



Regional Government Policy in Efforts to Improve the People's Economy an Islamic Perspective (Study of Zapin Dance Tourism in Bengkalis District)

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Abstract

This study examines regional government policies in the development of Zapin Dance tourism as an effort to improve the community's economy in Bengkalis Regency from an Islamic perspective. The research was motivated by the underutilization of cultural tourism potential in Bengkalis despite the existence of Zapin Dance as a representation of Malay-Islamic cultural identity with economic and social value. This study aimed to analyze government strategies, community participation, economic contributions, and challenges associated with the development of Zapin Dance tourism. A qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentation involving government officials, cultural leaders, tourism activists, local business actors, and community representatives in Bengkalis Regency. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis through coding, categorization, and theme development processes. The findings revealed that the regional government has implemented several tourism development initiatives through cultural festivals, financial assistance, tourism promotion, and collaboration with cultural communities. Community participation also plays a significant role in preserving Zapin Dance traditions and supporting local tourism activities. Furthermore, Zapin Dance tourism contributes to local economic activities through small businesses, traditional handicrafts, culinary services, and tourism-related informal sectors. However, several obstacles remain, including limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, weak digital promotion, and declining youth participation in cultural preservation. From an Islamic perspective, the development of Zapin Dance tourism reflects the principle of *maslahat* because it supports social welfare, cultural sustainability, and the preservation of Malay-Islamic values. Therefore, stronger collaboration between government institutions, cultural communities, and tourism stakeholders is necessary to optimize the sustainability and competitiveness of Zapin Dance tourism in Bengkalis Regency.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia possesses extensive cultural diversity that has become an important foundation for the development of the tourism sector and regional economic growth. Cultural tourism not only functions as a medium of entertainment, but also serves as an instrument for preserving local identity, strengthening social cohesion, and creating economic opportunities for local communities. In recent years, many regions in Indonesia have attempted to transform local cultural assets into tourism commodities capable of attracting domestic and international visitors (Rachman & Tekol, 2020; Saputro et al., 2025). The tourism sector has also been recognized as one of the strategic sectors contributing to regional income, employment creation, and community empowerment (Wani et al., 2024). Alongside the increasing global interest in authentic cultural experiences, local

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traditions and performing arts have gained greater attention as potential tourism attractions (Seyfi et al., 2020). Within this context, traditional arts are no longer viewed merely as cultural heritage, but also as economic resources that can support sustainable regional development. Nevertheless, the success of cultural tourism development is highly dependent on government commitment, community participation, and effective promotional strategies. Therefore, the integration between cultural preservation and economic development has become increasingly relevant in contemporary regional development discourse.

The development of cultural tourism in Indonesia has shown significant progress in several regions, particularly in areas that successfully integrate local wisdom with tourism management. Bali, Yogyakarta, and West Sumatra are examples of regions that have effectively transformed traditional arts and cultural performances into sustainable tourism attractions capable of increasing local revenue and improving community welfare (Mudana et al., 2025; Husen et al., 2025; Surata et al., 2024). However, many regions with strong cultural potential still face difficulties in optimizing their local cultural assets as drivers of economic growth. Bengkalis Regency in Riau Province represents one of these regions, particularly through the existence of Zapin Dance tourism rooted in Malay-Islamic cultural traditions. Although Zapin Dance possesses distinctive cultural and religious values, its tourism development remains relatively limited compared to other well-known cultural destinations in Indonesia. Public exposure to Zapin performances is still inconsistent, tourism promotion remains inadequate, and infrastructure support is not yet fully optimized. In addition, the younger generation's interest in preserving traditional arts has gradually declined due to modernization and the influence of popular culture (Suharyanto, 2024). This condition creates challenges for the sustainability of local cultural identity and reduces the economic opportunities that could potentially emerge from cultural tourism activities. Consequently, there is an urgent need for more comprehensive strategies to strengthen the development of Zapin Dance tourism in Bengkalis Regency.

