

Ethnomusicology in Church Music Education: Revitalizing Batak Musical Values and Practices

Boho Parulian Pardede

IAKN Tarutung, Indonesia; bangbohopardede@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the role of ethnomusicology in church music education as an effort to revitalize the values and practices of Batak music in the context of contemporary Christian worship. This study uses a literature review approach that examines theories, empirical findings, and cultural practices related to Batak music, church music education, and liturgical inculturation movements. The results of the study show that the dominance of modern spiritual music has shifted the role of Batak music in worship, especially due to changes in the preferences of the younger generation, lack of cultural integration in the theological education curriculum, and the limited number of educators with ethnomusicology competencies. The analysis also revealed that Batak music has significant pedagogical, spiritual, and aesthetic potential as affirmed by Rice, Merriam, and Nettl about the importance of cultural context in musical practice. The findings confirm that culture-based church music education can improve the identity, participation, and liturgical meaning of the congregation. This study addresses a major gap concerning the absence of comprehensive analyses that connect ethnomusicology frameworks with practical church education strategies for Batak music revitalization. This study concludes that the revitalization of Batak music requires a holistic approach involving churches, educational institutions, cultural communities, and traditional musicians to develop a contextual curriculum and model of worship.

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Corresponding Author:

Boho Parulian Pardede

IAKN Tarutung, Indonesia; bangbohopardede@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The study of ethnomusicology in ecclesiastical music education focuses on the relationship between music, culture, and religious practice. This discipline sees music not only as sound art, but as a social product that shapes the identity of a community, as described in "Anthropology of Music" (Kelly, 2018). Batak music is a form of Indonesian ethnic music that is rich in symbolic value, aesthetics,

and unique musical structure. In the context of the Batak church, traditional music such as gondang sabangunan and crying has a significant ritual and social function. However, the development of contemporary worship has led to a shift in the musical preferences of church members. This shift created new dynamics in ecclesiastical music education.

The main problem that arises is the erosion of the values and practices of Batak music in modern church worship. Many churches opt for popular music or international spiritual music that is considered more "modern" and appealing to the younger generation (Zosim, 2020). This condition causes traditional Batak instruments to be rarely used in church liturgy. In addition, the younger generation is no longer introduced to traditional musical values in church music education. The loss of ethnic music practices in social spaces is due to the lack of cultural transfer between generations (Shafazhinskaya et al., 2020; Muñiz, 2019). This also happened to the Batak community who began to lose attachment to their musical symbolism.

There is a gap between the development of contemporary worship and efforts to preserve Batak music in ecclesiastical music education. Although many studies have discussed Batak music as a cultural heritage, few have examined its integration into church music education. The ethnomusicology literature focuses more on the analysis of musical structures, rather than its application in the formation of ecclesiastical liturgy. In addition, existing studies of church music education have adopted more Western perspectives that are less relevant to the local context (Steuernagel, 2021). This gap shows that Batak music has not received a strategic space in the study of ecclesiastical music education. The functional approach of ethnomusicology demands an understanding that music must be analyzed in terms of the context in which it is used (Lutzu, 2016; Pettan & Titon, 2015). Research on the revitalization of Batak musical values and practices has scientific urgency. This gap is the basis for the need for a comprehensive literature review.

Several solutions can be done to overcome the marginalization of Batak music in ecclesiastical worship. First, church music education must integrate elements of ethnomusicology to strengthen understanding of local cultures. Second, the church can revitalize the Batak instrument in the liturgy through training and coaching of the congregation. Third, theology schools can provide special courses on ethnic music in worship. In addition, a documentation and digitization program of Batak traditional music is needed to maintain its sustainability. This solution is in line with the concept of cultural preservation conveyed through the "safeguarding musical heritage" approach (Pryer, 2018).

Research on Batak music has been conducted in various perspectives by several experts. Examining the function of gondang sabangunan in Batak traditional rituals. Simanjuntak et al. (2023) researching changes in Batak church music practices in the era of globalization. Other research by Natie (2023) shows the people's preference for modern church music. However, there has not been much research that specifically discusses the integration of Batak music in ecclesiastical music education. Most research focuses more on cultural and anthropological aspects than on educational implementation.

The uniqueness of this research lies in the combination of ethnomusicology, church music education, and the revitalization of Batak culture. Different from previous research, this study emphasizes the analysis of the literature to map the integration of cultural values in contemporary ecclesiastical music education. The novelty of the research lies in a multidisciplinary approach that combines music theory, cultural anthropology, and worship theology. This combination provides a new perspective in looking at the position of Batak music in the modern church. According to integrative theory, music education must consider the cultural context of the learner (McKoy & Lind, 2022).

