

## Adaptations of Movements and Elements in Randai Dramatists: A Case Study in Jelebu, Negeri Sembilan

Norazlinda Mohamed Rosdi<sup>1\*</sup>, Ahmad Zulhilmi Zulkefli<sup>1</sup>, and Hazrina Hasbolah<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Heritage Studies, Faculty of Creative Technology and Heritage, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, 16300 Bachok, Kelantan

<sup>2</sup>Department of Entrepreneurship, Faculty of Entrepreneurship and Business, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, 16100 Pengkalan Chepa, Kelantan

### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the adaptation of movements and elements in *Randai* performances by dramatists in Jelebu, Negeri Sembilan, examining how traditional forms have been modified through cultural, creative, communal, and innovative processes. Originating from West Sumatra, Indonesia, *Randai* is a Minangkabau folk theatre that blends music, dance, *silat* (martial arts), and storytelling, typically staged in a circular formation. Introduced to Negeri Sembilan through cultural migration, *Randai* has since undergone significant localisation. The study addresses the lack of appreciation for the artistic value of Malaysian martial arts particularly *Randai* and scarcity of visual documentation in existing literature. Adopting a qualitative case study approach, the research is based on field observations and semi-structured interviews with performers and cultural practitioners. Findings reveal that *Randai* in Jelebu incorporates varied movement influences including *silat Gayung Patani*, *silat Gayung Malaysia*, *Seni Silat Tanah Bahru*, and animal-inspired gestures drawn from the tiger, monkey, and eagle. These adaptations not only enhance performance aesthetics but also reflect local identity, communal values, and the creative localisation of a previously foreign form. The study underscores how movement functions as a core medium of innovation, allowing *Randai* to remain relevant while preserving its cultural roots. In conclusion, the transformation of *Randai*

in Jelebu illustrates how traditional performance can evolve dynamically through regional expression. This article foregrounds movement as the foundation of *Randai*'s contemporary identity, positioning it as a living heritage shaped by ongoing adaptation, creativity, and localised martial artistry.

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received: 27 January 2025

Accepted: 05 May 2026

Published: 29 May 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.34.S2.03>

#### E-mail addresses:

[norazlinda@umk.edu.my](mailto:norazlinda@umk.edu.my) (Norazlinda Mohamed Rosdi)

[ahmadzulhilmi297@gmail.com](mailto:ahmadzulhilmi297@gmail.com) (Ahmad Zulhilmi Zulkefli)

[hazrina.h@umk.edu.my](mailto:hazrina.h@umk.edu.my) (Hazrina Hasbolah)

\* Corresponding author

**Keywords:** Cultural heritage, innovation, Jelebu, Minangkabau theatre, movement adaptation, *Randai*, *silat*

## INTRODUCTION

Negeri Sembilan possesses a distinct cultural identity shaped by Minangkabau migration from West Sumatra between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (Abdullah, 1980; Mohd Taib Osman, 1989). This migration introduced *Adat Perpatih*, a matrilineal socio-cultural system still practiced in inheritance, kinship, and governance, positioning the state as a focal point in Malay cultural anthropology.

Within this framework, Jelebu—particularly the *Suku Beranang* community—serves as a living repository of Minangkabau-derived traditions, including *Randai*. Locally, *Randai* has been adapted through the incorporation of regional dialects, indigenous narratives, musical instruments such as the *tromba* and *rebana*, and distinctive silat movements (Norhayati Ahmad, 2010). Its performance is sustained through community rituals, intergenerational training, and cultural transmission.

*Randai* in Jelebu functions not only as entertainment but as a vehicle for communal values and memory (Mohd Anis Md Nor, 1994). This study's focus on Jelebu's clan-based society offers insight into how *Randai* is dynamically preserved and localised, contributing to wider discourses on Malaysia's intangible cultural heritage and the role of community agency in cultural adaptation.

### Background of the Study

*Randai*, rooted in the term *merandai*—meaning to search or explore—originates from the Minangkabau traditions and is distinguished by agile silat-based movements

(Netrirosa, 2010). This multidimensional art form fuses storytelling, music, song, martial arts, and theatrical dialogue within a circular staging format (Pauka, 2016). Traditionally performed during communal rituals and festivities, *Randai* functions as a vessel for transmitting folklore, moral teachings, and cultural memory through the interplay of narrative and physical expression.

