

Preserving the *Rabbani Wahed* Dance through Arts Extracurricular Activities: A Study of Cultural Digitalization

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How to cite: Aiman, U., & Basri, N. (2025). Preserving the Rabbani Wahed Dance through Arts Extracurricular Activities: A Study of Cultural Digitalization. *Gondang: Jurnal Seni dan Budaya*, Vol 9(2): Page. 584-593.

Article History : Received: May 13, 2025. Revised: Nov 25, 2025. Accepted: Dec 25, 2025

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the preservation of Rabbani Wahed Dance, a traditional dance originating from Bireuen District, Aceh, through arts extracurricular activities in junior high schools, as well as to explore its potential integration with digital technology. The research employed a qualitative method with an exploratory design, conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Bireuen, the only school that consistently teaches Rabbani Wahed Dance through extracurricular programs. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies involving the school principal, cultural arts teachers, extracurricular instructors, students, local artists, and the Bireuen District Office of Education and Culture. The findings reveal that extracurricular activities of Rabbani Wahed Dance function not only as a means of cultural preservation but also as a medium for character education, fostering students' discipline, responsibility, and cooperation. Nevertheless, several challenges persist, including limited teacher competence, low student interest, lack of regeneration, and insufficient policy and funding support. Strategies that have been implemented, such as internal regeneration and principal support, remain inadequate to ensure the sustainability of the program. The utilization of digital technology holds great potential as an alternative learning resource, a documentation medium, and a platform for cultural promotion, thereby serving as a strategic solution to support the continuity of Rabbani Wahed Dance in the modern era. This study highlights the urgency of formulating integrative preservation strategies that combine educational, cultural, and digital dimensions.

KEYWORDS

Rabbani Wahed Dance
Cultural Digitalization
Arts Extracurricular Activities
Cultural Preservation

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INTRODUCTION

Rabbani Wahed Dance is a local cultural heritage of Bireuen District, Aceh. This dance carries important character values that need to be preserved. However, amid the currents of globalization and modernization, this dance has become less attractive, particularly among the younger generation in Bireuen, many of whom are unaware of its existence as a distinctive regional art form. In fact, the preservation of local culture is essential for strengthening identity and national character among the younger generation. In this regard, schools, as formal educational institutions, play a strategic role in cultural preservation, one of which is through arts extracurricular activities.

Based on the most recent field conditions, it is found that only one junior high school in Bireuen District still actively teaches *Rabbani Wahed* Dance through arts extracurricular activities, namely SMP Negeri 1 Bireuen. This school is the only institution that consistently implements the preservation of this dance within the context of formal education. This

circumstance highlights the urgency of this research, as the preservation of the traditional dance has not yet developed optimally. Several factors contribute to this condition: the lack of socialization; the absence of systematic learning materials; limited teaching staff in schools; the lack of integration of digital approaches in arts learning; the low level of cultural arts teachers' understanding of *Rabbani Wahed* Dance; insufficient school policy support; and the declining interest of the younger generation in traditional dance. To address these challenges, strategic and adaptive efforts are required, one of which is the utilization of digital technology.

This study is supported by several previous works. Aiman (2018) showed that *Rabbani Wahed* Dance is not only a medium of performance and entertainment but also embodies an educational dimension that reflects Islamic teachings, particularly religious values. Manan (2013) demonstrated that *Rabbani Wahed* Dance has socio-cultural functions closely related to religious practices and community life, serving as a means of worship, a medium for spreading the oneness of God, da'wah, entertainment, and accompaniment in various traditional and religious ceremonies, including weddings, circumcisions, and Islamic festivals. In another study, Manan (2013) also revealed that the movements of *Rabbani Wahed* Dance contain symbolic meanings that function as conveyors of religious values, giving the dance both spiritual significance and aesthetic appeal. Aziz (2021) emphasized that schools have great potential as a medium for transmitting cultural values through traditional dance, as long as educational practitioners fulfill their roles optimally. Rahmawati (2023) found that extracurricular programs contribute to improving students' self-confidence while fostering their potential and creativity. Similarly, Nada (2023) showed that extracurricular dance activities provide opportunities for students to gain a deeper understanding of Thengul Dance, a unique form of local wisdom from Bojonegoro. Rahmasari (2023) highlighted that schools introduce Dongrek Art in learning as a representation of cultural heritage. Dana (2021) stressed that the essence of Baris Memedi Dance is inseparable from its supporting community, and thus preservation efforts must continuously be carried out by traditional art practitioners to ensure sustainable cultural resilience through the principle of *Ajeg Bali*. Agustinova (2022) showed that the use of digital technology facilitates the dissemination of information about cultural heritage to the wider public, making communication about heritage an essential aspect of preservation efforts as it raises public awareness of its existence. Lastly, Dwihantoro (2023) emphasized the importance of utilizing digital platforms as global media to reach wider audiences, particularly millennials. Through digitalization training programs, participants acquired new knowledge and understanding regarding the use of digital platforms to promote traditional art, especially Njanen in Seloprojo.

