

The Umbul Dance in Situraja in the Trajectory of History and Local Cultural Education

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ABSTRACT

The Umbul Dance is a traditional performing art form that emerged from the helaran tradition of the agrarian community in Situraja, Sumedang Regency, West Java. This dance has spiritual, aesthetic, and pedagogical dimensions, and has become a cultural symbol of the Sundanese people, passed down orally across generations. This study aims to examine the origins, transformation of form and function, and the role of the Umbul Dance in local cultural education. Using the primary theoretical foundation of Louis Gottschalk, who emphasizes reconstructing the significance of the past through a process of critical selection, verification, and interpretation of sources, using a cultural history approach, oral history according to Paul Thompson and Alessandro Portelli, and ethnopedagogy based on Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, this study employed in-depth interviews, participant observation, and visual documentation. The findings indicate that the Umbul Dance has undergone significant revitalization since 1976 through the active participation of community leaders and the arts community, successfully transforming it from a local ritual into a representative art form in education. Its existence is integrated into the Independent Curriculum as part of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) to instill local character values. This research confirms that the Umbul Dance is not merely a cultural heritage, but also a contextual educational strategy instrument based on local wisdom that can respond to the challenges of the times.

Keywords: umbul dance, situraja, cultural history, ethnopedagogy, oral history

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INTRODUCTION

Local culture is the foundation of a community's identity, manifested in various forms of expression, including the performing arts. In the context of the Sundanese community in Sumedang, the Umbul Dance occupies a strategic position as a traditional art form that carries not only aesthetic but also historical and pedagogical value (Ufie et al., 2020). This dance originally grew from the agrarian roots of village life as part of the *helaran* art form, reflecting folk festivals (Muzakkir, 2021). The Umbul Dance underwent a transformation in function and meaning, from cultural expression to education of local values (Ardiansyah et al., 2024; Fauzi & Kumalasari, 2020).

The Umbul Dance became widely known in the early 21st century as part of performances accompanying traditional ceremonies and certain commemorations, particularly in the eastern region of Sumedang. This dance has a simple movement structure yet is rich in symbolism, accompanied by traditional music and distinctive costumes that reflect harmony, sincerity, and respect for the cycles of nature. This transformation in meaning began to emerge in the 1970s, when local governments and educational institutions began promoting the Umbul Dance at various festivals and school events. This process led to the Umbul Dance becoming not only an artistic product but also an instrument of local cultural education, embodying moral, spiritual, and social values (Subakri & Mangkachi, 2021).

Research on the Umbul Dance is important because it reflects cultural dynamics in relation to the process of value inheritance. A cultural history approach positions this dance as a living artifact that holds narratives about social change and the structure of meaning within Sumedang society (Amboro et al., 2021; Ivygina et al., 2018). According to Paul Thompson, oral history allows researchers to access collective experiences and memories that have previously remained undocumented formally, thus providing new perspectives on understanding local history. In the context of the Umbul Dance, the narratives of cultural actors dancers, art teachers, traditional leaders are key to reconstructing the changing form, function, and values of this dance over the past eight decades.

Furthermore, this study utilizes an ethnopedagogical approach based on Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in viewing this *helaran* art form. Vygotsky emphasized that learning does not occur in a vacuum, but rather in a social and cultural context involving interactions between individuals. In the Umbul Dance training practice, the relationship between senior and junior dancers reflects a scaffolding learning model, where cultural values are passed on through direct practice, imitation, and collective interpretation. This process demonstrates that traditional dance serves as a vehicle for character education based on local experience and cultural wisdom (Hidayati et al., 2020; Ramdani & Narawati, 2024; Subaidi, 2020).

Traditional Sundanese art, including dance, is an effective laboratory for local cultural values in shaping the social and spiritual awareness of the younger generation. Cultural learning is not solely based on narrative content or teaching materials, but rather on the process of actualizing values through shared practices within the community. Therefore, preserving the Umbul Dance must be positioned not merely as a conservation effort but also as part of a contextual and participatory cultural education strategy (Ardiansyah et al., 2024).

Using an oral history and ethnopedagogical approach, this paper aims to examine how the Sumedang Umbul Dance has undergone changes throughout history, as well as how it has become a sustainable medium for local cultural education. The study focuses on its origins, the mechanisms for transmitting cultural values through dance practices within the community, and the changing function of the Umbul Dance from 1940 to 2025.

