

THE BODY LOSING GROUND: DANCE EDUCATION AND THE URGENCY OF PRESERVING LOCAL TRACES IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract

The development of digital culture and social media has accelerated the spread of popular movement trends in the choreographic practices of younger generations. This condition encourages the homogenization of movement patterns as many dancers and choreographers adopt popular choreographic movements exposed through media without understanding the cultural values and local traditions underlying them. As a result, regional choreographic identities gradually weaken and local movement characteristics become increasingly difficult to recognize. This study discusses the urgency of dance education in preserving cultural locality through choreography learning rooted in regional cultural values. The research employs a reflective qualitative approach based on artistic practices and educational experiences within cultural communities. The findings reveal that the body in dance functions not only as a medium of artistic expression, but also as a repository of cultural memory and regional identity. Choreography education based on local wisdom is able to strengthen cultural identity while encouraging the creativity of younger generations amid the influence of digital culture and global aesthetic trends. In conclusion, dance education plays a strategic role in sustaining local cultural identity through the creative choreographic processes of younger generations.

Keywords : dance education; digital culture; local wisdom; choreographic identity; younger generation.

Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technology has transformed the ways cultural knowledge is produced, circulated, and consumed across contemporary societies. In the field of dance, social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and various digital streaming services have become dominant spaces for learning, performing, and disseminating choreographic works. Through algorithm-driven systems, dance movements can spread globally within seconds, reaching audiences far beyond their original cultural contexts. This development has created unprecedented opportunities for artistic exchange, creative collaboration, and public participation in

dance practices. At the same time, it has generated significant concerns regarding the sustainability of local cultural identities and the preservation of embodied cultural knowledge.

Digital culture has altered traditional modes of dance transmission. Historically, dance knowledge was acquired through direct interaction between teachers and learners within specific cultural communities. The learning process involved not only the mastery of movement techniques but also the internalization of cultural values, social norms, philosophical meanings, and collective memories embedded within dance traditions. In contemporary digital environments, however, choreographic knowledge is increasingly mediated

through screens and algorithmically curated content. Young dancers frequently encounter dance practices as fragmented visual products detached from their historical, social, and cultural foundations.

The growing popularity of short-form video platforms has intensified this transformation. Viral dance challenges encourage rapid imitation and mass reproduction of movement sequences designed primarily for visibility and audience engagement. Although such practices promote accessibility and democratize artistic participation, they often prioritize aesthetic appeal over cultural understanding. As a consequence, movement vocabularies become increasingly standardized, resulting in what many scholars identify as the homogenization of bodily expression in digital culture (Li, 2021). Dancers from diverse cultural backgrounds may perform similar movement patterns while possessing limited awareness of the cultural origins and meanings associated with those movements.

This phenomenon presents a serious challenge for countries with rich cultural diversity such as Indonesia. Indonesian dance traditions are deeply connected to local histories, indigenous knowledge systems, communal values, spiritual beliefs, and environmental experiences. Traditional forms such as Gandrung in Banyuwangi, Tayub in East Java, Bedhaya in Central Java, Tor-Tor in North Sumatra, and numerous other regional dances function as living cultural archives through which communities preserve and transmit collective memory. These traditions embody distinctive choreographic vocabularies that reflect local worldviews and cultural identities. When younger generations become increasingly disconnected from these traditions, the continuity of local cultural knowledge becomes vulnerable.

The issue extends beyond the preservation of artistic forms. Dance serves as an

important medium through which communities construct, negotiate, and communicate cultural identity. Hall (2021) argues that cultural identity is continuously produced through representation, social practice, and collective experience. Within this framework, dance becomes a significant site where identity is embodied and performed. Movement patterns, spatial relationships, gestures, rhythms, and performance conventions collectively contribute to the formation of cultural belonging. Therefore, the weakening of local choreographic traditions may also contribute to the weakening of cultural identity among younger generations.

Recent scholarship has increasingly examined the relationship between digital technology and dance education. Research demonstrates that digital media can support dance learning, broaden access to cultural resources, and facilitate creative innovation when integrated appropriately into educational contexts (Astuti, 2021; Nongko et al., 2024). Online archives, virtual performances, and digital learning platforms provide valuable opportunities for documenting and disseminating traditional dance knowledge. Nevertheless, existing studies primarily focus on the pedagogical effectiveness of digital tools and technological adaptation. Comparatively less attention has been given to the cultural implications of digital choreography and the long-term consequences of movement homogenization for local choreographic identity.

