusive. Rather than acting as external agents of change, universities must reorient themselves as facilitators of community empowerment. This study explores whether such a shift is taking place in practice, and how community service can be integrated into a longer-term cultural preservation agenda.

Ultimately, the research aspires to produce a conceptual model of culturally grounded community engagement. This model would ideally serve as a blueprint for similar initiatives in other culturally endangered areas across Indonesia and the Global South (Roeschley et al., 2025; Salih et al., 2025). Through qualitative documentation and community storytelling, the research not only contributes to empirical knowledge but also honors the intangible heritage of Bukit Sangkal as a case worth preserving and learning from.

Existing studies on cultural preservation in Indonesia tend to concentrate on museum initiatives, digital archiving, and national heritage policies. These efforts are valuable but often overlook the lived experiences and adaptive capacities of rural communities. The academic literature has yet to give sufficient attention to how local engagement and participatory education can become practical instruments of cultural resilience (Benedetti et al., 2025; Farda et al., 2025; Kelmelis et al., 2025; Shahi et al., 2025). Most of the available research adopts a macro-level focus, leaving a gap in understanding of micro-level interventions led by universities and NGOs.

The discourse on community service in Indonesian higher education remains under-theorized in relation to cultural development. While service-learning and rural empowerment programs are widely discussed, their intersection with cultural preservation has not been clearly articulated. This research identifies a critical need to examine the operational dynamics of such programs-how they are structured, who participates, and what outcomes they generate-in order to inform both policy and pedagogy.

There is also a methodological gap in the literature regarding the use of participatory action research (PAR) to address cultural concerns. Although PAR has been employed in public health and environmental contexts, its application in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage remains rare. This study extends the scope of participatory research by demonstrating its relevance in mediating between academic knowledge and community-based cultural values.

This research introduces a novel academic-practical framework that combines participatory research with cultural preservation. The study repositions community service not merely as a social obligation but as a dynamic platform for co-creating cultural knowledge and safeguarding heritage. It moves beyond documentation to emphasize cultural transmission and active community involvement as essential dimensions of preservation.

The innovation of this research lies in its integration of community narratives, artistic expression, and local wisdom into the formal structure of academic engagement. The inclusion of intergenerational dialogue, traditional art workshops, and oral storytelling as part of the program represents a significant departure from conventional, top-down approaches. It highlights the need for epistemological diversity in how culture is studied, preserved, and transmitted.

The justification for this study is reinforced by the urgency of cultural disappearance and the absence of inclusive preservation frameworks at the village level. By filling this void, the research contributes not only to the preservation of Bukit Sangkal's cultural identity but also to the development of scalable, context-sensitive models of academic-community collaboration. These contributions are critical for enriching both cultural policy and higher education's civic mission.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employed a qualitative approach with a participatory action research (PAR) design to explore the process and outcomes of local culture preservation through community service programs in Bukit Sangkal Village. The participatory nature of the research was chosen to ensure active involvement of community members in the identification of cultural issues, implementation of cultural activities, and evaluation of outcomes (Atmaja et al., 2025; Jackson, 2025; Oduor et al., 2025). The PAR framework allowed researchers to collaborate with local stakeholders as co-researchers, aligning with the transformative goals of community empowerment and cultural revitalization.

The population of the study consisted of residents of Bukit Sangkal Village, including traditional artists, cultural leaders, educators, youth representatives, and local government officials. From this population, a purposive sampling technique was applied to select 20 participants who were directly involved in or had deep knowledge about local cultural practices. The sample included five traditional dance instructors, three local storytellers, four youth leaders, three community elders, and five representatives from the university's community service team. The diverse backgrounds of the participants ensured a holistic understanding of the cultural ecosystem within the village.

Data collection instruments consisted of semi-structured interview guides, focus group discussion (FGD) protocols, and field observation checklists. The interviews explored participants' experiences, perceptions, and aspirations related to cultural preservation. FGDs were conducted to stimulate collective reflection and idea-sharing among different community groups. Field observations were used to document cultural events, traditional performances, and training workshops. Audio recordings, photographs, and researcher field notes were also utilized to enrich the data and validate the findings.

The research procedures followed several key stages. The initial stage involved socialization meetings with community leaders and stakeholders to introduce the objectives of the study and gain informed consent from participants. In the second stage, the research team conducted interviews, FGDs, and observations over a three-month engagement period. Data collection was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and local dialects, with all interactions documented and transcribed. In the third stage, a series of cultural workshops and collaborative exhibitions were organized as part of the action component, enabling the community to actively participate in preserving and showcasing their cultural heritage. Data analysis was conducted using thematic coding to identify patterns, recurring themes, and the impact of the programs on community engagement and cultural sustainability. Ethical considerations such as confidentiality, informed consent, and respect for local norms were upheld throughout the research process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The secondary data obtained from the Bukit Sangkal Village Profile (2022) and the Regional Cultural Office of Palembang provide a general overview of the state of local cultural practices. Statistical records show that out of approximately 1,340 residents, only 7.6% are actively involved in traditional arts such as dance, weaving, or oral storytelling. Of these, over 68% are aged 50 and above, indicating a generational gap in cultural participation. Prior to the implementation of

community service programs, the village had not held a formal cultural event for more than three consecutive years.