The issue of regional economic inequality and limited community-based tourism development further strengthens the urgency of this study. Despite Indonesia's rich cultural resources, many local communities have not fully benefited from tourism development because tourism management often prioritizes physical infrastructure rather than community empowerment and cultural sustainability (Scheyvens & van der Watt, 2021; Turčinović et al., 2025). In several regions, tourism development has even resulted in cultural commodification that weakens local values and social identity. Therefore, contemporary tourism development increasingly emphasizes the importance of sustainable and community-based tourism approaches that balance economic benefits with social and cultural preservation (Mtapuri et al., 2022; Abreu et al., 2024). Within the Islamic perspective, tourism activities are encouraged as long as they provide *maslahat*, preserve morality, and contribute to collective welfare. Islamic teachings also emphasize the importance of maintaining cultural values, social harmony, and ethical economic activities that benefit society (Ali et al., 2024; Firdaus & Suwendi, 2025). In this regard, Zapin Dance tourism has the potential to become a form of Islamic cultural tourism that simultaneously preserves Malay traditions and strengthens the local economy. However, the realization of this potential requires supportive policies, institutional collaboration, and sustainable cultural management. Accordingly, examining regional government policies in developing Zapin Dance tourism becomes highly important in understanding how cultural tourism can contribute to public welfare from both economic and Islamic perspectives.

The strategic role of local governments in tourism development has become increasingly important in the era of regional autonomy and decentralized governance. Local governments are expected to formulate policies that not only increase Regional Original Income (PAD), but also empower local communities and preserve regional cultural heritage (Hu et al., 2022; Aneta et al., 2024). In the context of cultural tourism, government intervention is essential in terms of infrastructure provision, financial support, tourism promotion, cultural preservation, and stakeholder collaboration. Previous studies indicate that successful cultural tourism destinations are generally supported by strong policy frameworks and active community involvement (Moric et al., 2021). Nevertheless, many local governments still face obstacles related to limited budgets, weak digital promotion, lack of innovation, and insufficient cultural regeneration programs (Wahba & Chun, 2022). Similar conditions are also found in Bengkalis Regency, where the development of Zapin

Dance tourism has not yet reached its optimal potential. Although the local government has organized several cultural events and tourism programs, these initiatives remain sporadic and lack long-term sustainability. In addition, the integration between tourism development and Islamic cultural values has not been adequately explored within regional tourism policies. Therefore, analyzing regional government policies in the development of Zapin Dance tourism is essential to identify both opportunities and challenges in strengthening community-based cultural tourism.

Several previous studies have examined the relationship between cultural tourism and regional economic development from various perspectives. Research conducted by Junita (2025) highlighted the potential of Zapin Dance as a special-interest tourism attraction capable of increasing cultural tourism appeal in Bengkalis. Similarly, Suhaila and Samin (2022) emphasized the importance of developing Zapin Api Dance as a cultural tourism destination in Rupa Island through strategic tourism management. Other studies have discussed the socio-cultural meanings of Zapin Dance and its role in preserving Malay identity and Islamic values (Martiarra et al., 2026; Suryani et al., 2025). Beyond the Indonesian context, recent studies also show that cultural tourism can contribute significantly to local economic resilience, employment creation, and community participation when managed collaboratively (Pramono & Juliana, 2025; Rahman & Baddam, 2021). Furthermore, digital tourism promotion and creative economy development have become dominant themes in recent tourism research due to the growing influence of social media and digital communication platforms (Veseli et al., 2025). Community-based tourism models are also increasingly recognized as effective approaches for balancing tourism growth with local empowerment and cultural preservation (Dolezal & Novelli, 2022). These studies collectively demonstrate that cultural tourism possesses multidimensional benefits extending beyond economic aspects into social, educational, and cultural domains. However, most previous studies tend to focus primarily on tourism attractiveness and cultural preservation rather than critically examining regional government policy and Islamic perspectives simultaneously.

In addition, previous studies on tourism and local economic development still reveal several important limitations. First, many studies discuss cultural tourism in general terms without specifically analyzing the policy mechanisms implemented by local governments in sustaining cultural tourism development (Li et al., 2024). Second, studies focusing on Zapin Dance largely emphasize historical, artistic, and aesthetic dimensions rather than examining its strategic role in regional economic empowerment. Third, limited research has integrated Islamic legal and ethical perspectives into discussions of tourism policy and cultural economy development. Existing tourism studies frequently adopt secular development frameworks and pay insufficient attention to Islamic concepts such as *maslahat*, social welfare, cultural morality, and collective responsibility (Harahap et al., 2025; Jaelani et al., 2025). Fourth, empirical discussions regarding the challenges faced by local governments in maintaining cultural sustainability amid modernization and digital transformation remain underexplored. Furthermore, research concerning the involvement of local communities, youth participation, and digital promotion in sustaining Malay-Islamic cultural tourism is still relatively fragmented. These limitations indicate a significant research gap regarding how regional government policies can optimize cultural tourism development while simultaneously preserving Islamic cultural values and improving community welfare. Therefore, a more integrative and context-specific analysis is necessary to understand the development of Zapin Dance tourism in Bengkalis Regency.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the regional government policies implemented in the development of Zapin Dance tourism as an effort to improve the community's economy in Bengkalis Regency from an Islamic perspective. Specifically, this research seeks to explore the strategies, opportunities, and obstacles associated with the development of Zapin Dance tourism as a form of Malay-Islamic cultural tourism. This study also examines how tourism development can contribute to economic welfare, cultural preservation, and social empowerment within the framework of Islamic values and local wisdom. Theoretically, this research contributes to the literature on cultural tourism, regional development, and Islamic-based community empowerment by integrating tourism policy analysis with the concept of *maslahat* and sustainable cultural development. Practically, the findings are expected to provide recommendations for local governments, tourism stakeholders, cultural communities, and policymakers regarding strategies for strengthening community-based cultural tourism. In addition, this study contributes to broader