The integration of martial arts (silat) into *Randai* dramatisations is essential to its performative identity. Often used to convey *kaba*—traditional Minangkabau epic tales—*Randai* draws influence from classical Malay noble comedy, reinforcing its function as both entertainment and pedagogy (Netrirosa, 2010). *Randai* was introduced to the Malay Peninsula through the migration of Minangkabau people, particularly after 1932 in *Labuah Basilang*, and earlier via trade routes between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (Abdullah, 1980; Mohd Taib Osman, 1989).

In Negeri Sembilan, *Randai* has undergone distinct local adaptations, shaped by cultural, linguistic, and aesthetic assimilation. Norhayati Ahmad (2010) highlights changes in musical composition, silat choreography, and linguistic delivery, including the use of local dialects and instruments such as the *tromba* and *rebana*, alongside the influence of silat traditions like *silat Gayung Patani* (Norhayati Ahmad, 2013), *silat Gayung Malaysia*, *Seni Silat Tanah Bahru*, and animal-inspired movements like those of the tiger, monkey, and eagle. These changes reflect *Randai*'s responsiveness to local sociocultural dynamics.

Today, *Randai* remains a living tradition in West Sumatra and Negeri Sembilan, performed during weddings, markets, and communal celebrations (Indrayuda & Samsuddin, 2021). In Jelevu, the *Suku Beranang* community continues to preserve *Randai* through oral transmission and community-based performances. Their role is crucial in sustaining the form's relevance, adapting it in ways that reflect contemporary life while retaining ritualistic and communal functions.

Contemporary *Randai* narratives are increasingly diverse, drawing from folk legends, historical memory, literature, and modern social issues. In Jelevu, these adaptations often blur the line between fiction and reality, reflecting lived experiences. The region's strong cultural communalism makes it a compelling site to examine how *Randai* continues to evolve—demonstrating that cultural sustainability is best achieved through adaptation rather than static preservation.

### Statement of the Problems

The issue arising in this study is the lack of appreciation and understanding of the artistic value of Malaysian martial arts, particularly *Randai* by the community. Many people are unaware of the existence and origins of *Randai*, despite its long history and introduction to the region. According to a prior study by Rosidi (2022), the issue of apathy from various parties towards this art form is not new. This is partly because artistic expressions easily change according to trends and circumstances.

Before conducting this study, there was limited visual documentation of *Randai* in the form of books, although several *Randai* videos are available on social media platforms like 'YouTube'. However, the information provided in these videos is often insufficient and lacks accurate explanations, especially for the younger generation, including the researchers. Therefore, it is important to conduct this study to produce comprehensive documentation of *Randai* to ensure that this heritage does not disappear easily. This study can also serve as a reference for future generations in their efforts to understand cultural heritage in Negeri Sembilan and beyond.

### Research Objectives

This study aims to achieve two main objectives. First, it seeks to examine how *Randai* dramatists in Jelevu, Negeri Sembilan have adapted traditional movement practices originally rooted in the Minangkabau performance tradition. The focus is on how physical gestures, choreographic structures, and bodily expressions have been modified to reflect the socio-cultural realities of the local community, including adaptations in narrative flow and spatial orientation.

Second, the study aims to analyse the performance elements that have been reinterpreted by *Randai* dramatist in accordance with local cultural and creative contexts. This includes an exploration of components such as music, singing, costumes, narrative structure, and stage configuration. These elements are assessed in terms of their artistic innovation,

cultural relevance, and contribution to the preservation and evolution of local identity.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Theoretically, it contributes to the fields of performance studies and ethnomusicology by documenting and critically analysing the localised adaptations of *Randai*—a traditional Minangkabau performance genre—within the cultural context of Jelebu, Negeri Sembilan. By examining the restructuring of movement vocabularies and performative elements, the study offers valuable insights into processes of cultural adaptation, elements, transmission, hybridisation, and innovation within traditional theatre forms.