The State of the art of this research is in an effort to compile a mapping of the latest literature related to ethnomusicology in church worship. Modern literature shows an increasing trend of using local music in various world religious practices. Studies on local worship music are also developing but not systematic. Global research as conducted by Grant (2025) emphasizing the importance of "music sustainability" in the worship space. Meanwhile, local research has not touched much on the integration

of Batak values into the church music curriculum. This state of the art study shows the need for alignment between ethnomusicology theory and church music education practice.

This research has urgency because of the growing trend of globalization in modern church music. If revitalization is not carried out, Batak music practices will be increasingly difficult to find in worship halls. This is in line with the warning Howard (2016) that local culture will be eroded if it is not preserved through education. The church has a central role in maintaining the sustainability of ethnic music culture because it is the most commonly used social space. Church music education is the key to intergenerational learning. Without scientific studies, revitalization efforts will not have a strong theoretical basis (Jiang, 2025). Therefore, this research is important to produce structured recommendations. This urgency shows the strategic value of the literature review. This research also confirms the importance of cultural integration in modern Christian worship.

The objectives of this research can be formulated as follows: (1) Identify relevant Batak musical values to be revitalized in the context of contemporary Christian worship; (2) Analyze the shift in Batak church music practice in the modern era and the factors that affect it; (3) Evaluate the concept and model of church music education that is able to integrate ethnomusicological approaches and local culture; and (4) Prepare literature-based recommendations related to the revitalization strategy of Batak music in the education and practice of ecclesiastical worship.

2. METHOD

This study uses *the literature review* method with a descriptive qualitative approach. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to analyze in depth various scientific sources related to ethnomusicology, church music education, and Batak music culture. According to Willig & Rogers (2017) Qualitative research emphasizes the interpretation of phenomena based on the researcher's perspective through an understanding of the context. The literature review approach is also in line with the views of the Soaita et al. (2020) which states that *systematic literature review* helps map existing knowledge and identify study gaps. Through this approach, researchers can develop a comprehensive understanding of the revitalization of Batak musical values in contemporary worship. This method was chosen because it is relevant for evaluating theories, findings of previous research, and cultural practices in the context of the church. The use of this method also allows for multidisciplinary integration between musicology, anthropology, and theology. Thus, this study uses the right scientific approach to analyze the phenomenon of Batak music in modern worship.

This research data is sourced from scientific journals, academic books, proceedings, research reports, and relevant ecclesiastical documents. Data collection is carried out through documentation techniques, namely the collection of texts that discuss Batak music, ethnomusicology, and church music education. According to Chanda (2021) Document analysis is an important technique in qualitative research because it provides historical and contemporary data that is stable and verifiable. The data collected included ethnic music theory, church liturgical practices, music education curriculum, and contemporary worship dynamics. The researcher also selects sources using eligibility criteria such as relevance, year of publication, author's reputation, and methodological accuracy. This technique helps ensure that the data analyzed is academic and valid. Data collection was carried out systematically using Google Scholar, JSTOR, SAGE, and university e-library databases. Thus, the data used in this study can be scientifically accounted for.

Data analysis was carried out using content analysis techniques. This technique allows researchers to systematically interpret text data by identifying themes, patterns, and relationships between concepts. The analysis is carried out through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Mezmir, 2020). At the data reduction stage, the researcher screened important information related to the value of Batak music, ethnomusicology theory, and worship practices. At the data presentation stage, the researcher organized the findings into thematic categories such as music culture, church education, and revitalization. The last stage is the drawing of conclusions based on the integration of previous research findings. This analytical approach helps researchers develop a

comprehensive understanding of the research topic. This technique ensures that the results of the research have a clear and logical interpretive structure.

The research procedure is carried out through organized stages according to the rules of *systematic literature review*. First, the researcher establishes the focus of the research and formulates a literature question to determine the direction of the source search. According to Vaidyanathan (2022) The formulation of research questions is an important step to avoid data collection bias. Second, the researcher identifies sources through a keyword-based selection process and inclusion-exclusion criteria. Third, the researcher reads, tags, and analyzes sources that have met the methodological criteria. Fourth, findings from various literature are synthesized into thematic patterns that are relevant to the context of Batak music in church worship. Fifth, the researcher validated the findings through theoretical triangulation to increase the credibility of the results. This procedure ensures that research runs systematically and according to scientific standards. With clear stages, research can be accounted for methodologically.