discussions on the importance of preserving local cultural identity amid globalization and modernization. Through this approach, the research is expected to enrich academic discourse concerning the intersection of tourism, culture, economy, and Islamic values in regional development contexts.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a descriptive case study design to explore regional government policies in the development of Zapin Dance tourism as an effort to improve the community's economy in Bengkalis Regency from an Islamic perspective. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to understand social realities, policy practices, cultural meanings, and community experiences in depth within their natural context. The case study design enabled the researchers to examine the interaction between government policy, cultural tourism development, community participation, and Islamic values in a specific regional setting. In addition, this approach facilitated the exploration of contextual factors influencing the sustainability of Zapin Dance tourism and its contribution to local economic development. The research also adopted an interpretive perspective to analyze how stakeholders perceive cultural tourism as both an economic instrument and a medium for preserving Malay-Islamic identity. Through this design, the study sought to generate comprehensive and contextualized findings regarding the opportunities and challenges associated with cultural tourism development in Bengkalis Regency.

Research Site and Period

The research was conducted in Bengkalis Regency, Riau Province, Indonesia, particularly in several locations associated with the preservation and performance of Zapin Dance tourism, including Meskom Village and Tanjung Medang Village, which are widely recognized as centers of Malay cultural activities. These locations were selected because they represent areas where Zapin Dance continues to be practiced and promoted as part of local cultural tourism development. Bengkalis Regency was also chosen due to its strong Malay-Islamic cultural identity and its ongoing efforts to strengthen regional tourism through local cultural assets. Data collection activities were carried out from January to March 2024. This period included preliminary observations, interviews with key stakeholders, field documentation, and data verification processes. Conducting the research during this period allowed the researchers to directly observe cultural activities and tourism-related initiatives implemented by local authorities and community groups. The selected research sites also provided access to relevant informants who possessed substantial knowledge regarding regional tourism policies, cultural preservation programs, and local economic conditions.

Population and Participants

The participants in this study consisted of individuals directly involved in the planning, implementation, promotion, and preservation of Zapin Dance tourism in Bengkalis Regency. The study employed purposive sampling to select participants who possessed relevant experiences, knowledge, and responsibilities related to tourism development and cultural preservation. A total of 15 participants were involved in the research, comprising officials from the Department of Culture and Tourism of Bengkalis Regency, village government representatives, leaders of cultural communities, Zapin Dance performers, local tourism activists, small business owners, and community leaders. The inclusion criteria required participants to have at least two years of involvement in tourism, cultural activities, or local policy implementation related to Zapin Dance tourism. Participants who had limited knowledge regarding regional tourism programs or were not directly involved in cultural tourism activities were excluded from the study. The purposive sampling technique was chosen because it enabled the researchers to obtain rich and in-depth information from individuals considered capable of providing relevant insights into the research problem. The diversity of participants also allowed the study to capture multiple perspectives regarding the effectiveness, challenges, and opportunities associated with the development of Zapin Dance tourism.

Research Instruments

The primary instrument in this qualitative study was the researcher, who played a central role in collecting, interpreting, and analyzing the data. To support systematic data collection, several supporting instruments were employed, including semi-structured interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation checklists. The interview guidelines were designed to explore participants' perspectives regarding regional government policies, tourism development strategies, community participation, cultural preservation efforts, economic impacts, and the integration of Islamic values within tourism practices. The interview questions were developed based on concepts derived from cultural tourism theory, community-based tourism, and Islamic perspectives on social welfare and *maslahat*. Observation sheets were used to record field conditions, tourism activities, cultural performances, community interactions, and supporting tourism facilities within the research sites. In addition, documentation analysis included government reports, tourism policy documents, photographs, promotional materials, village records, and social media publications related to Zapin Dance tourism. These instruments were intended to facilitate data triangulation and strengthen the credibility of the research findings through multiple data sources.

