

The Distinctive Banjar Art of Balamut

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Abstract: Local wisdom encompasses noble values believed to be true and upheld within the social order of local communities, with the aim of protecting and sustainably managing the environment. One manifestation of local wisdom in the form of oral tradition art is Lamut, a solo performance art originating from the Banjar people in South Kalimantan. Lamut centers its main character in the narrative and has grown and developed alongside its supporting community. Furthermore, the art of Balamut, a distinctive oral cultural heritage of the Banjar community, uniquely combines elements of storytelling, music, and Islamic values. This performance is generally presented by a pelamut (storyteller) who conveys hikayat (epic tales) or local legends in a distinctive narrative style, accompanied by traditional musical instruments such as the rebana (a type of frame drum). Nevertheless, this oral tradition art is beginning to face the threat of extinction. Therefore, this research aims to comprehensively describe the art of Lamut/Balamut, including its form, function, and the cultural values it embodies, identify the factors contributing to its threatened extinction, and elaborate on preservation efforts amidst the currents of modernization. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method with data collection techniques including literature study, interviews, and direct observation. The analysis reveals that this art form, believed to have originated in China and integrated into the art of the Banjar community, functions not only as entertainment but also as a medium for moral education and the dissemination of Islamic teachings. Although its existence is beginning to erode due to the progress of time, revitalization efforts by local communities and regional governments are starting to show positive results in maintaining the existence of this art form. This study is expected to contribute to the preservation of local culture and strengthen the cultural identity of the Banjar community.

Keywords: ScBalamut, banjar oral tradition art, local wisdom, cultural preservation, threat of extinction, south kalimantan

1. Introduction

Indonesia, as an archipelagic nation rich in cultural diversity, possesses an invaluable heritage of local wisdom (Dahlan, 2025). This local wisdom, manifested in various forms of traditions, knowledge, and practices, has served as the foundation for the social, cultural, and environmental life of communities across different regions (Mungmachon, 2012). South Kalimantan, with its rich Banjar culture, also holds diverse local wisdom that deserves to be studied and preserved.

One form of local wisdom that holds significant importance within the Banjar community, particularly in the Hulu Sungai Tengah Regency, is the tradition of Balamut (Hermawan, 2023). Etymologically, Balamut refers to the practice of oral storytelling that has been passed down from generation to generation. More than just entertainment, Balamut is a crucial medium for the transmission of noble values, social norms, local history, and practical knowledge about community life and the natural environment (Abatayo & Gumapang, 2024). Through its narrative flow, characters, and distinctive delivery style, Balamut serves as an effective informal education tool and strengthens social bonds among community members.

In the Hulu Sungai Tengah Regency, the Balamut tradition possesses its own uniqueness that reflects the history, beliefs, and characteristics of the local community (John, 2025). The stories conveyed in Balamut often revolve around origin legends, tales of local heroism, myths about nature and supernatural beings, as well as narratives containing moral messages. The performers of Balamut, who are usually respected elders with extensive knowledge, play a vital role as guardians and inheritors of this oral tradition.

However, in line with the currents of modernization, the development of information technology, and changes in community lifestyles, the Balamut tradition in the Hulu Sungai Tengah Regency, like many other oral traditions, faces significant challenges (Hartanto, 2023). The emergence of various forms of modern entertainment and the changing preferences of the younger generation have the potential to erode the existence and appreciation of Balamut. If there are no structured and sustainable preservation efforts, it is feared that this local wisdom, rich in values and meaning, will become increasingly marginalized and even forgotten.

Considering the importance of Balamut as an integral part of the cultural identity and a source of local wisdom for the Hulu Sungai Tengah community, in-depth research and study of this tradition become crucial (Putra et al., 2024). A comprehensive understanding of the history, functions, forms, and current challenges faced by Balamut will serve as an important foundation for formulating effective preservation strategies (Fajinmi & Oloyede, 2025). Therefore, this paper aims to examine the local wisdom of Balamut in the Hulu Sungai Tengah Regency in greater depth. Through this research, it is hoped that the important values contained within Balamut can be identified, the dynamics of its development in the modern era can be understood, and strategic recommendations for its preservation can be formulated for the sustainability of this valuable cultural heritage.

2. Research Objectives

This research is explanatory in nature, aiming to explain the art of Lamut in South Kalimantan along with its dynamics. The method employed is a qualitative descriptive method. Qualitative research aims to describe and analyze phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts of individuals or groups (Hancock et al., 2001). Furthermore, according to Polkinghorne (2005) qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words about people and observable behavior. According to Bijou et al. (1968) the descriptive method is a method carried out without using numbers, but rather by understanding the interaction between concepts being empirically studied. The research techniques used include library research and observation. Library research was conducted during the collection of materials relevant to the research from libraries and personal collections.