This gap becomes particularly important when considering the concept of embodied cultural knowledge. According to Taylor (2021), cultural memory is transmitted not only through archives such as documents and recordings but also through repertoires embodied in performance practices, rituals, and everyday actions. Dance constitutes one of the most significant forms of cultural repertoire because knowledge is preserved through bodily enactment rather than

textual documentation alone. Consequently, the erosion of local movement traditions represents more than the disappearance of artistic expressions; it signifies the gradual loss of embodied cultural memory accumulated across generations.

The challenge faced by contemporary dance education is therefore not simply technological adaptation but cultural mediation. Educational institutions must negotiate the relationship between global digital influences and local cultural traditions in ways that foster both creativity and cultural continuity. Dance education should enable learners to engage critically with digital culture while maintaining meaningful connections to local identities and cultural heritage. Such an approach requires pedagogical frameworks that move beyond technical skill acquisition toward the development of cultural awareness, critical reflection, and creative responsibility.

The theoretical foundation of this study draws upon the concepts of embodiment, cultural identity, critical pedagogy, participatory culture, and cultural sustainability. Embodiment theory emphasizes the role of the body as a site of lived experience and cultural meaning. Cultural identity theory highlights the dynamic relationship between representation and belonging. Critical pedagogy encourages learners to develop consciousness regarding the social and cultural dimensions of knowledge. Participatory culture explains how digital technologies reshape cultural production and circulation. Meanwhile, cultural sustainability emphasizes the importance of preserving intangible cultural heritage within changing social environments.

Building upon these perspectives, this article introduces the concept of “The Body Losing Its Ground” as a critical framework for understanding the cultural condition experienced by many young dancers in the digital era. The term does not refer merely

to geographical displacement but to the gradual disconnection between the dancing body and the cultural foundations that historically informed its movement practices. Ground, in this context, signifies locality, cultural memory, communal knowledge, historical consciousness, and embodied identity. A body that loses its ground remains active and technically capable, yet increasingly detached from the cultural meanings embedded within movement.

The novelty of this study lies in the formulation of “The Body Losing Its Ground” as a conceptual lens for examining the relationship between digital culture, choreographic identity, and dance education. While previous studies have explored digital learning, local wisdom, and cultural preservation separately, this research integrates these discussions to explain how educational practices can respond to the challenges of cultural disconnection in contemporary dance environments.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the influence of digital culture on choreographic identity and to examine the strategic role of dance education in preserving local traces through culturally grounded pedagogical practices. By exploring the relationship between embodiment, locality, and digital transformation, the study contributes to broader discussions concerning cultural sustainability, arts education, and the future of local knowledge in an increasingly interconnected world.

Method

This study employed a qualitative reflective approach grounded in arts-based inquiry and cultural interpretation. The qualitative paradigm was selected because the research seeks to understand meanings, experiences, and cultural phenomena related to dance education, digital culture, and the preservation of local choreographic

identity. Rather than measuring variables quantitatively, the study focuses on interpreting the cultural implications of contemporary dance practices and educational processes within the context of rapid digital transformation.

The research was conceptualized as a reflective cultural analysis that examines the interaction between digital culture, embodied knowledge, and local wisdom in dance education. Reflection was utilized as a methodological strategy to critically investigate how technological developments influence the transmission of cultural values through dance and how educational practices may respond to these changes. This approach is particularly relevant for arts education research because artistic knowledge is often embedded in lived experiences, bodily practices, and cultural participation.

Data were collected through four primary sources. First, an extensive literature review was conducted to identify contemporary discussions concerning digital culture, dance education, embodiment, cultural identity, critical pedagogy, and cultural sustainability. Scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, and international publications published between 2021 and 2026 were analyzed to establish the theoretical framework of the study.

Second, the study incorporated reflective observations derived from dance education practices within formal and informal learning environments. These observations focused on the ways younger generations engage with dance content through digital platforms, including social media applications, online choreography tutorials, and virtual performance spaces. Particular attention was given to patterns of movement imitation, cultural interpretation, and creative adaptation emerging from digital interactions.