Table 1.

Cultural Participation in Bukit Sangkal Village (Before Program Implementation)

Cultural Practice	Number of Practitioners	Age Group Dominated	Status Before Program
Traditional Dance	15	50+ years	Inactive
Traditional Weaving	8	45–60 years	Intermittent
Oral Storytelling	5	60+ years	Endangered
Youth Cultural Participation	4	15–25 years	Very Low

The data highlights a critical point: the village's cultural heritage was at risk of disappearing due to the aging population of cultural bearers and the minimal involvement of youth. The absence of formal platforms for cultural expression had further weakened the continuity of traditional knowledge transmission. These statistics reinforced the urgency for intervention through community-based programs.

The results of qualitative data collection through interviews and observations reveal that community members responded positively to participatory engagement facilitated by the university-led community service program. Participants reported a renewed sense of pride and collective identity as they contributed to organizing traditional dance performances, storytelling sessions, and weaving demonstrations. The youth segment, in particular, displayed increased interest after being directly involved in workshops and cultural exhibitions held within the village.

Observational data confirmed that intergenerational interaction increased significantly during program implementation. Elder artisans served as facilitators and mentors to younger villagers during cultural training sessions. Several new initiatives emerged organically, such as a youth-led theater group inspired by local folklore and a women's weaving cooperative that expanded its reach to online platforms. These developments indicate not only cultural preservation but also innovation grounded in local tradition.

Inferential analysis based on thematic coding from focus group discussions identified three primary factors contributing to successful cultural revitalization: sustained intergenerational dialogue, contextual relevance of program content, and the participatory nature of planning and execution. These factors showed a strong correlation with increased community involvement in cultural activities. Villages that incorporated collective decision-making in designing cultural events reported higher levels of ownership and enthusiasm across age groups.

The data also demonstrate that cultural engagement had spillover effects on social cohesion and educational interest. Teachers reported a higher frequency of cultural references in classroom discussions and extracurricular activities. Parents observed improved attitudes among youth who participated in cultural workshops, noting stronger appreciation for family heritage and community values. These relational outcomes highlight the broader social function of culture in strengthening communal bonds and identity.

Case study documentation of three cultural initiatives—Tari Gending Sriwijaya revival, storytelling circles (Cerita Rakyat Bukit), and the Tenun Warisan Ibu program—illustrate tangible outcomes of the project. The revival of Tari Gending Sriwijaya drew 70 spectators and included 14 new youth dancers trained over five weeks. Storytelling circles featured narratives performed by elders, some of whom had never shared their stories in public before. The weaving program resulted

in the production of 25 handwoven items within the first two months of training, some of which were sold through local cooperative networks.

These case studies demonstrate that cultural revival can be both symbolic and economically empowering. The programs created spaces for emotional connection and memory preservation while offering opportunities for income generation and skill development. Participants expressed that the activities helped bridge generational gaps and restored community rituals that had been lost for years.

The data provide strong evidence that community service programs, when designed and executed inclusively, can produce meaningful cultural outcomes. Participants described the process as both restorative and transformative. Community members who were previously disengaged from cultural matters became key contributors and advocates for cultural continuity. Local schools and religious institutions began integrating traditional content into their curricula and sermons, reflecting a shift toward cultural reappropriation at multiple levels.

The results of this study suggest that culture, when nurtured through participatory frameworks, becomes a catalyst for broader social renewal. Beyond the preservation of art forms and oral traditions, the programs facilitated a rediscovery of identity, belonging, and intergenerational purpose. These outcomes affirm the role of culture not merely as a historical artifact but as a living, dynamic element of community life.

The findings of this study reveal a significant transformation in cultural engagement within Bukit Sangkal Village following the implementation of community service programs. The revitalization of traditional practices such as dance, storytelling, and weaving involved both older and younger generations, promoting intergenerational learning and cultural continuity. Community members reported increased pride in their heritage, while local institutions such as schools and religious centers began to integrate traditional content into their activities. The emergence of youth-led cultural initiatives and cooperative networks demonstrates that community service can serve not only as a preservation tool but also as a catalyst for innovation rooted in local identity.