METHOD

This research employs a cultural history approach (Wasino & Hartatik, 2018), grounded in Louis Gottschalk's primary theory, which emphasizes the importance of reconstructing the past through a process of critical selection, verification, and interpretation of sources (Gottschalk, 1983). Gottschalk stated that history focuses not only on major events documented in writing but also encompasses the social and cultural dynamics passed down orally in community life. In

this context, the Umbul Dance is understood as a cultural artifact that preserves historical traces through oral traditions and social practices that persist across generations.

To uncover information not recorded in official documents, this research employs an oral history approach, as developed by Alessandro Portelli, who views subjective testimony from cultural actors as a valid form of meaning construction in historiography. Portelli emphasizes that in oral history, "errors" or "factual discrepancies" are not obstacles but rather reveal how communities understand events and their culture emotionally and symbolically. Therefore, in-depth interviews were conducted with Oting Sutarja, a performer and inheritor of the Umbul Dance from the Tunas Mekar Pancawarna Arts Community in Situraja, as the pioneer of the Umbul Dance revival in the Situraja region.

In addition to a historical approach, this research also employs an ethnopedagogical perspective, as explained by Lev Vygotsky, emphasizing the role of social and cultural context in the learning process. Vygotsky viewed education as inseparable from local values and cultural symbols passed down from generation to generation. Therefore, the Umbul Dance is analyzed as an educational medium that indirectly transmits Sundanese character values, such as mutual cooperation, gratitude, communal solidarity, and expressions of local pride and a spiritual attitude toward nature. In this regard, the researcher not only recorded historical narratives but also observed the role of the Umbul Dance in local learning activities and the practice of transmitting values through performing arts.

Data collection was conducted through a combination of in-depth interviews, participant observation, and visual documentation of the Umbul Dance activities still preserved by the local community. Data validity was tested through source triangulation and interpretation of meaning based on the local cultural context. Data analysis was conducted qualitatively using an interpretative approach to understand the symbolic meaning and social function of the Umbul Dance within the framework of history and cultural education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Origins of the Umbul Dance

The Situraja region is located in the northeastern part of Sumedang Regency, West Java Province. Administratively, it comprises several villages with a fertile agricultural landscape, fed by tributaries of the Cimanuk River, and surrounded by hills that have been a source of livelihood for the community since the Dutch East Indies colonial era. This area is known as a center for agricultural and horticultural production, with a strong social structure that upholds the values of family and mutual cooperation based on Sundanese customs. Culturally, Situraja holds a wealth of local traditions stemming from agricultural practices, folk spirituality, and the *helaran* system and folk performing arts. One cultural expression that has grown from these roots is the Umbul Dance (Ramadhani et al., 2023).

The Umbul Dance in the Situraja region is inextricably linked to the dynamics of the migration of traditional artists that occurred in the 1930s and 1940s. The Umbul Dance was first introduced to Situraja by the Reog Pancawarna troupe from the Kulinyar area, Tomo District, Sumedang. This art troupe actively toured the area, presenting folk performing arts that combined elements of dance, music, and traditional rituals.

One key member of the Reog Pancawarna troupe was an artist named Sutarja, widely known by the nickname Koyib. He not only played a crucial role in the performances but also became a cultural figure, bringing the distinctive dance form from his home region. After touring various regions, Koyib settled in the Babakan Bandung area of Situraja, after marrying a woman from the area. This event marked a crucial moment in the process of cultural transmission and transformation: the dance art originally rooted in Kulinyar began to undergo a process of localization in the new socio-cultural environment of Situraja (Sutini et al., 2025).

The Umbul Dance, in its original form, was part of the Reog Pancawarna performance repertoire, featuring symbolic movement and traditional Sundanese musical accompaniment. The Umbul Dance is a folk festival, better known as the "*helaran*" dance, which accompanies the circumcised bride and groom to the bathing place, as a form of entertainment for the bride

and groom, ensuring a smooth circumcision process. Over time, this dance form was modified to suit the needs and context of the Situraja community, becoming a traditional village performance art performed at harvest celebrations, weddings, circumcisions, and other traditional rituals.

After Koyib's death in 1965, the Reog Pancawarna troupe experienced a significant decline. Shortly afterward, the group disbanded, and its members dispersed to various regions. However, the artistic legacy left by Koyib and his group did not disappear. On the contrary, the dance was passed down informally to local residents, particularly the Oting, and developed into a local art form now known as the Umbul Situraja Dance.