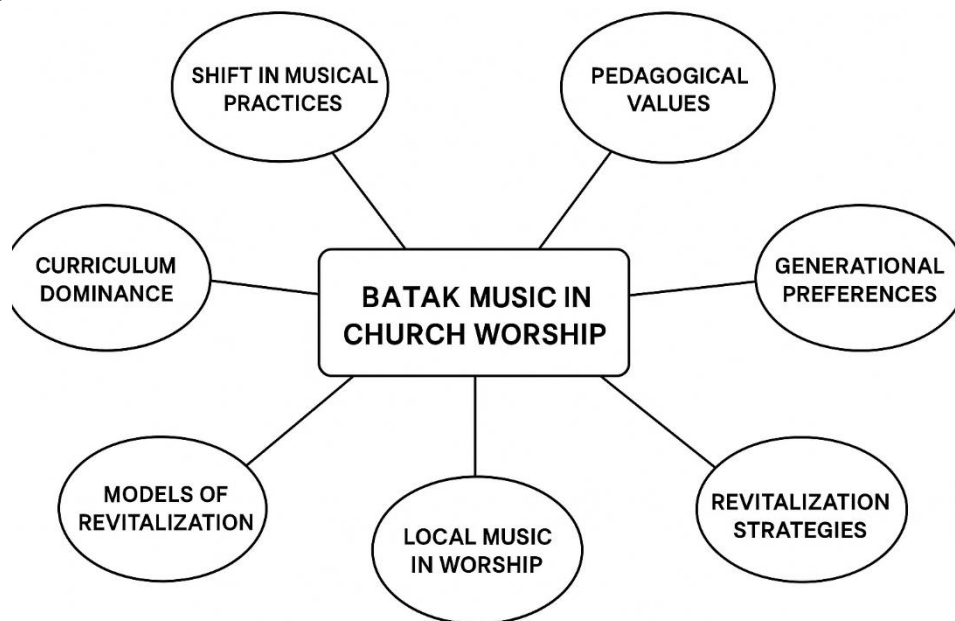
The validity of the data in this study is maintained through source triangulation and theoretical triangulation. Ahmed (2024) states that *trustworthiness* in qualitative research can be achieved through *credibility*, *dependability*, and *confirmability*. To this end, the researcher reviewed various theories of ethnomusicology and church music education to ensure the objectivity of the analysis. The researcher also ensured that the sources used came from credible academic literature. In terms of research ethics, researchers maintain scientific integrity by not plagiarizing and respecting the author's copyright. In addition, the researcher places Batak culture as an object of study with the principle of appreciation for the values, meaning, and identity of indigenous peoples. This ethics is in line with the view Schippers & Bendrups (2015) which emphasizes the importance of siding with the sustainability of local culture in ethnomusicology research.

Table 1. Summary Table of Literature Search Process

Component	Description
Databases used	Google Scholar, JSTOR, SAGE Journals, Taylor & Francis, SpringerLink, E-Library Universitas
Main keywords	<i>Ethnomusicology, church music education, Batak music, gondang sabangunan, local worship music, music revitalization, indigenous church music</i>
Keyword combinations	"ethnomusicology AND church worship", "Batak traditional music AND education", "gondang sabangunan AND liturgy", "local music revitalization AND church", "indigenous music AND Christian worship"
Kriteria inklusi	(1) Published in 2015–2025; (2) Journal articles, academic books, or proceedings; (3) Relevant to ethnomusicology, Batak music, or church music education; (4) Have a methodology that can be traced; (5) Written by a credible author or institution
Kriteria eksklusi	(1) Popular/non-scientific articles; (2) Published before 2015 (except for important basic theories); (3) Does not discuss ethnic music or church music; (4) Full text is not available; (5) Contains extreme bias or does not meet academic standards
Number of sources found	180 sources on the initial search
Total screened (title & abstract)	70 sources
Fully analyzed amounts	40–50 sources
The amount used in the final synthesis	30–35 sources

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings



The Dominant Shift of Church Music from Traditional to Modern

The results of the literature review show that Batak music has a distinctive musical structure built on the pattern of *gondang*, *ogung*, *sulim*, and *ende* vocal forms that reflect the value system of the Batak community. Theory Hariati & Purwarno (2024) about the three frameworks of music *sound*, *behavior*, and *concept* explains that Batak music cannot be separated from rituals and social identities. The literature shows that Batak music functioned as a means of religious expression before and after the entry of Christianity. During the development of Batak church worship, traditional elements had become an important part of the liturgy. However, in the last two decades, congregation preferences have been more inclined towards contemporary spiritual music. This shift has led to a reduction in the use of Batak music in regular worship. The findings show that this musical transformation occurs along with globalization. Thus, the study shows a shift in musical culture in the context of the church.