Although a number of studies have discussed the functions, values, and preservation potential of traditional arts through schools, extracurricular activities, and even digital technology, to date, no study has specifically examined the implementation of *Rabbani Wahed* Dance within the context of formal education in Bireuen District. Therefore, this study offers a comprehensive and contextual approach to the preservation of *Rabbani Wahed* Dance by situating it within formal education through extracurricular programs at junior high schools. Its main strength lies in the integration of local cultural preservation with education and digital technology an approach still rarely implemented in areas such as Bireuen District. This study also provides a practical solution through the production of digital instructional videos as a concrete contribution to sustainable local cultural preservation.

The novelty of this research lies in its cross-disciplinary approach between arts, education, and digital technology in the preservation of culture; its focus on the preservation

of local culture in Bireuen District (*Rabbani Wahed* Dance) through formal educational institutions; and its production of digital instructional videos as concrete outputs, which remain underdeveloped in arts education, particularly in the context of traditional arts preservation.

Based on the aforementioned background, this study focuses on the preservation of *Rabbani Wahed* Dance through arts extracurricular activities in junior high schools in Bireuen District: a cultural digitalization study. Specifically, the research aims to: (1) identify the implementation of *Rabbani Wahed* Dance in school-based extracurricular activities; (2) analyze the challenges and preservation strategies applied; and (3) explore the potential use of digital technology as a preservation effort relevant to educational needs and cultural development in the digital era.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with an exploratory design. This design was selected to examine the practices of preserving *Rabbani Wahed* dance through arts extracurricular activities in junior high schools across Bireuen District. It also aims to explore the potential of cultural digitalization within the educational context. The research subjects were determined using a purposive sampling technique, which consisted of school principals, arts and culture teachers, extracurricular supervisors or trainers, local artists, representatives from the Bireuen District Office of Education and Culture, and students participating in the *Rabbani Wahed* dance extracurricular program. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Bireuen, the only junior high school in Bireuen District that consistently maintains the teaching and preservation of *Rabbani Wahed* dance through its arts extracurricular activities. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The collected data were then thematically analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes the processes of data condensation, data display, and the drawing and verification of conclusions. This design also facilitates the development of a contextual digital learning video as an additional output, addressing the school's educational needs.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of the *Rabbani Wahed* Dance in Junior High Schools

The implementation of the *Rabbani Wahed* Dance as an extracurricular activity in junior high schools in Bireuen Regency is primarily centered at SMP Negeri 1 Bireuen, which since 2018 has become the pioneer of this program. The extracurricular activity was active and consistently involved students until early 2025, with the main objectives of preserving traditional arts, instilling character values, and providing space for students to develop their potential and creativity. This is in line with Aiman's (2024) view that arts education is an integral part of the learning process, supporting the achievement of educational goals, particularly in optimizing individual potential to foster creativity in both formal and non-formal education contexts.

Recent findings indicate that the activity has been inactive for the past six months due to the graduation of students who previously served as active dancers and the lack of continuous regeneration. This situation is worsened by the limited competence of cultural arts teachers, who have not mastered the *Rabbani Wahed* dance, and the low interest of new students in participating.

The extracurricular practice was routinely conducted three times a week in the afternoons, with each session lasting approximately 1.5 hours. Participation was limited to

male students, consisting of 10 dancers and 2 vocal accompanists (*syekh*). The training process included stages of warming up, introduction of movements, repetition, introduction of lyrics, and evaluation of coordination. This pattern demonstrates a systematic approach to training, although still simple and not supported by written modules, as shown in the figure below:



Figure 1. Training process of the Rabbani Wahed Dance

Amelia (2025) emphasizes that traditional dance education is not solely oriented toward the development of motor skills and student creativity, but also plays an important role in instilling character values such as discipline, cooperation, and responsibility. Consistent with this perspective, the extracurricular implementation of the *Rabbani Wahed* Dance not only serves as a means of cultural preservation but also as a medium for character education. The cultural arts teacher emphasized that through the practice of the *Rabbani Wahed* Dance, students were trained to develop responsibility, discipline, politeness, and self-confidence.