Instrument Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the research instruments and findings, several validation procedures were conducted throughout the study. First, the interview guidelines and observation instruments were reviewed by two experts in cultural tourism and qualitative research methodology to assess content relevance, clarity, and contextual appropriateness. Suggestions from the experts were incorporated into the final instruments before data collection was conducted. Second, pilot interviews were carried out with two participants outside the main sample to evaluate the effectiveness and comprehensibility of the interview questions. Third, data triangulation was applied by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation sources to ensure consistency and accuracy. Member checking was also conducted by providing interview summaries to several participants for confirmation and clarification. Furthermore, peer debriefing was performed through discussions with fellow researchers to minimize subjective interpretation and strengthen analytical rigor. The researchers also maintained reflective field notes and an audit trail to document the data collection and analysis processes systematically. These procedures were implemented to enhance the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the study.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process was conducted in several systematic stages. The first stage involved preliminary preparation, including obtaining research permission from relevant institutions, identifying research sites, developing research instruments, and establishing communication with prospective participants. Following the preparation stage, the researchers conducted preliminary observations to understand the social and cultural context of Zapin Dance tourism activities in Bengkalis Regency. The second stage involved conducting semi-structured interviews with participants individually, either at government offices, cultural centers, tourism locations, or participants' residences, depending on their availability and convenience. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 90 minutes and was conducted in Indonesian to facilitate effective communication. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and supplemented with written field notes. The third stage consisted of direct observations of cultural performances, tourism activities, and community interactions related to Zapin Dance tourism. During this stage, the researchers documented field conditions through photographs, observation records, and tourism-related documents. The final stage involved organizing, transcribing, and verifying all collected data prior to the analysis process.

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis procedures adapted from qualitative data analysis frameworks proposed by Braun and Clarke. The analysis began with data familiarization through repeated reading of interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentation records. After becoming familiar with the data, the researchers conducted open coding to identify meaningful statements, concepts, and recurring patterns related to tourism development, economic empowerment, government policy, cultural preservation, and Islamic

values. Similar codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories and organized into thematic patterns reflecting the major findings of the study. The themes were then reviewed, refined, and interpreted in relation to the research objectives and relevant theoretical perspectives, including community-based tourism and the concept of *maslahat* in Islamic thought. Throughout the analysis process, the researchers continuously compared data across participants and sources to ensure analytical consistency. NVivo 12 software was utilized to facilitate data organization, coding management, and thematic categorization. The final stage involved interpreting the findings critically and presenting them narratively to explain the relationship between regional government policies, cultural tourism development, and community economic improvement in Bengkalis Regency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Government Policies in Supporting Zapin Dance Tourism Development

The findings revealed that the Bengkalis Regency Government has implemented several initiatives to support the development of Zapin Dance tourism as part of regional cultural tourism programs. Based on interview data obtained from officials of the Department of Culture and Tourism, the local government routinely includes Zapin Dance performances in regional festivals, official ceremonies, and tourism promotion events. Cultural activities are commonly organized during annual celebrations, traditional ceremonies, and regional tourism exhibitions aimed at strengthening the cultural identity of Bengkalis Regency. In addition, the government has provided financial assistance for several cultural studios in Meskom Village and Tanjung Medang Village to support costumes, musical instruments, and performance preparation. Interview data indicated that government support for Zapin cultural activities has been carried out continuously since 2018, although the amount of assistance varies depending on annual regional budget allocations. One official explained that the local government allocated approximately IDR 30,000,000 annually to support the operational activities of cultural groups and Zapin performances. Observation findings also showed that local authorities have attempted to improve supporting facilities around cultural tourism areas, including performance stages, public spaces, and tourism signage. However, several participants stated that policy implementation remains limited because tourism development programs are still dominated by short-term event activities rather than long-term cultural tourism planning.