Third, documentation analysis was conducted on selected examples of

contemporary dance content circulated through digital media. Various forms of online dance performances, viral choreography trends, educational dance videos, and digital archives of traditional dance were examined to identify recurring themes related to cultural representation, movement standardization, and local identity preservation.

Fourth, the study drew upon the researcher's artistic and educational experiences within cultural communities. As an educator and practitioner in dance education, the researcher engaged in continuous reflection concerning the transmission of local cultural knowledge, the pedagogical challenges of digital learning, and the changing relationship between younger dancers and traditional artistic practices. These experiences provided contextual insights that enriched the interpretive analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analytical process consisted of several stages. Initially, relevant literature, observations, and documentation were reviewed repeatedly to identify significant concepts and recurring issues. Subsequently, data were categorized into thematic clusters representing major dimensions of the study. Three principal themes emerged from the analysis: (1) algorithmic aesthetics and the homogenization of movement, (2) the body as a repository of cultural memory, and (3) local wisdom-based dance education as a strategy for cultural sustainability.

Interpretation of findings was informed by an interdisciplinary theoretical framework integrating embodiment theory, cultural identity theory, participatory culture, critical pedagogy, and cultural sustainability. This theoretical triangulation enabled a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between bodily practices, digital technologies, and educational processes. The analysis emphasized not only the challenges posed by digital culture but also the opportunities for creative

cultural preservation through educational innovation.

To enhance trustworthiness, methodological triangulation was applied through the integration of literature analysis, cultural observation, documentation review, and reflective practice. The convergence of multiple sources allowed the researcher to examine the phenomenon from different perspectives and to strengthen the credibility of interpretations. Furthermore, continuous comparison between theoretical concepts and observed cultural practices contributed to the consistency and depth of the analysis.

Through this methodological framework, the study seeks to generate a critical understanding of how dance education can contribute to preserving local cultural identity while responding constructively to the realities of contemporary digital culture.

Finding and Discussion

A. Algorithmic Aesthetics and the Standardization of Movement

The expansion of digital culture has fundamentally altered how dance movements are created, disseminated, and consumed. Social media platforms operate through algorithmic systems designed to maximize visibility, engagement, and audience retention. Consequently, dance content that is visually appealing, easily replicated, and adaptable to short-form video formats tends to receive greater exposure than complex movement traditions rooted in specific cultural contexts.

This phenomenon has contributed to what may be described as algorithmic aesthetics. Within this framework, choreographic value is increasingly determined by metrics such as views, shares, likes, and engagement rates rather than cultural

significance or artistic depth. Movements that are simple, repetitive, and visually attractive are more likely to circulate globally, encouraging dancers to reproduce similar choreographic patterns regardless of their cultural backgrounds.

The influence of algorithmic aesthetics can be observed in the widespread popularity of dance challenges on digital platforms. Thousands of users imitate identical movement sequences while adapting them only minimally to individual contexts. Although such participation demonstrates the democratization of artistic expression, it simultaneously encourages the standardization of movement vocabularies. Distinctive local movement characteristics become increasingly overshadowed by globally circulating choreographic trends.

For younger generations, social media often functions as the primary source of dance learning. Unlike traditional learning environments that emphasize historical understanding, cultural context, and interpersonal transmission, digital platforms frequently present dance as isolated visual content. As a result, movement becomes detached from its original meanings and transformed into a commodity of digital consumption.



Figure 1. Group Of People Performing Indonesian Traditional Dance For Social Media.

This condition does not imply that digital culture is inherently harmful. Rather, it highlights the need for critical engagement with technology. Without cultural awareness, the rapid circulation of dance

content may gradually reduce the diversity of embodied practices that constitute the richness of global cultural heritage. The challenge for dance education is therefore to cultivate critical digital literacy that enables learners to appreciate innovation while recognizing the cultural origins of movement traditions.

Educational practices grounded in local wisdom, embodied pedagogy, and reflective choreography can strengthen students' cultural awareness and creative agency. Rather than positioning digital technology as a threat, this study emphasizes the importance of critical and contextual integration between technology and local cultural traditions.