Transformation of Dance Aesthetics and Function

After 1965, the departure of the Umbul elders resulted in the loss of the primary source of the Umbul dance's origins. However, the Umbul dance continued, regardless of its origins. After a decade-long hiatus following the death of Sutarja (Koyib) and the disbandment of the Reog Pancawarna troupe in mid-1966, the Umbul dance experienced a revival thanks to the efforts and persistence of Oting Suharyat, a young local arts and cultural figure in Situraja. This revival occurred on a historic occasion, August 17, 1976, which also commemorated Indonesian Independence Day.

To revive the community's collective memory of the Umbul dance, Oting Suharyat actively contacted living traditional artists who had previously participated in Umbul performances. Some of the key figures he successfully collaborated with included Mr. Wardi, Mr. Ahya (a Sundanese trumpet expert), Ms. Ulki (a senior dancer), and Mr. Wikanta (a dogdog musical accompanist). They are living witnesses and keepers of the cultural memory of the form and meaning of the Umbul Dance in the past.



Figure 1 Oting Suharyat during an interview and sharing his story at his residence on June 11, 2025

With a spirit of mutual cooperation and a determination to preserve their ancestral culture, these leaders agreed to train and prepare for the Umbul Dance performance. Intensive training sessions were held for one week, from August 10 to 17, 1976, at night, so as not to disrupt community activities and to match the mystical atmosphere that accompanies the Umbul Dance. The training was led by Ibu Ulki, the lead dancer, while the musical accompaniment was led by Pak Wilenta, who arranged the traditional dogdog and tarompét rhythms.

The Umbul Dance performance on the evening of August 17, 1976, in Situraja was not just an ordinary artistic performance, but also a symbol of the revival of the community's cultural identity and a manifestation of the spirit of independence through the preservation of local culture. Community support was substantial, as many residents remembered the Umbul

performance as part of their village's history. This event marked a significant turning point in the history of Sumedang's traditional arts. Since then, the Umbul Dance has been revived within the artistic and traditional communities of Situraja, inspiring the younger generation to learn it.

The Umbul Dance, which developed in Situraja, not only has historical and spiritual dimensions, but also a distinctive choreographic structure, representing the values of communal solidarity, expressions of local pride, and the aesthetics of the body in Sundanese culture. Based on oral history and field observations, the Umbul Dance consists of five basic movements, which serve as the basis for developing variations in the performance.

The first movement is performed by folding the right hand in an L-shape, while the left hand supports the bottom of the right hand in a graceful position. The second movement is the opposite: the left hand forms an L-shape and the right hand supports it underneath. These two initial movements reflect the principles of balance, harmony, and symbolize respect. The third movement is performed with both hands at the waist while flicking the fingers, ending with a subtle head-butt as the music reaches the end of the measure. The fourth movement maintains the position of the hands at the waist with a variety of finger flicks that emphasize the delicate movements of Sundanese women.

However, the fifth movement has been removed from modern performances as it is deemed inconsistent with the values of manners and moral norms prevailing in Sundanese society, after several appearances in various performances in West Java. This shows that the Umbul Dance is not a static art form, but a living art that constantly adapts to changes in social values and the dynamics of community ethics.

Umbul Dance in Local Education

Over time, the Umbul Dance has become more than just a means of community expression, but has transformed into a social performance art for youth. This performance is generally performed on full moon nights, traditionally considered a sacred and magical time in the Sundanese cultural calendar. In these performances, the Umbul Dance is presented as a collaborative art form that combines dance movements, traditional gending music, and visual props, creating a form known as "Umbul Kreasi" (Creative Umbul) with the Pamayang Umbul performance format.

Pamayang Umbul is not only an aesthetic form, but also a regenerative strategy implemented by the Tunas Mekar Pancawarna Arts Circle. In the Pamayang Umbul performance, local youth are actively involved as dancers, musicians, directors, and organizers. This activity reflects the transmission of cultural values between generations, as well as concrete efforts to preserve culture through a participatory approach and community-based arts education. The involvement of youth in the Umbul Kreasi performance represents a form of learning through social interaction, where young people internalize cultural values, symbols, and ethics through collective practice and guidance from artistic elders. This means that the Umbul Dance not only preserves a form of ancestral heritage but also serves as a platform for character, identity, and cultural education for the younger generation.