Practically, the research provides important implications for local practitioners, cultural advocates, and policy makers by illuminating the creative strategies employed by *Randai* dramatists in balancing traditional aesthetics with contemporary relevance such understanding can inform efforts in cultural preservation, community-based arts education, and the revitalisation of heritage performances within modern contexts.

Moreover, by focussing on a specific geographical and socio-cultural setting, this case study facilitates a deeper understanding of how local identity, collective memory, and performance aesthetics intersect in sustaining and transforming a traditional art form. The findings may also serve as a comparative reference for future studies on

the adaptation of traditional performances across other Malaysian or Southeast Asian communities.

### **Organisation of the Paper**

This study is structured into five main sections to systematically address its research objectives and offer a comprehensive analysis of the adaptations of movements and elements in *Randai* performances in Jelebu, Negeri Sembilan. The first section, the introduction presents the study's background, problem statements, research objectives, significance and the overall organisation of the paper, thereby establishing the rationale for examining the localised adaptations of the *Randai* tradition. For the literature review, it will explore relevant scholarly works and theoretical frameworks, including traditional *Randai*, performance theory, cultural adaptation, identity, hybridity, embodiment, and community. It identifies gaps in existing literature and positions the study within academic discourse on performance and Southeast Asian cultural practices.

The methodology outlines the qualitative case study design, detailing data collection methods—such as semi-structured interviews, observations—and analytical procedures. The findings and discussion section present thematically organised data aligned with the research objectives, focussing on how *Randai* dramatist in Jelebu have adapted movement vocabularies and performance elements in relation to local values and creative expression. Finally, the conclusion summarises the key findings,

highlights their implications for cultural sustainability and performance studies, limitations and proposes recommendations for practitioners, scholars, and policymakers, as well as directions for future research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The adaptation of *Randai* in Jelevu represents a dynamic cultural negotiation, reflecting the interplay between the traditional Minangkabau performance heritage and the distinctive socio-cultural environment of Negeri Sembilan. These adaptations are evident in the integration of the Negeri Sembilan dialect, modifications in physical movements to accommodate local capabilities, and the reconfiguration of narratives to reflect community-specific issues, values, and histories.

In its place of origin—West Sumatra—*Randai* remains rooted in tradition, emphasising epic tales, circular formations, and the stylised martial art of Minangkabau silat. However, in other regions such as Selangor and Kuala Lumpur, *Randai* has undergone modernising shifts, incorporating multimedia elements, contemporary music, and proscenium staging. In states like Perak and Melaka, the performative aspect of *Randai* has largely been diluted, with emphasis placed more on storytelling and dialogue, while traditional dance and music elements have either been commercialised or significantly transformed.

Scholars such as Mohd Anis Md Nor (1994) have highlighted the importance of spatial and communal contexts in shaping the evolution of traditional dances.

Likewise, Shamsul Amri Baharuddin (2005) emphasised that local cultures are not passive recipients of external influences; rather, they actively and selectively adapt cultural forms to suit local needs. Rachmi Diyah Larasati (2013) has also noted that transformations in traditional art forms often respond to socio-political conditions and the politics of identity formation.

The theoretical lens of cultural hybridity, as posited by Homi K. Bhabha (1994), is particularly relevant here. Bhabha's concept of the "third space" highlights the emergence of hybrid cultural expressions resulting from the interaction between two distinct traditions. *Randai* in Jelevu exemplifies this hybridity, functioning as a unique cultural product formed through the synthesis of Minangkabau heritage and Negeri Sembilan locality.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (1995) view on cultural preservation through recontextualisation further enriches the analysis. According to her, the sustainability of cultural practices depends on their ability to evolve contextually. *Randai* in Jelevu district illustrates such active preservation, as it adapts its form while retaining foundational values such as moral instruction, social cohesion, and the reinforcement of customary beliefs.

Performance identity theory suggests that traditional art is not merely a form of entertainment, but a vehicle for cultural expression and social identity formation. In Jelevu, *Randai* serves as a performative symbol of local identity, encapsulating communal norms, matrilineal customs (Adat Perpatih), and collective values.

Richard Schechner's (1985) theory of performance as ritual further reinforces this notion by suggesting that performance acts as a transformative social process. Within *Randai* in Jelevu district, the integration of traditional songs, silat, and circular choreography reaffirms cultural memory and creates a shared ritualistic experience.