The study also found that tourism promotion policies implemented by the local government remain relatively limited in terms of digital outreach and tourism market expansion. Interview data from tourism officers indicated that cultural promotion activities are still predominantly conducted through regional events, local government websites, and ceremonial programs. Social media utilization for tourism promotion has not yet been systematically managed, resulting in limited public awareness regarding Zapin Dance tourism outside Bengkalis Regency. Several participants emphasized that the lack of collaboration with digital creators, tourism influencers, and professional marketing teams has reduced the visibility of Zapin cultural tourism at the national level. Observation results showed that promotional materials related to Zapin Dance tourism were still limited in quantity and distribution, particularly on digital tourism platforms. In addition, tourism information concerning performance schedules, tourism packages, and accessibility remains difficult for visitors to obtain. One tourism activist explained that many cultural activities are not promoted consistently, causing tourists to have limited information regarding Zapin Dance events. Participants further reported that government programs related to cultural tourism are often constrained by financial limitations and administrative priorities focused on infrastructure development rather than tourism innovation. These findings indicate that although policy support for Zapin Dance tourism exists, promotional strategies and long-term tourism planning have not yet been fully optimized.

Community Participation in Cultural Preservation Activities

Community participation emerged as an important component in sustaining Zapin Dance tourism in Bengkalis Regency. The findings demonstrated that local communities actively contribute to cultural preservation through the establishment of cultural studios, regular training programs, and voluntary participation in tourism events. In Meskom Village and Tanjung Medang Village, cultural activities are generally organized collectively by local residents, traditional leaders, artists, and youth

groups. Interview data showed that community members frequently provide financial contributions, logistical support, and rehearsal spaces to maintain the continuity of Zapin Dance performances. Several participants explained that community involvement is motivated by a strong awareness of preserving Malay-Islamic cultural identity amid modernization and social change. Observation findings also revealed that cultural rehearsals involving children and adolescents are conducted regularly, particularly before regional festivals and ceremonial events. One cultural leader stated that the community considers Zapin Dance not only as entertainment, but also as part of cultural heritage that reflects moral values and local traditions. In addition, the involvement of local communities contributes to the maintenance of social solidarity and cooperation among residents. These findings suggest that community participation remains a major supporting factor in the preservation of Zapin Dance tourism.

Despite the strong involvement of local communities, the study identified several challenges related to youth participation and cultural regeneration. Interview data indicated that younger generations tend to show greater interest in modern entertainment and digital culture than in traditional arts. Several cultural instructors reported difficulties in recruiting young dancers who are willing to participate consistently in training activities. Participants explained that Zapin Dance requires discipline, patience, and cultural understanding, which are often perceived as less attractive by younger audiences. Observation results also showed that most active cultural practitioners are middle-aged adults and senior artists who have long been involved in traditional cultural activities. In several cases, cultural studios experienced interruptions in training schedules due to the limited availability of younger participants. One participant explained that some young people join Zapin activities only during festival periods rather than as part of continuous cultural engagement. In addition, modernization and urban migration have contributed to declining participation in local cultural activities within several villages. These conditions indicate that the sustainability of Zapin Dance tourism may face long-term challenges if cultural regeneration programs are not strengthened systematically.

Economic Contributions of Zapin Dance Tourism

The findings of this study indicate that Zapin Dance tourism contributes to local economic activities, particularly during cultural festivals and tourism events. Interview data from small business owners and local residents showed that tourism activities create temporary economic opportunities through food sales, souvenir trading, transportation services, and parking management around performance venues. During major cultural events, local traders commonly sell traditional Malay foods, handicrafts, traditional clothing, and cultural accessories to visitors attending Zapin performances. Several participants explained that cultural tourism activities increase the number of visitors from neighboring districts, thereby generating additional income for local communities. Observation findings also demonstrated that tourism activities stimulate informal economic interactions involving local vendors, youth groups, and community organizations. One participant stated that income from food and souvenir sales tends to increase significantly during cultural festivals and tourism celebrations. In addition, some households utilize tourism events to introduce locally produced products such as songket fabrics, traditional snacks, and Malay handicrafts. These findings demonstrate that Zapin Dance tourism possesses economic potential capable of supporting community-based economic activities within rural cultural tourism areas.

Nevertheless, the study found that the economic impact of Zapin Dance tourism remains relatively limited and inconsistent. Interview data revealed that tourism activities are generally concentrated only during specific festivals or ceremonial occasions rather than operating continuously throughout the year. Consequently, economic benefits generated from tourism activities are temporary and highly dependent on the frequency of cultural events organized by the government or community groups. Several participants also explained that the absence of integrated tourism management limits the ability of local communities to maximize tourism-related economic opportunities. Observation findings showed that tourism facilities such as accommodation services, visitor centers, and organized tourism packages remain underdeveloped in several cultural tourism areas. In addition, transportation access to certain Zapin performance locations is still considered inadequate by visitors. One tourism activist explained that many tourists attend cultural performances only briefly because supporting tourism services are still limited. Participants further

reported that the lack of consistent tourism promotion reduces visitor numbers and restricts broader market expansion. These findings indicate that although Zapin Dance tourism contributes to local economic activities, its overall economic impact has not yet reached a sustainable and large-scale level.