Figure 2. Digital-based dance learning through online platforms

B. The Body as a Cultural Archive

Dance is fundamentally an embodied cultural practice. Unlike written knowledge preserved through texts and documents, dance knowledge is transmitted through bodily experience. Every gesture, posture, rhythm, and spatial pattern carries traces of cultural memory accumulated through generations of social and artistic interaction.

The concept of the body as a cultural archive emphasizes that the body functions as a living repository of collective experience. Cultural values are not merely understood intellectually but are embodied through repeated participation in artistic practices. Through dance, communities preserve stories, social relationships, ethical principles, spiritual beliefs, and historical experiences that may not be

adequately represented through written records alone.



Figure 3. Traditional Dance Papua

Traditional dance forms throughout Indonesia illustrate this phenomenon clearly. In Gandrung performances of Banyuwangi, bodily expression reflects local philosophies concerning gratitude, communal solidarity, and cultural resilience. Similarly, Tayub traditions embody social interaction, communal celebration, and regional identity. The preservation of these dances therefore involves more than safeguarding movement techniques; it requires sustaining the cultural knowledge embedded within bodily practices.



Figure 4. Traditional Dance Gandrung



Figure 5. Traditional Dance Tayub

Digital documentation contributes significantly to preservation efforts by providing visual records of performances. However, documentation alone cannot replace embodied transmission. Watching a dance through a screen differs fundamentally from learning through participation, observation, repetition, and interaction within cultural communities. Embodied knowledge emerges through lived experience rather than passive observation.

Consequently, the disappearance of local movement traditions represents a loss that extends beyond artistic aesthetics. It signifies the erosion of cultural memory and the weakening of intergenerational connections. Dance education plays a crucial role in addressing this challenge by creating opportunities for students to engage directly with embodied cultural knowledge and to understand the meanings embedded within movement practices.

C. The Body Losing Its Ground: A Conceptual Interpretation

The central concept proposed in this study is “The Body Losing Its Ground.” This concept serves as a theoretical lens for understanding the cultural consequences of digital transformation in contemporary dance practices.

Ground, within this framework, does not simply refer to geographical territory. Rather, it encompasses cultural memory, historical consciousness, communal values, local knowledge systems, and embodied identity. Ground represents the cultural foundation from which movement acquires meaning and significance.

A body loses its ground when movement practices become increasingly disconnected from these foundations. Such disconnection occurs when dancers engage primarily with globally circulating choreographic trends while maintaining limited relationships with the cultural environments that shaped their own artistic traditions. In this

condition, technical proficiency may continue to develop, yet cultural understanding gradually diminishes.

The phenomenon is particularly evident among younger generations who grow up within highly interconnected digital ecosystems. Their exposure to diverse global influences provides valuable opportunities for creativity and intercultural exchange. However, the same environment may reduce engagement with local artistic traditions if educational systems fail to facilitate meaningful cultural encounters.

The concept of “The Body Losing Its Ground” should not be interpreted as resistance to globalization or technological innovation. Instead, it highlights the importance of cultural balance. Contemporary dancers require the ability to participate in global artistic conversations while remaining connected to local cultural identities. Creative innovation becomes more meaningful when it emerges from a dialogue between local knowledge and global experience.

This conceptual framework contributes to current discussions on cultural sustainability by emphasizing the relationship between embodiment and locality. While many studies examine cultural preservation in terms of documentation, policy, or heritage management, the present study focuses on the body as the primary site through which cultural continuity is enacted and experienced.

Table 1. Conceptual Model of Cultural Sustainability in Dance Education

Dimension	Educational Function	Expected Outcome
Embodied Cultural Knowledge	Understanding local movement traditions	Cultural Awareness
Local Wisdom	Exploration of regional values	Identity Formation

Critical Digital Literacy	Critical engagement with online content	Cultural Resilience
Creative Participation	Choreographic innovation	Cultural Sustainability

Note: The table presents a conceptual framework of cultural sustainability in dance education based on embodiment, local wisdom, digital literacy, and creative participation.