The Influence of Modernization on Batak Music Identity in Worship

The research literature shows that church music education is more dominated by Western models of music learning. According to pedagogy theory Bonnaire & Moreno (2023) music education that is only technique-oriented tends to ignore the cultural context of the learner. Literature data shows that church music education schools place only a small number of Batak music in the formal curriculum. This inequality has an impact on the low competence of prospective music servants in understanding traditional music. The results of the study confirm that the culture-based curriculum is not developed systematically. This condition is exacerbated by the lack of educators who have expertise in ethnomusicology. Therefore, the results of the study show that there is a need for curriculum reform. These findings became an important basis for the revitalization of Batak music in church education.

Music Preferences and Participation Between Generations of the Church

A literature review found that the shift in congregational music tastes was influenced by the global expansion of spiritual music. According to Jeon (2024) music modernization often encourages society to adopt new aesthetic systems and abandon local traditions. The literature shows that young congregations prefer contemporary music because it is considered more modern, simple, and emotional. On the other hand, the older generation identifies Batak music as a heritage of faith and

culture. This inequality of taste has an impact on the loss of space for traditional music in worship. The analysis shows that the change in preferences is not only due to the style of music, but also due to the lack of internalization of cultural values in the formation of the church. Therefore, the results of the study emphasize the need for a comprehensive culture building approach. These findings reinforce the urgency of revitalization.

Changes in the Pattern of People's Music Appreciation for Traditional Music

The results of the analysis show that revitalization can be carried out through the systematic integration of Batak music in church music education. According to Liu et al. (2024) The process of revitalizing music culture must pay attention to the social context, aesthetics, and function of music in society. The literature also reveals that the inculturation of traditional music in the church can increase the sense of identity and connectedness of the congregation. Several studies have stated that learning music based on local culture increases congregation participation and motivation. These findings confirm that revitalization does not mean replacing modern music, but rather creatively incorporating traditional elements. In addition, adaptations of Batak music in the form of contemporary arrangements have proven effective in some ecclesiastical practices. Thus, the results support the idea that revitalization requires a flexible pedagogical approach. These findings form the basis for an implementable solution.

The Educational and Spiritual Value of Batak Music in Ecclesiastical Learning

Literature data shows that churches in the world such as African, Korean, and Latin American churches have succeeded in contextualizing local music in worship. This is in line with the theory of contextual worship according to Brumagin (2021) which states that worship must reflect the cultural identity of the people. In the Batak context, the practice of inculturation was strong in the early days of the development of the church. However, in its development, the practice began to decline as the dominance of global music increased. Some churches still maintain Batak music, but the number is dwindling. The results of the study revealed that churches that still maintain local music tend to have consistent cultural development programs. Therefore, the literature data shows the need for church policies that favor cultural preservation. This result strengthens the urgency of revitalizing Batak music in modern worship.

Challenges of Implementing Batak Music in Worship Today

Literature findings show that Batak music has strong pedagogical values, such as togetherness, rhythmic discipline, and role harmony. According to Gómez & Andreu, (2021) traditional music is a means of forming a collective identity through musical participation. Studies show that the structure of the Batak gondang ensemble teaches musical cooperation and coordination (Rommen & Nettle, 2020). These values are in line with ecclesiological principles in church education that emphasize the unity of the body of Christ. The results of the study also revealed that the spirituality value of Batak music can enrich the worship experience. Batak music contains deep emotional and symbolic expressions in the context of rituals. Thus, the results of the study confirm that Batak music has theological and pedagogical relevance. These findings became the foundation for integration in church education.

Adaptation and Creative Arrangement as a Bridge to Modern Traditional Music

Literature analysis also shows that there are generational challenges in the reception of Batak music in the church. The younger generation views traditional music as a symbol of the unattractive past. Meanwhile, the older generation views Batak music as an important part of the Batak church's identity. According to the theory of cultural transmission Thompson & Bertaux (2020) The sustainability of tradition occurs through cross-generational interaction. The findings suggest that without intergenerational dialogue, traditional music will increasingly lose its relevance. Some literature suggests that cross-generational educational activities can increase cultural appreciation. Therefore, the results of the study confirm the importance of an inclusive pedagogical strategy. This

finding strengthens the position of Batak music as a means of fostering culture that unites the congregation.