Challenges in the Development of Zapin Dance Tourism

This study identified several major obstacles affecting the development and sustainability of Zapin Dance tourism in Bengkalis Regency. One of the most significant challenges concerns limited financial support and insufficient infrastructure development for cultural tourism activities. Interview data from government representatives and cultural actors revealed that tourism funding allocated for cultural preservation remains relatively limited compared to broader regional development priorities. Several participants explained that cultural communities often experience difficulties in maintaining costumes, repairing musical instruments, and organizing regular performances due to budget constraints. Observation findings also showed that some performance locations still lack adequate public facilities, including seating areas, sanitation facilities, lighting systems, and visitor information services. In addition, transportation access to several tourism locations remains difficult, particularly during unfavorable weather conditions. One government official acknowledged that infrastructure development for cultural tourism has not yet become a primary regional priority. Participants further reported that limited financial resources reduce opportunities for organizing large-scale tourism events capable of attracting wider audiences. These findings demonstrate that financial and infrastructural limitations remain major barriers to the development of Zapin Dance tourism.

Another important challenge identified in this study relates to the limited use of digital promotion and tourism innovation strategies. Interview data indicated that many cultural communities and tourism groups still possess limited digital literacy and promotional capabilities. Tourism promotion activities continue to rely primarily on conventional methods such as banners, local events, and government announcements. Observation findings showed that social media utilization for tourism promotion remains inconsistent and lacks professional management. Several participants explained that cultural groups experience difficulties in producing attractive digital content capable of reaching broader tourism markets. In addition, collaboration between local governments, tourism influencers, and digital content creators remains minimal. Participants also expressed concern regarding the growing influence of modern entertainment, which has reduced public interest in traditional cultural performances. One cultural activist stated that younger audiences are increasingly more interested in online entertainment than local cultural activities. Although several youth groups have started promoting Zapin Dance performances through Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, these initiatives remain limited in scale and continuity. Therefore, stronger collaboration between government institutions, local communities, and digital promotion networks is considered necessary to improve the visibility and sustainability of Zapin Dance tourism in Bengkalis Regency.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that regional government policies play a crucial role in shaping the sustainability of community-based cultural tourism in Bengkalis Regency. The implementation of cultural festivals, financial assistance programs, and tourism promotion initiatives indicates that the local government recognizes Zapin Dance not merely as a cultural performance, but also as a strategic economic asset capable of strengthening regional identity and local welfare. From the perspective of community-based tourism theory, effective tourism development requires institutional support, participatory governance, and local cultural empowerment to ensure sustainable outcomes (Mtapuri et al., 2022). The findings support previous studies emphasizing that government intervention significantly influences the success of cultural tourism destinations through infrastructure provision, policy facilitation, and stakeholder collaboration (Hu et al., 2022; Moric et al., 2021). However, this study also extends earlier literature by showing that policy sustainability is not determined solely by the presence of cultural events, but by the continuity and long-term orientation of tourism governance. The predominance of short-term ceremonial programs in Bengkalis indicates that cultural tourism policies remain event-oriented rather than strategically institutionalized. Consequently, the findings suggest that sustainable

cultural tourism requires integrated policy frameworks capable of balancing economic objectives, cultural preservation, and community empowerment simultaneously.

Another important finding concerns the limited effectiveness of digital tourism promotion in expanding the visibility of Zapin Dance tourism beyond the regional context. Although local governments have initiated tourism promotion through official events and websites, the lack of systematic digital marketing strategies has reduced broader tourism market engagement. This condition reflects the increasing relevance of digital tourism theory, which emphasizes that tourism competitiveness in the contemporary era is strongly influenced by social media visibility, digital storytelling, and interactive online engagement (Veseli et al., 2025). The findings are consistent with previous research arguing that tourism destinations with weak digital communication strategies often experience limited tourist accessibility and market expansion (Wahba & Chun, 2022). Nevertheless, this study reveals a more contextual challenge in rural cultural tourism areas, where digital limitations are not only technological but also institutional and human-resource related. Limited digital literacy among cultural actors and the absence of collaboration with professional content creators weaken the transformation of local culture into attractive digital tourism commodities. This finding expands previous tourism promotion studies by demonstrating that digital tourism development in community-based cultural contexts depends heavily on collaborative ecosystems involving governments, local communities, and digital networks. Therefore, digital transformation should not be understood merely as technological adaptation, but as a socio-cultural process requiring capacity building and participatory innovation.