Meanwhile, students themselves reported experiencing a sense of solidarity and pride in being able to introduce their local culture to a wider audience. Thus, the extracurricular activity of the *Rabbani Wahed* Dance has the capacity to internalize cultural and religious values while simultaneously serving as a vehicle for character education aligned with the goals of national education.

Furthermore, students of SMP Negeri 1 Bireuen also gained performance experience in various events, both at the local level and outside the region. A notable example was their participation in a Malay arts festival celebrating the anniversary of Siak Regency, Riau, which demonstrated the *Rabbani Wahed* Dance as a representation of Bireuen's cultural identity on a broader stage. This experience not only reinforced students' motivation to practice but also fostered collective pride within the school and enhanced the positive image of the region in the public eye.

The role of the cultural arts teacher in this implementation was more of a facilitator, given their limited competence in mastering the *Rabbani Wahed* Dance. In contrast, the instructor held a central role, whether from outside the school or from more experienced students and alumni who supported regeneration. The teaching methods focused on movement demonstrations, corrections, and the internalization of cultural and religious values embodied in the dance, as illustrated in the figure below:



Figure 2. Instructor demonstrating Rabbani Wahed Dance movements to students

Support from the school was evident in the provision of training space, costumes, and opportunities for students to perform in various events, both at the school and outside the region. The principal not only played a role in providing physical facilities but also demonstrated readiness to adopt digital media as an alternative learning resource. This was reflected in the use of projectors for dance socialization and openness to video as a training aid. The principal's support was key to ensuring that digitalization could be integrated into extracurricular activities as a solution when direct coaching was not feasible. Students' responses to the activity during its active period were relatively positive; they regarded the dance as a means to preserve local culture while building self-confidence.

Thus, the experience of SMP Negeri 1 Bireuen shows that the implementation of the *Rabbani Wahed* Dance in junior high schools can serve as a concrete effort for school-based traditional arts preservation. However, the inactivity over the past six months highlights the fragility of preservation efforts that rely solely on internal student regeneration. This underscores the importance of policy support, teacher competence, and alternative strategies based on digital technology to ensure continuity when regeneration is disrupted. Karoso (2017) argued that school principals play a strategic role in determining the success of programs, school achievements, and teacher performance, including the development of traditional arts, by guiding changes in the mindset, attitudes, and behaviors of the school community.

The findings of this study confirm the relevance of this perspective, as the principal of SMP Negeri 1 Bireuen demonstrated a strong commitment to preserving the *Rabbani Wahed* Dance through extracurricular activities. Nevertheless, the field realities indicate that not all schools share the same commitment to supporting the preservation of this dance, making its sustainability heavily dependent on the consistency of SMP Negeri 1 Bireuen and the support of multiple stakeholders to ensure the transmission of local culture remains safeguarded.

Challenges And Preservation Strategies

The implementation of *Tari Rabbani Wahed* extracurricular activities in junior high schools across Bireuen Regency faces multiple challenges. From a human resource perspective, most arts and culture teachers lack specific competencies in this dance, primarily due to the absence of teaching modules or instructional manuals, as well as the limited availability of training programs on *Tari Rabbani Wahed* for teachers in the region. Consequently, the sustainability of the program relies heavily on external trainers or local artists. This situation is further complicated by the scarcity of professional trainers and issues related to honorariums, which often result in inadequate recognition of their contributions. Financial support for artists, therefore, becomes a critical aspect. Many trainers and artists come from modest economic backgrounds, making it difficult to balance their role as cultural mentors with daily subsistence needs without adequate funding. This finding resonates with Aiman (2017), who noted that the preservation of *Mop-Mop* art in North Aceh was hindered by the lack of governmental attention to artists' welfare, despite their vital role in sustaining the tradition.

Another significant challenge is the declining interest among students. The younger generation shows decreasing enthusiasm for traditional dance activities, with some students reluctant to participate due to the perception that the dance is exclusively male-oriented, while others associate dancing with femininity. As a result, some male students fear being stigmatized if they engage in dancing. In contrast, many students are more attracted to modern, popular extracurricular activities. Modernization and the pervasive influence of popular culture have thus diminished the space for traditional art appreciation among students.