The ethnomusicological approach outlined by Azmi, Idris, and Kechot (2022) will also be employed in this study to examine the interrelationship between music and cultural elements such as custom, belief, and identity. This framework is particularly relevant for analysing how movement and music in *Randai* near Jelevu district have been adapted within the local sociocultural context.

Victor Turner's (1982) concepts of "community" and "liminality" also apply meaningfully. The *Randai* stage becomes a liminal space where both performers and audiences engage in collective identity negotiation. The coexistence of traditional and contemporary elements reflects how identity is continuously shaped and redefined within performative contexts. Notably, the emphasis on ritualistic and communal values in Jelevu distinguishes it from urban *Randai* performances, which are often more aesthetically driven and commercially oriented.

Cultural adaptation in *Randai* in Jelevu district involves not only aesthetic transformation but also meaningful community engagement. The original circular formations and martial movements drawn from Minangkabau silat are now

infused with local dance vocabulary, including Negeri Sembilan-style *pencak silat*. Linguistically, the Minangkabau dialect has been blended or substituted with the Negeri Sembilan dialect to enhance accessibility and cultural resonance.

Narrative adaptations are equally significant. Rather than focusing solely on Minangkabau legends, contemporary *Randai* in Jelevu features local tales, historical events, and social commentaries relevant to the community. This transformation not only rejuvenates the tradition but also ensures its relevance to new generations, aligning cultural expression with the realities of a changing society.

The notion of performativity, as theorised by Judith Butler (1990) and Richard Schechner (1985), underscores how identity and tradition are enacted and re-enacted through performance. *Randai* in Jelevu district, the choices made in choreography, dialogue, and thematic focus are not merely artistic but reflect deeper processes of cultural reaffirmation and transformation. The inherently participatory nature of *Randai*—through responsive dialogue, song, and audience interaction—further transforms the performance into a living space of negotiation and meaning-making.

Finally, the core of *Randai* in Jelevu district lies in the negotiation of cultural identity. As a community inheriting Minangkabau tradition yet shaped by Negeri Sembilan's unique historical and cultural context, Jelevu dramatists carefully decide which traditional elements to preserve

and which to reinterpret. These creative decisions reflect both communal aspirations and a desire for cultural sustainability. Through such performances, local history is reclaimed, cultural pride is nurtured, and new expressions of belonging are continuously shaped.

In conclusion, the adaptation of *Randai* in Jelevu is best understood through the interrelated frameworks of cultural hybridity, performativity, and identity negotiation. These concepts illuminate how *Randai* is not simply preserved but dynamically reimagined, reinforcing its role as a vibrant, living tradition that reflects the evolving identity of the Jelevu community.

## METHODS

This study employs a qualitative ethnographic case study approach to examine how movements and performance elements in *Randai* have been adapted by dramatists in Jelevu, Negeri Sembilan. Rooted in the interpretivist tradition, this approach allows for an in-depth exploration of cultural practices within their specific socio-historical and performative contexts. The methodology is informed by principles of naturalistic inquiry (Berg, 1995; Marican, 2005), which emphasise field immersion, reflexivity, and the co-construction of meaning between researcher and participants.

Ethnography, as defined by Creswell (2005), enables researchers to study a group's education, beliefs, behaviours, and language in natural settings. In this study, the ethnographic lens is applied to observe and

interpret the cultural adaptation of *Randai*, focusing on processes of transformation in choreography, music, narrative, and performance style. Research questions are oriented toward understanding how local identity, cultural continuity, and innovation intersect within *Randai* practices in Jelevu.

The selection of Jelevu as the research site was guided by several contextual and methodological considerations. Firstly, Jelevu remains one of the most culturally vibrant districts in Negeri Sembilan, with communities that actively uphold *Adat Perpatih* and traditional arts. Local art groups serve as agents of cultural transmission, offering a living context in which *Randai* continues to thrive. Secondly, the presence of *Suku Beranang*, a dominant clan in Jelevu, plays a central role in maintaining *Randai* as a tool for cultural communication. Their regular involvement in performances and cultural education enables the study to explore clan-based influences on artistic adaptation.