The strong involvement of local communities in preserving Zapin Dance traditions further confirms the importance of community participation as the foundation of sustainable cultural tourism. The active contribution of cultural studios, traditional leaders, youth groups, and local residents indicates that cultural preservation in Bengkalis is deeply embedded within collective social responsibility and Malay-Islamic identity. This finding strongly supports community empowerment theory, which argues that tourism sustainability is highly dependent on local ownership, social participation, and cultural attachment (Scheyvens & van der Watt, 2021). Similar findings were reported by Dolezal and Novelli (2022), who emphasized that tourism initiatives become more sustainable when local communities function not as passive beneficiaries but as active cultural agents. However, this study provides a distinctive contribution by demonstrating that community participation in Bengkalis is also motivated by religious and moral considerations rooted in Islamic cultural values. Zapin Dance is perceived not only as entertainment, but also as a medium for preserving ethics, social harmony, and collective identity. In this context, the findings extend community-based tourism discourse by integrating the concept of cultural participation with Islamic values of social responsibility and communal welfare. This perspective enriches global tourism literature, which has often been dominated by secular frameworks that overlook the spiritual and moral dimensions of community participation.

Despite strong community engagement, this study identified a significant decline in youth participation in cultural preservation activities. Younger generations tend to prioritize modern entertainment and digital culture over traditional artistic engagement, creating long-term risks for cultural sustainability. This finding reflects the broader sociocultural consequences of globalization and digital modernization, which frequently reshape cultural preferences and weaken intergenerational cultural transmission (Suharyanto, 2024). The results are aligned with previous studies showing that traditional cultural practices increasingly struggle to maintain relevance among younger audiences in rapidly digitalized societies (Martiaro et al., 2026; Suryani et al., 2025). Nevertheless, this study offers a more critical perspective by revealing that declining youth participation is not solely caused by modernization itself, but also by the limited adaptation of cultural preservation strategies to contemporary youth culture. Cultural programs remain largely conventional and insufficiently integrated with digital creativity, social media engagement, and youth-oriented innovation. Consequently, the challenge is not merely preserving tradition, but reconstructing cultural transmission mechanisms in forms that remain meaningful to younger generations. This finding implicitly modifies existing cultural sustainability theories by emphasizing that cultural continuity depends not only on preservation efforts, but also on the adaptive transformation of cultural practices within changing digital environments.

The findings also reveal that Zapin Dance tourism contributes positively to local economic activities, particularly through small-scale businesses, informal trade, handicraft production, and tourism-related services during cultural events. These results reinforce sustainable tourism theories suggesting that cultural tourism can generate multidimensional economic benefits when local communities are directly involved in tourism ecosystems (Wani et al., 2024). Similar findings have been reported in studies conducted in Bali, Yogyakarta, and other rural tourism destinations, where cultural tourism strengthened local income generation and community resilience (Mudana et al., 2025; Pramono & Juliana, 2025). However, this study demonstrates that the economic impact of Zapin Dance tourism remains temporary and seasonal because tourism activities are still highly dependent on festival-based events. This condition differs from more established cultural tourism destinations where tourism has evolved into continuous economic systems supported by integrated tourism infrastructure and professional management. The findings therefore suggest that cultural tourism alone is insufficient to create sustainable economic transformation without institutional continuity, transportation accessibility, tourism packages, and market integration. From a broader perspective, the study indicates that cultural tourism development in rural regions requires not only cultural attractiveness but also structural economic support capable of transforming occasional tourism activities into sustainable local economic ecosystems.

Another significant contribution of this study lies in its integration of Islamic perspectives into discussions of tourism development and local economic empowerment. The findings indicate that Zapin Dance tourism reflects the Islamic principle of *maslahat* because it promotes collective welfare, preserves moral values, strengthens cultural identity, and supports social cohesion within Malay society. This finding supports previous studies emphasizing that Islamic values can function as ethical foundations for sustainable tourism and community development (Ali et al., 2024; Harahap et al., 2025). However, unlike many tourism studies that primarily focus on halal tourism from commercial or regulatory perspectives, this research conceptualizes Islamic tourism through the lens of cultural preservation and social empowerment. The integration of Islamic values within cultural tourism demonstrates that tourism development can operate not merely as an economic strategy, but as a moral and socio-cultural project rooted in communal ethics. This perspective contributes conceptually to tourism literature by extending discussions beyond economic sustainability toward spiritually informed cultural sustainability. In addition, the findings challenge secular tourism development paradigms that frequently separate economic growth from moral and cultural considerations. Instead, this study proposes that Islamic cultural values may strengthen the legitimacy and sustainability of community-based tourism initiatives in culturally religious societies.