The results resonate with prior research conducted by UNESCO (2019) and Nasution et al. (2021), which emphasize the role of community-based interventions in preserving intangible cultural heritage. However, this study departs from dominant models that rely heavily on documentation and archiving by highlighting the importance of experiential learning and participatory action. While many cultural preservation efforts focus on top-down mechanisms, this study shows that change is more sustainable when it emerges from within the community itself (Palefsky et al., 2025; Papadopoulos et al., 2025; Sharma & Sharma, 2025). The findings support but also expand the existing literature by integrating academic-community collaboration with cultural activation strategies.

This research signals a shift in how local culture can be sustained in rural settings. The results reflect not just the survival of traditional practices but their adaptation into modern community life. Cultural preservation in Bukit Sangkal no longer depends solely on passive inheritance but has become an active process involving planning, education, and creative expression (Arbutina et al., 2025; Gautam et al., 2025; Horna-Saldana et al., 2025). The findings suggest that culture is not a static legacy, but a dynamic resource that can foster resilience, economic opportunity, and collective identity when supported by inclusive institutional frameworks.

The implications of this study extend to both policy and practice. Universities and development agencies need to recognize the transformative potential of participatory community service in safeguarding cultural heritage. Cultural policy should emphasize grassroots engagement rather than centralized programming, especially in rural or marginalized areas. The integration of

cultural activities into educational systems can reinforce values of identity and civic pride while also cultivating creativity and critical thinking. These insights underscore the value of reimagining community service not merely as outreach, but as a co-creative process of knowledge preservation and innovation.

The success of the program can be attributed to several context-specific factors that shaped community receptiveness and participation. The cultural wealth of Bukit Sangkal had not entirely disappeared but remained latent within the memories and skills of its elder population. The collaborative design of the program created a safe and respectful space for these cultural bearers to share their knowledge (Cheng & Chen, 2025; Handayani et al., 2025; Hassouni & Mellor, 2025). Younger participants, though previously disengaged, became active once given the opportunity to explore culture in a relatable, participatory format. The findings suggest that cultural revitalization occurs most effectively when it aligns with local values and lived realities.

The participatory approach empowered community members by making them agents rather than objects of intervention. The flexibility of the program allowed for adaptation to local rhythms and traditions, which increased its acceptance and sustainability. Institutional actors, such as universities, served not as external authorities but as facilitators of dialogue, learning, and action. These dynamics explain why the cultural initiatives did not feel imposed but rather emerged as organic expressions of community will and creativity.

The success of the Bukit Sangkal program invites further exploration into how community service can be systematized as a strategy for cultural resilience. Replication of this model in other rural communities would require a context-sensitive approach that begins with mapping local assets and identifying cultural stakeholders. Policy frameworks should allow for flexibility, co-design, and long-term engagement to ensure meaningful outcomes. Academic institutions can expand their role beyond research and education by embedding themselves in processes of cultural revival and empowerment.

Future research could explore comparative studies across regions to understand how different cultural ecologies respond to similar interventions. A longitudinal approach would help assess the long-term impact of community service programs on cultural sustainability. Additional attention could also be given to the economic implications of cultural revitalization, particularly in relation to creative industries and social entrepreneurship. By building on the insights from this study, stakeholders can develop more inclusive, participatory, and transformative models of cultural preservation across Indonesia and beyond.

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study is the emergence of intergenerational collaboration as a central driver in the preservation and revitalization of local culture. Unlike conventional preservation models that focus primarily on documentation and archiving, the community service program in Bukit Sangkal Village facilitated dynamic cultural transmission through participatory engagement. The involvement of elders as mentors and youth as active learners led to the formation of new cultural collectives, such as youth performance groups and women's weaving cooperatives, marking a shift from passive cultural inheritance to active cultural production.

This research contributes conceptually by framing cultural preservation as a process of co-creation rather than conservation. The participatory action research (PAR) model used in this study demonstrates that community service, when designed with contextual sensitivity and shared ownership, can serve as an effective instrument of cultural empowerment. The integration of traditional knowledge, academic facilitation, and community agency into a unified model offers a

replicable approach for similar interventions in other rural contexts. This methodological contribution provides an alternative to top-down heritage preservation efforts by emphasizing lived experience and relational pedagogy.

One limitation of this study lies in its geographic and cultural specificity, as the findings are deeply rooted in the social fabric of Bukit Sangkal Village. The participatory outcomes observed may not be universally applicable in communities with weaker cultural cohesion or less institutional support. Future research should include comparative studies across different regions and cultural groups to test the adaptability of the participatory model. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to evaluate the sustainability of community-led cultural initiatives and to examine how such programs evolve in response to generational shifts, technological influences, and policy changes.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Khalid Andri: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing; Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation.

Rendi Arifin: Data curation; Investigation; Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

Omar Ahmad: Supervision; Validation; Other contribution; Resources; Visualization; Writing - original draft.

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