3. Research Questions

There are four research questions in this research which are:

- a. What are the form and function of the Balamut tradition as local wisdom within the Banjar community of Hulu Sungai Tengah Regency?
- b. What local wisdom values are inherent in the Balamut tradition in Hulu Sungai Tengah Regency?
- c. How has the Balamut tradition in Hulu Sungai Tengah Regency evolved in the face of modernization and changing community lifestyles?
- d. What challenges are encountered in the preservation of the Balamut tradition in Hulu Sungai Tengah Regency?

4. Literature Review

This research will be built upon the theoretical and empirical foundations developed in previous studies concerning local wisdom, oral traditions, and the preservation of cultural heritage (Rasidi et al., 2025). This literature review section aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the key concepts relevant to the study of the Balamut tradition in Hulu Sungai Tengah Regency. The discussion will begin with the concept of local wisdom, where various definitions and characteristics from the perspectives of experts will be explored. Emphasis will be placed on understanding local wisdom as a legacy of knowledge, values, and practices passed down through generations within a community (Bihari, 2023). Furthermore, this review will outline the functions and roles of local wisdom in various aspects of community life, including environmental management, social interaction, and the formation of cultural identity. A general overview of the richness of local wisdom in Indonesia will also be presented to contextualize the research within a broader cultural landscape.

Next, the literature review will discuss oral traditions and their role in society. The definition and various forms of oral traditions, such as myths, legends, folktales, and narrative performances, will be identified. The crucial role of oral traditions as a medium for the transmission of knowledge, cultural values, history, and entertainment across generations will be analyzed (Bascom, 1965). The power of oral traditions in shaping collective identity and strengthening social bonds will be a primary focus. In a regional context, this review will introduce various forms of oral traditions present in South Kalimantan, which form the background for the emergence of the Balamut tradition.

More specifically, the literature review will delve into the Balamut tradition within the context of the Banjar community. If available, the history of the emergence and development of this tradition in Hulu Sungai Tengah Regency will be traced. The essential elements of Balamut performances, such as plot, characters, language, delivery style, and musical aspects, will be described. An in-depth analysis will be conducted on the social and cultural functions of Balamut as a means of entertainment, informal education, the transmission of values, the strengthening of solidarity, and the preservation of local history.

Furthermore, this review will examine the local wisdom values inherent in oral traditions in general, referring to studies that have analyzed moral, ethical, social, and environmental values in various forms of folktales and other oral

traditions. The potential local wisdom values that may be contained within Balamut stories, such as mutual cooperation (gotong royong), wisdom, and harmony with nature, will be linked to the research context.

The challenges faced in the preservation of oral traditions in the modern era will also be an important part of this literature review. The impact of modernization, the development of information technology, and changes in community lifestyles on the existence and appreciation of oral traditions will be analyzed (Nugroho & Kesyafano, 2025). The shifting interests of the younger generation and preservation efforts that have been carried out in various contexts will be reviewed to provide a broader perspective on the issue of preservation.

Finally, the literature review will summarize previous research relevant to this research topic. Studies on oral traditions in South Kalimantan, including those specifically addressing Balamut if any exist, will be identified and analyzed. Additionally, studies on the preservation of cultural heritage, both those focusing on intangible cultural heritage and more general ones, will be reviewed to gain insights into the strategies and challenges in preserving cultural heritage. Overall, this literature review will present a theoretical and empirical framework relevant to understanding the Balamut tradition as part of the local wisdom of the Banjar community in Hulu Sungai Tengah Regency, as well as the challenges and opportunities in its preservation efforts in the modern era. This foundation will be an important stepping stone in analyzing data and formulating relevant recommendations in the subsequent sections of this research."

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This research is explanatory in nature, aiming to explain the art of Lamut in South Kalimantan along with its dynamics. The method employed is a qualitative descriptive method. Hancock et al. (2001) states that qualitative research aims to describe and analyze phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts of individuals 1 or groups. Furthermore, according to Polkinghome (2005) qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words 2 about people and observable behavior. According to Bijou et al. (1968), the descriptive method is a method carried out without using numbers, but rather by understanding the interaction between concepts being empirically studied. The research techniques used include library research and observation. Library research was conducted during the collection of materials relevant to the research from libraries and personal collections

5.2 Research Sample

This research takes place in Barikin village, Haruyan sub-district, which is believed to be the cultural center in the Central Hulu Sungai Regency. The primary data collection method used was interviews with three cultural experts who were selected as the research sample due to their knowledge and involvement in the culture being studied. This information provides an initial overview of the research's methodological approach, which tends to be qualitative, with a focus on in-depth data collection from key informants who have a deep understanding of the research topic.