Technical challenges also arise, as the vigorous and fast-paced movements of *Tari Rabbani Wahed* are difficult for novice learners to master. Issues of discipline, such as tardiness and irregular attendance, further hinder the continuity of practice sessions. From a policy perspective, limited school funding for trainers has obstructed program sustainability. Moreover, the absence of specific directives from the Bireuen Education and Culture Office mandating the preservation of *Tari Rabbani Wahed* through extracurricular activities exacerbates the issue. Conflicts over claims of choreography ownership have also complicated preservation efforts. However, it is important to underline that the version of *Tari Rabbani Wahed* taught at SMP Negeri 1 Bireuen the focus of this study was created by M. Kasem Ahmad on August 17, 1988, in North Aceh, and has been officially recognized as an *Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)* and protected under Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) since November 29, 2021. The Education and Culture Office has recommended that schools adopt Ahmad's version as the legally recognized and authentic form. This provides schools with legal legitimacy and cultural authenticity in their implementation.

Challenges also emerge within the context of digitalization, including limited technological integration, the low digital literacy of teachers and trainers, and the potential decline of live performance experiences if students rely too heavily on digital media. Excessive dependence on digital platforms risks reducing students' opportunities to engage in the collective, social, and spiritual aspects of *Tari Rabbani Wahed*. As a form of collective performance, dance embodies togetherness, unity, and non-verbal communication dimensions that digital media cannot fully replace. Hence, digitalization should be positioned as a complementary tool rather than a substitute, ensuring that experiential values of arts education are preserved.

To address these challenges, several strategies have been attempted by schools, teachers, and trainers. Schools appointed coordinators to assist students, while regeneration systems

were applied by engaging experienced students to train newcomers. This strategy proved effective in maintaining continuity, although the quality varied. The support of school principals through facility provision and performance opportunities was also an important factor. However, the current inactivity of the program indicates that internal strategies alone are insufficient to ensure sustainability. A crucial strategy involves enhancing the capacity of teachers and trainers through workshops on *Tari Rabbani Wahed* and digital content production. Such initiatives can be facilitated by the Education and Culture Office in the form of training on dance instruction, tutorial video development, social media management, and basic editing tools. This would enable teachers to serve not only as practice facilitators but also as content creators who can extend the reach of *Tari Rabbani Wahed* learning through digital platforms.

Furthermore, preservation strategies must emphasize the integration of cultural and religious values during training sessions, motivating students not only through physical movement but also through the philosophical meanings embedded in the dance. The Bireuen Education and Culture Office has also announced plans to launch the “Art Movement in Schools” program in 2026, aimed at strengthening cultural preservation within formal education, including *Tari Rabbani Wahed*. In addition, the Office is considering direct engagement of *Rabbani Wahed* artists to train students in selected schools, ensuring the authenticity of movements and lyrics, while facilitating direct transmission of knowledge from original sources to the younger generation.

In conclusion, the key challenges to preserving *Tari Rabbani Wahed* include limited human resources, declining student interest, technical difficulties in training, and insufficient policy support. The program’s inactivity at SMP Negeri 1 Bireuen underscores the urgency of implementing multi-stakeholder strategies. These efforts should encompass strengthening school-based initiatives, fostering sustained collaboration with local artists, and ensuring more concrete governmental support. The findings align with Aiman (2017), who emphasized that cultural preservation cannot be sustained without broad community involvement and its integration into everyday life. Preservation can only endure if it remains embedded and actively practiced within the community.

The Potential Of Digitalization In Preservation

The findings of this study reveal that the application of digital technology holds significant potential in supporting the preservation of the *Rabbani Wahed* Dance in schools. Digital media, particularly instructional videos, have proven effective in facilitating the transfer of knowledge and dance skills. This aligns with the perspective of Ramadhan (2024), who argued that the utilization of information and communication technology-based learning media contributes positively to both the process and learning outcomes of students, including within the context of arts education. Similarly, the study by Fitriyani (2025) also demonstrates that the use of audiovisual media is more effective in enhancing student learning outcomes compared to conventional media.

At SMP Negeri 1 Bireuen, teachers and trainers employ performance videos available on YouTube as supplementary tools during training sessions. These videos not only assist students in memorizing movements but also serve as references when trainers or students forget certain sequences. The use of digital media was even introduced at the recruitment stage, through the screening of *Rabbani Wahed* Dance videos with projectors. This indicates that, although interactive learning applications are not yet available, the school has already adapted simple digital forms for both socialization and learning purposes. The current suspension of extracurricular activities further highlights the strategic role of digital media,

whereby the documentation of dance in the form of instructional videos can serve as a solution for regeneration when no trainers or experienced students are available to continue the practice.