Furthermore, the study highlights how infrastructural limitations, financial constraints, and weak institutional coordination continue to hinder the optimization of cultural tourism development in Bengkalis Regency. Although the government has shown commitment through various cultural initiatives, insufficient tourism infrastructure and inconsistent funding reduce the long-term effectiveness of tourism programs. This finding aligns with previous studies arguing that local governments in developing regions often face structural limitations in balancing economic development priorities with cultural preservation agendas (Aneta et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024). However, this study demonstrates that infrastructural limitations are interconnected with broader governance challenges, including fragmented policy implementation, limited intersectoral collaboration, and inadequate strategic planning. These findings imply that sustainable tourism development cannot rely solely on cultural enthusiasm or community participation without institutional integration and policy continuity. In this regard, the study strengthens arguments within sustainable tourism governance literature that emphasize the necessity of collaborative governance models involving governments, communities, private sectors, and digital stakeholders simultaneously. Therefore, the sustainability of Zapin Dance tourism depends not only on preserving cultural performances, but also on developing integrated governance systems capable of transforming cultural heritage into a resilient socio-economic resource.

Overall, this study contributes to the global literature on cultural tourism by positioning Zapin Dance tourism as an intersection between cultural preservation, community empowerment, regional economic development, and Islamic social values. Unlike many previous studies that discuss cultural tourism primarily from economic or heritage perspectives, this research demonstrates that tourism sustainability in Malay-Islamic societies is deeply influenced by moral values, communal

participation, and culturally embedded governance structures. The study therefore fills an important gap in tourism literature concerning the integration of Islamic ethical perspectives into community-based tourism development. At the practical level, the findings offer strategic implications for policymakers regarding the importance of long-term tourism planning, digital transformation, youth-oriented cultural regeneration, and collaborative governance mechanisms. At the theoretical level, this research expands existing tourism frameworks by showing that cultural tourism sustainability is not solely determined by economic profitability or tourism attractiveness, but also by the ability to preserve social meaning, cultural identity, and moral legitimacy within local communities. Consequently, this study positions cultural tourism not merely as an economic sector, but as a multidimensional socio-cultural system capable of shaping sustainable regional development in contemporary society.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the development of Zapin Dance tourism in Bengkalis Regency possesses significant potential to support community economic improvement while simultaneously preserving Malay-Islamic cultural identity. The findings indicate that the regional government has implemented several initiatives through cultural festivals, financial assistance, tourism promotion programs, and collaboration with local cultural communities. Community participation also plays an important role in maintaining the continuity of Zapin Dance traditions through cultural studios, regular training activities, and voluntary involvement in tourism events. In addition, Zapin Dance tourism contributes to local economic activities by creating opportunities for small businesses, informal trading, traditional handicrafts, and tourism-related services during cultural festivals and performances. These findings confirm that cultural tourism can function not only as a tourism attraction, but also as a medium for community empowerment and cultural sustainability within the context of local economic development.

However, the study also found several challenges that limit the optimization of Zapin Dance tourism development in Bengkalis Regency. Limited financial support, inadequate tourism infrastructure, weak digital promotion, and declining youth participation remain significant obstacles to sustainable cultural tourism development. From an Islamic perspective, the development of Zapin Dance tourism reflects the principle of *maslahat* because it contributes to social welfare, cultural preservation, and the strengthening of moral and religious values within Malay society. Therefore, stronger collaboration between local governments, cultural communities, tourism stakeholders, and digital promotion networks is necessary to ensure the sustainability and competitiveness of Zapin Dance tourism. This study contributes theoretically to discussions on cultural tourism and Islamic-based community development, while practically offering recommendations for policymakers and tourism managers regarding strategies for strengthening community-based cultural tourism in regional contexts.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

MA contributed to the conceptualization of the study, research design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and manuscript drafting. **RAF** contributed to the literature review, theoretical framework development, and manuscript revision process. **MAA** contributed to data validation, methodological review, and critical editing of the manuscript. **SLPY** contributed to data interpretation, academic proofreading, and final manuscript refinement.

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