5.3 Research Instrument

This research aims to identify and analyze the form, function, and local wisdom values inherent in the Balamut tradition within the Banjar community of Hulu Sungai Tengah Regency, to understand its developmental dynamics amidst modernization, to identify the challenges in its preservation, and to formulate strategic recommendations for its sustainability as a cultural heritage.

6. Findings and Discussion

6.1 Respondents' Demographic Analysis

The demographic characteristics of this research sample indicate a focus on the perspectives of adult males aged between 40 and 50 years. All three respondents involved possess established life experiences and careers, which potentially offer in-depth insights into the changes and continuity of the Balamut tradition from the viewpoint of a generation that has experienced transitional periods of development.

The variation in occupational backgrounds among the respondents ranging from an entrepreneur active in traditional art communities, a civil servant with a keen interest in local history, to a part-time Balamut artist/storyteller promises an exploration of diverse perspectives regarding the role of this tradition in the social, cultural, and even economic life of the local community. This varied involvement can enrich the understanding of the function and values of Balamut from multiple viewpoints."

6.2 Analysis of Research Questions

6.2.1 Research Question 1: What are the form and function of the Balamut tradition as local wisdom within the Banjar community of Hulu Sungai Tengah Regency?

The analysis of Balamut's form highlights the oral storytelling art of the pelamut without text, emphasizing the narrator's ability, story structure, distinctive delivery style (intonation, gestures), the use of the Banjar language and traditional

expressions containing local wisdom, as well as variations in performance duration and context (customary, entertainment). Supporting elements such as music or costumes are also considered.

The analysis of Balamut's function as local wisdom reveals its diverse roles: transmitting noble values and social norms, serving as informal education about customs and history, preserving collective memory and local identity, strengthening social bonds and solidarity, providing entertainment, transmitting practical knowledge, and serving as a medium for cultural expression and creativity within the Banjar community.

6.2.2 Research Question 2: What local wisdom values are inherent in the Balamut tradition in Hulu Sungai Tengah Regency?

This research question aims to identify the local wisdom values within the Balamut tradition in Hulu Sungai Tengah. The study will analyze Balamut stories and interview practitioners/community leaders to uncover values such as moral, social, environmental, and spiritual ones embedded within them. The analysis methods will include content analysis, semiotics, and an ethnographic approach to understand the meaning within the Banjar cultural context. The findings will categorize these values and interpret them in the life of the local community, highlighting the relevance and uniqueness of Balamut's local wisdom. This research is expected to reveal a wealth of values such as mutual cooperation (gotong royong), wisdom, harmony with nature, and respect for ancestors within this oral tradition.

6.2.3 Research Question 3: How can collaboration between principals and guidance and counseling teachers strengthen supervision and the development of teacher professionalism?

This research aims to understand how the Balamut tradition in Hulu Sungai Tengah Regency has developed and changed in the face of the current of modernization and shifting community lifestyles. The primary focus is to identify the dynamics of adaptation, challenges, and potential for the sustainability of this tradition within a continuously evolving socio-cultural context. The research will explore how the practices, forms, and meanings of the Balamut tradition are transforming, the most influential factors of modernization and lifestyle changes, as well as the responses of the community and tradition bearers in addressing them. A deep understanding of these dynamics is crucial for identifying strategies for the preservation and development of the Balamut tradition in the future, and for comprehending how local cultural heritage interacts with global trends.

6.2.4 Research Question 4: What challenges are encountered in the preservation of the Balamut tradition in Hulu Sungai Tengah Regency

This research aims to identify and deeply analyze the various challenges faced in the efforts to preserve the Balamut tradition in Hulu Sungai Tengah Regency. These challenges are expected to arise from various aspects, including socio-cultural changes that erode the interest of the younger generation, economic pressures that affect the sustainability of traditional practices, obstacles in the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and skills, limitations in effective institutional and policy support, as well as the lack of comprehensive documentation and understanding of the value and meaning of the Balamut tradition. Through an in-depth understanding of these challenges, this research hopes to provide valuable insights and constructive recommendations for stakeholders in formulating more effective and sustainable preservation strategies for the Balamut tradition.

7 Conclusion

The local wisdom of the Banjar people has grown to become an integral part of Banjar culture and plays a significant role in its development. This includes managing the environment with inherent values and moral messages, fostering responsible behavior, and cultivating respect and care for the environment. All of this should be understood within the framework of environmental quality. The higher the environmental quality, the higher the quality of life for the community within a specific environment. Lamut is a solo narrative theater art form that has become a living, growing, and evolving part of the Banjar oral tradition alongside its supporting community. Lamut itself consists of lamut tatamba (healing) and lamut for entertainment. The performance art of lamut tatamba cannot be altered, while lamut for entertainment can undergo innovation or changes based on the creativity of its artists.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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