From the students' perspective, digital media is considered practical and flexible, enabling independent learning outside extracurricular schedules. They expressed that the availability of systematic instructional videos containing content such as the history, costumes, and sequences of movements from slow to fast would greatly facilitate the training process. Thus, the use of digital media is not only an instrument of cultural preservation but also a means of fostering student autonomy in learning.

Romadhan (2025) emphasized that live streaming via Instagram and TikTok effectively expands audience reach while simultaneously serving as a medium for cultural education and encouraging youth engagement as content creators. This initiative demonstrates that live streaming represents an adaptive strategy for cultural preservation that can be replicated by other arts communities. In line with this, *Rabbani Wahed* dance trainers and artists also highlight the importance of utilizing social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram as tools for documentation and promotion. Digitalization allows the *Rabbani Wahed* Dance to reach broader audiences, extending beyond the school environment to the global community.

From a policy perspective, the Department of Education and Culture of Bireuen Regency has expressed its support for the utilization of digital technology. The planned "Art in Schools Movement" program, scheduled for 2026 with targets set through 2030, places digitalization as one of the key strategies for long-term cultural preservation. The availability of instructional videos is seen as a solution for schools that lack the financial resources to hire external trainers, while also serving as a form of intergenerational documentation.

Accordingly, the digitalization of the *Rabbani Wahed* Dance holds strategic potential across three main domains: as an effective learning medium, as an instrument of cultural documentation and promotion, and as a long-term preservation strategy aligned with educational policy directions. The current inactivity of extracurricular activities at SMP Negeri 1 Bireuen underscores that digitalization can no longer be viewed as an optional supplement but rather as an urgent necessity to ensure the continuity of *Rabbani Wahed* Dance amid challenges of regeneration, modernization, and shifting youth interests.

Therefore, future efforts to preserve Tari *Rabbani Wahed* should prioritize the development of video-based learning media to support teaching and independent practice. Schools can leverage digital platforms such as YouTube or social media to distribute tutorial videos, which not only facilitate students in mastering dance movements but also introduce the dance to audiences who may be unfamiliar with it, including art educators within schools. This recommendation aims to ensure that the learning process remains effective even in the absence of professional instructors, while simultaneously reinforcing cultural preservation through technology-driven instructional materials that are accessible and relevant to the current educational context.

CONCLUSIONS

The preservation of the *Rabbani Wahed* Dance through extracurricular activities at SMP Negeri 1 Bireuen demonstrates the strategic role of schools in maintaining traditional arts while nurturing students' character. Despite its significance, the program's continuity remains challenged by limited teacher competence, weak regeneration, declining student interest, and the absence of strong policy and funding support. These findings indicate the need for collaborative efforts among schools, cultural practitioners, and local authorities through teacher training, the development of contextual learning resources, and more concrete educational policies.

The integration of digital technology emerges as an effective and adaptive approach to strengthen preservation efforts. Beyond serving as a tool for learning and documentation, digitalization enables broader public engagement and promotes cultural awareness among younger generations. Therefore, optimizing the digital aspect of arts education can serve as a sustainable pathway to preserve the *Rabbani Wahed* Dance amid modernization and shifting cultural interests.

In addition, the findings of this study provide valuable insights for policymakers and educational institutions to formulate long-term strategies for cultural preservation. Establishing partnerships between schools and local art communities can ensure continuous regeneration and authentic transmission of traditional knowledge. Furthermore, integrating local arts into digital-based curricula could enhance students' appreciation of their cultural heritage while fostering innovation and creativity in the learning process. These efforts are essential to ensure that traditional arts, such as the *Rabbani Wahed* Dance, remain relevant, appreciated, and practiced in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to express their gratitude to the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology (Diktiristek), Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia (Kemendikbudristek RI) for the financial support provided through the Beginner Lecturer Research Grant (Penelitian Dosen Pemula/PDP) in 2025, which enabled the successful completion of this research. Special thanks are also extended to Universitas Islam Kebangsaan Indonesia (UNIKI) for providing research facilities, as well as to the Department of Education and Culture of Bireuen Regency, the principal of SMP Negeri 1 Bireuen, art teachers, students, dance instructors, and *Rabbani Wahed* artists who actively participated and contributed valuable data to this study.

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