The Role of the Church and Community in Efforts to Revitalize Batak Music

Literature studies indicate that the adaptation of Batak music in contemporary worship is very possible through arrangement innovation. According to Kurniawan (2025) music education should encourage creative *musicianship* through improvisation and cultural collaboration. Some churches have combined instruments such as the flute with modern band formats, and the results have been positively received by the congregation. The literature shows that the success of adaptation is based on the ability of music servants to understand the characteristics of traditional instruments. The findings suggest that church education that practices traditional instruments can improve cultural sustainability. In addition, the digitization of Batak music provides new opportunities in the dissemination and development of arrangements. Therefore, the results show that revitalization needs to be directed at contextual musical creativity.

Strategic Model of Batak Music Revitalization for Contemporary Liturgical Practice

The final results of the study confirm that the revitalization of Batak music in worship requires the collaboration of churches, cultural communities, universities, and musicians. According to the theory *cultural sustainability* Meireis & Rippl (2019) cultural preservation requires joint work between religious institutions and art actors. The literature shows that church music education is the most strategic space in cultural heritage. The findings show that without structured education, the preservation of Batak culture cannot run consistently. The studies also emphasized the need to develop a curriculum that blends ethnomusicology theory, traditional music practice, and worship theology. Thus, the results of this study confirm the urgency of reforming the church music education system. These findings are the foundation for a more in-depth discussion.

Discussion

The results of the study show that Batak music has a strong socio-religious structure and function, so it is very relevant for the context of Christian worship. From the perspective of ethnomusicology, Batak music has a close relationship between sound systems and people's cultural practices (Purba, 2024). This discussion emphasizes that the Batak musical character is not just aesthetic, but part of the religious experience of the community. Thus, when Batak music is absent from worship, the cultural identity of the congregation is also weakened. This is in line with the theory that the loss of traditional musical practices has an impact on the degradation of collective identity (Tang & Wu, 2025). This research shows that musical shifts are not just artistic preferences, but social changes. Therefore, the discussion emphasized the importance of maintaining Batak music as a liturgical identity. This is the foundation for cultural revitalization.

The discussion of the results revealed that the dominance of the Western music curriculum in church education led to low knowledge of Batak music. Music education must be rooted in the culture of students so that learning is more meaningful (Campbell, 2017). When the church's curriculum does not reflect the cultural realities of the church, learning becomes disconnected from its social context. This is evident in the Batak church that adopts modern music without a cultural foundation. The discussion shows that the inequality of the curriculum contributes to the loss of the competence of music servants in playing traditional instruments. In addition, the imbalance in the curriculum has an impact on the decline in the appreciation of the younger generation for Batak music. Therefore, curriculum reform is an important step in revitalization. An ethnomusicology-based approach can be a strategic solution.

The next discussion highlighted the shift in the church's musical tastes as part of the global cultural transformation. Music modernization tends to marginalize local music because it is considered less relevant. In the context of the Batak church, modern music is considered more in accordance with contemporary worship styles. However, this discussion emphasizes that shifting tastes should not

eliminate traditional musical identities. When the younger generation is not introduced to the value of Batak music, they will be further away from their cultural roots. Therefore, the development of church culture must be part of the pastoral strategy. Transmission theory suggests that culture survives only if it is taught continuously (Buska & Prihartini, 2019). Thus, the development of Batak music is an urgent need.

The discussion also emphasized that the revitalization of Batak music is very likely to be achieved through integration in church music education. Theory Fitriah & Vivian (2022) About music as a social process emphasizes that revitalization must start from the educational space. Analysis of the findings shows that church music education is an important center in the formation of the church's musical identity. By incorporating Batak music into the curriculum, the church can revive musical traditions while strengthening the identity of the congregation. In addition, the discussion shows that revitalization does not have to erase contemporary music. Instead, integration and dialogue between modern and traditional music can create contextual forms of worship. Thus, musical revitalization is an adaptive process. This approach is in line with contextual worship theory.

A discussion of global practice shows that churches in many countries have successfully contextualized local music into worship. Contextual worship is worship that represents the culture and environment of its people (Azumah et al., 2019). This discussion emphasizes that the Batak church actually has a very rich cultural capital to be contextualized. However, the dominance of global music causes the tradition to not develop optimally. These findings suggest that churches need to adopt more concrete cultural preservation policies. In addition, the discussion emphasized that the Batak church has a historical responsibility to maintain its own culture. By following the example of global praxis, the Batak church can build a more authentic model of worship. This is an important discourse in worship theology.