D. Re-grounding the Body Through Local Wisdom-Based Dance Education

If the body can lose its ground, it can also be re-grounded. Dance education possesses a unique capacity to reconnect learners with cultural roots while fostering contemporary creativity. This process requires pedagogical approaches that position local wisdom as a dynamic source of learning rather than as static cultural heritage.

Local wisdom-based dance education encourages students to engage critically with their cultural environments. Learning activities may involve exploring traditional movement vocabularies, investigating local histories, documenting community practices, and reflecting upon the cultural meanings embedded within dance traditions. Such experiences enable learners to develop deeper awareness of the relationship between movement and identity.

Importantly, local wisdom should not be understood as a limitation on innovation. On the contrary, local traditions provide rich resources for creative exploration. Many contemporary choreographers have demonstrated that culturally grounded artistic practices can generate innovative works capable of engaging global audiences while maintaining strong local identities.

Educational strategies for re-grounding the body may include community-based learning, intergenerational dialogue, collaborative artistic projects, and reflective choreography. Through these approaches, students become active participants in

cultural transmission rather than passive recipients of information. They learn to negotiate tradition and innovation creatively, developing artistic voices rooted in cultural understanding.

Digital technology can also support this process when used critically. Online archives, virtual exhibitions, digital storytelling, and multimedia choreography projects may expand access to local cultural resources and facilitate creative reinterpretation. The objective is not to reject digital culture but to employ technology as a tool for strengthening cultural continuity.

E. A Conceptual Model of Cultural Sustainability in Dance Education

The findings suggest a conceptual model linking digital culture, embodiment, dance education, and cultural sustainability.

Digital culture influences choreographic practices through algorithmic circulation and global connectivity. These processes generate both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, digital platforms expand access to artistic resources and intercultural communication. On the other hand, they contribute to movement homogenization and cultural disconnection.

Dance education functions as a mediating space between these opposing tendencies. Through critical pedagogy and local wisdom-based learning, educational institutions can transform digital challenges into opportunities for cultural revitalization. Students are encouraged to engage with global artistic developments while maintaining awareness of local cultural identities.

Within this model, cultural sustainability emerges from the interaction of four interconnected dimensions: embodied cultural knowledge, local wisdom, critical digital literacy, and creative participation. The integration of these dimensions enables learners to develop artistic

competence alongside cultural responsibility.

Therefore, sustainable dance education in the digital era should not focus solely on technical mastery or technological adaptation. It must also cultivate cultural consciousness, ethical engagement, and creative agency. By reconnecting the body with its cultural ground, dance education contributes to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage while supporting the development of innovative artistic practices capable of responding to contemporary realities.

Conclusions

This study concludes that digital culture has significantly transformed dance education and choreographic practices in both constructive and challenging ways. The expansion of digital media has created new opportunities for artistic innovation, accessibility, and wider cultural dissemination. However, at the same time, it has also accelerated the standardization of movement vocabularies and contributed to the gradual weakening of local choreographic identities. In this context, the phenomenon of “the body losing its ground” describes the growing disconnection between younger generations and the cultural roots embedded in traditional dance practices.

Within the conceptual model proposed in this study, cultural sustainability in dance education is shaped by the interaction of embodied cultural knowledge, local wisdom, critical digital literacy, and creative participation. These interconnected dimensions highlight that dance education is not merely a space for technical skill development, but also a site for cultural formation and identity construction in the digital era. Dance education therefore plays a strategic mediating role in balancing global digital influences with the preservation of local cultural values.

The findings further emphasize that educational practices grounded in local wisdom, embodied pedagogy, and reflective choreography can strengthen students’ cultural awareness while simultaneously fostering creative agency. Rather than positioning digital technology as a threat to cultural continuity, this study underscores the importance of its critical and contextual integration within dance learning processes. Digital platforms can be utilized not only for distribution and exposure, but also as pedagogical tools that support cultural interpretation and creative transformation when guided by appropriate educational frameworks.

Ultimately, the preservation of local traces in dance education is not only an artistic concern but also a cultural and educational necessity. Through meaningful, reflective, and culturally grounded pedagogical practices, the dancing body can remain connected to collective memory, local identity, and cultural continuity, even amid the rapidly changing dynamics of global digital culture. In this way, dance education contributes to sustaining cultural heritage while enabling the emergence of innovative artistic expressions rooted in local wisdom.

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