Figure 2 Gratitude from STSI

The consistent Pamayang Umbul activities have brought the Umbul Dance to various cultural events at the local and regional levels. This dance is routinely performed every August 17th Independence Day commemoration, both at the village and district levels, and is part of the renggong horse accompaniment and art parades at traditional ceremonies, weddings, and harvest celebrations (*lampur di gaji*). The Umbul Dance's existence was further recognized when the group won first place in the Sumedang Regency Traditional Arts Festival in 1982 and represented Sumedang Regency in the Traditional Arts Exhibition at Gedung Sate Bandung in 1983. In the context of cross-regional performances, the Umbul Dance was performed at the farewell party for PKI TESIS students at SMA 8 Jakarta on January 13, 2003, and at the Sumedang Regency DPRD Building on April 28, 2003.

On July 24, 2003, the group was entrusted with representing Situraja District to welcome the new Regent at the State Building. This dance also took part in the Political Party Banner parade from the Regent's Building to the Election Supervisory Agency Building on May 21, 2004, and in the lowering of the Red and White flag on August 17, 2004. Its participation in the opening of the Sumedang Regency Election on January 21, 2004, also demonstrated that the Umbul Dance is present not only in the artistic context, but also in the social and political spheres of society. At the higher education level, the Umbul Dance was performed at the STSI Buah Batu Bandung campus on May 11, 2005, and again represented Sumedang Regency in the West Java Traditional Arts Festival held at the West Java Cultural Park, Dago Bawah, on December 23, 2007, alongside representatives from various regencies such as Subang, Majalengka, Garut, Indramayu, and Bandung. This series of performances is clear evidence that the Umbul Dance is part of a living cultural heritage that continues to be preserved, developed, and voiced through representative performance spaces that build cultural identity.

Since the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, the government has given educational institutions the freedom to develop learning based on local contexts and student needs, one way being through the integration of local wisdom into the learning process (Handoko & Wasino, 2020; Sayono et al., 2020). In the Situraja area of Sumedang Regency, the community and schools have utilized this opportunity to preserve the Umbul Dance, a traditional art form deeply rooted in the social and cultural life of the community. The Umbul Dance is now performed not only in traditional contexts or circumcision rituals, but has become part of the arts and culture teaching materials, even being the theme of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), which addresses the topic of "Local Wisdom."



Figure 3 Oting Suharyat in the P5 activities of SMAN Situraja

Students' direct involvement in the Umbul Dance practice, both through intracurricular learning and school cultural projects, not only strengthens artistic and cultural competencies but also instills character values such as mutual cooperation, gratitude, and respect for ancestors. Furthermore, this activity is a crucial part of the local cultural revitalization strategy, as the learning process takes place through collaboration between teachers, students, and traditional leaders such as Ibu Ulki and activists from the Tunas Mekar Pancawarna Arts Circle. In this sense, the school serves as a space for cultural heritage, while the Umbul Dance serves as a pedagogical tool that bridges cultural values with the formal curriculum.

By utilizing the Umbul Dance as a living learning resource, schools in Situraja not only technically fulfill the mandate of the Independent Curriculum but also realize an education rooted in local values (Anyolo et al., 2018; Rahayu et al., 2022). This step forms part of an ethnopedagogical-based character education and demonstrates that traditional arts such as the Umbul can remain relevant and meaningful in contemporary education (Raković et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

The Umbul Dance is a manifestation of traditional art that is not only rooted in the socio-ritual system of the Sundanese people of Situraja but also demonstrates its adaptability to socio-cultural dynamics for over eight decades. Originally part of the Pancawarna Reog repertoire, which developed in the 1930s, the Umbul Dance experienced a period of hiatus and was then revived through the initiative of local figures such as Oting Suharyat in 1976. This revitalization process involved the collective participation of the community and artists, demonstrating that local culture can be restored through community work and collective memory. The transformation of the Umbul Dance from a ritual art form to a performing art form and educational tool reflects the fact that culture is not static, but rather contextual and communicative. Through an oral history approach and Lev Vygotsky's ethnopedagogical theory, the Umbul Dance has proven to be an educational medium that internalizes values such as mutual cooperation, respect for ancestors, spirituality, and communal solidarity in learning practices. In schools, especially since the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, the Umbul Dance has been integrated into arts and culture learning and the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), making it an effective and relevant medium for character education. Therefore, the Umbul Dance is not only important to preserve as an intangible cultural heritage but also needs to be continuously developed as a pedagogical instrument rooted in local values. Collaboration between the arts community, schools, and local governments is key to maintaining the sustainability of the Umbul Dance as part of a contextual, participatory, and transformative cultural education strategy.

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