The following discussion emphasizes the pedagogical value of Batak music in the formation of the character of the congregation. Traditional music is a means of identity formation through musical participation. The complementary structure of the Batak ensemble reflects the vision of the unity of the body of Christ (Reily & Dueck, 2016). Thus, Batak music not only teaches musical skills, but also spiritual and social values. The discussion shows that this value is very relevant to the education of the church today. Integrating Batak music in learning can help form a congregation that is more sensitive to cultural identity. In addition, the spiritual value of Batak music can strengthen the quality of worship. Therefore, Batak music has enormous pedagogical potential.

The issue of generation is an important point of discussion. The theory of cultural transmission shows that traditions only survive if they are practiced across generations (Lizardo & Skiles, 2015). The discussion revealed that the tension between the young and old generations can be overcome through musical dialogue. Intergenerational programs in church music education can increase cultural appreciation and reduce generational bias. The analysis shows that when the younger generation is involved in the process of learning Batak music, they value cultural identity more. Therefore, the discussion encourages the church to create programs that involve all ages.

The discussion also emphasized the importance of the creative adaptation of Batak music into contemporary worship. Musical creativity is at the heart of *true musicianship*. Some churches that have successfully combined traditional instruments with modern bands are examples that adaptation is very possible (I, 2024). Research shows that the success of adaptation is influenced by the competence of the music servant to the character of traditional instruments. Therefore, church music education must include training in Batak instruments. In addition, the digitization of traditional music opens up new innovation opportunities. The discussion emphasized that revitalization does not mean returning to the past, but reviving tradition in a new contextual form. This became the basis for the renewal of church music.

The last discussion emphasized that the revitalization of Batak music can only succeed through collaboration between churches, academics, artists, and cultural communities. The theory of *cultural sustainability* states that cultural preservation requires synergy across institutions (Birkeland et al., 2018). The findings of the study show that church music education is central to cultural preservation.

The discussion emphasized that the ethnomusicology-based curriculum is a strategic step in maintaining the sustainability of Batak music. In addition, liturgical renewal is also needed to make room for local musical expression. Thus, this study confirms that the revitalization of Batak music is an urgent need. This discussion strengthens the theoretical and practical basis for the next implementation step.

It is important to highlight the methodological limitations of literature review-based research. The literature review approach has limitations because it depends entirely on the availability and quality of published sources. Thus, this study cannot capture the dynamics of Batak music practice directly in the field, such as performative nuances, social interaction in worship, and local variations between churches. Another limitation lies in the potential for *publication bias*, where works that tend to be published are usually formal academic, so that non-documentary musical practices or oral traditions are not fully accommodated. In addition, some of the sources used have different thematic focuses, so interpretation is highly dependent on the researcher's ability to perform conceptual synthesis. Because it does not involve direct observation or interviews, this study cannot claim a comprehensive representation of contemporary Batak music practices. Nevertheless, the literature review approach still provides a strong theoretical picture to understand the pattern of revitalization of Batak music conceptually and provides a basis for further field-based research.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the revitalization of Batak music in church music education is an urgent need to maintain the continuity of cultural values and musical identity of the Batak congregation in the midst of the dominance of modern church music. Literature studies show that Batak music has aesthetic, pedagogical, and spiritual values regarding the importance of cultural context in music practice. The decline in the use of Batak music in worship is mainly influenced by changes in the tastes of the younger generation, the lack of integration in the church education curriculum, and the lack of educators with competence in ethnomusicology. The discussion also emphasized that culture-based church music education has proven to be effective in increasing congregational participation, identity, and pride through contextual learning models. Previous research supports that the integration of ethnic music in worship can create a more inclusive and meaningful liturgical experience. Therefore, the revitalization of Batak music must be carried out through a holistic approach that involves churches, educational institutions, cultural communities, and traditional musicians. Overall, this study confirms that the development of a church music curriculum that integrates Batak musical values is a strategic step to build contextual worship and sustainable cultural preservation. The dominance of modern music and the lack of integration in the church curriculum are the main factors in the decline in the appreciation of the younger generation, so the integration of Batak music in learning becomes a strategic step. To enrich future understanding, empirical research is highly recommended through ethnographic studies, in-depth interviews, music education experiments, and inter-church comparative analysis to test the effectiveness of the implementation of the Batak music-based curriculum directly in the field.

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