Thirdly, Jelevu's communal and tradition-bound structure presents a rich ethnographic setting for data collection. It allows the researcher to establish sustained interactions with participants, facilitating access to embodied knowledge and situated cultural meanings. Lastly, the lack of detailed academic documentation on *Randai* in Jelevu presents a research gap that this study aims to address, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of Malaysia's intangible heritage.

Data were collected through observation and semi-structured interviews. Observation

was conducted during adaptation of movements by *Randai* dramatist near Jelebu. Interviews also were conducted with a purposive sample of informants including *Randai* dramatists (directors, dancers, actors, scriptwriters), cultural instructors and community who is familiar with *Randai*'s evolution. Sampling was designed to ensure diversity in terms of gender, age, and role within the performance ecosystem.

Semi-structured interviews provided flexibility to explore specific themes while maintaining comparability across participants. Interview questions were organised around several core themes: involvement in *Randai*, artistic motivations, adaptation strategies, elements, perceptions of tradition and innovation, and reflections on *Randai*'s role in shaping local identity. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, while field notes, photographs, and audio-visual recordings were used to supplement observations and enhance contextual understanding. Where possible, interviews were conducted in informal and familiar settings to encourage openness and reflexivity.

Ethical protocols were observed throughout the research process, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality. Participants were given opportunities to review their interview data, and member checking was conducted to ensure accuracy and integrity of interpretations.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006)

six-phase framework: (1) familiarisation with the data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) identification of themes, (4) theme review, (5) definition and naming of themes, and (6) final report writing. Key themes that emerged included '*movement adaptation*', '*creative negotiation*', '*preservation of tradition*', and '*cultural identity*'. Manual coding and reflective memo-writing were employed to trace emerging patterns, supported by triangulation of data sources.

The theoretical frameworks underpinning the analysis include Cultural Preservation by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (1995) and Cultural Hybridity Homi K. Bhabha (1994) and Performance Theory (Schechner, 1985; Turner, 1982). These frameworks conceptualise *Randai* as a site of cultural negotiation and identity formation, where tradition and innovation coexist. Cultural adaptation is examined through shifts in language use, costume, choreography, and musical forms, while performance theory situates *Randai* as a ritual space for cultural expression and transformation.

To ensure trustworthiness, strategies such as data triangulation (semi-structured interviews and observation), reflexive journaling, and prolonged engagement in the field were implemented. These methods support the study's aim to offer a contextually grounded and nuanced understanding of how *Randai* in Jelebu is being adapted, reimaged, and sustained by its practitioners amidst changing socio-cultural landscapes.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Adaptations of Movements in Randai Dramatists

Originally, silat encompassed techniques such as *gayuang*, *sambuik*, *tangkok*, and *lapek*, but due to its combative nature, these movements were gradually refined into stylised, dance-like forms more suitable for public performance (Elias et al., 2015). This refinement contributed to the emergence of art forms like *pencak silat*, *sewah dance*, and *gelombang*, all of which became foundational to *Randai*. The evolution of Minangkabau martial and literary arts gained momentum in the 1920s when Malay nobility introduced theatrical performances across the Malay Archipelago (Brandon, 1989), influenced in part by Dutch colonial theatre or *toneel* (Mohd Anuar Ramli, 2006; Zulkifli, 2017).

The migration of Minangkabau people to Negeri Sembilan (Hall, 1971), especially to Jelebu (Mustafar & A'zmi, 2023), facilitated the localisation of *Randai*, embedding it within local customs and social structures (Azmi et al., 2021). Emerging from the oral storytelling tradition *bakaba*, *Randai* preserved folk epics like

*Si Tongga Maget Jabang* and absorbed elements from *basijobang* and Dutch drama (Kechot, 2009). Today, groups like *Randai Rantau* and *Laman Bangkinang* (Kechot, 2009) continue to promote its legacy. Though rooted in martial arts, *Randai* now emphasises choreographed *bunga silat* movements for communal storytelling and cultural transmission (Hum & Kuniang, 2015).

The *bunga silat* sequence forms the foundation of movement adaptation in *Randai* dramatics, where martial origins are stylised for performative aesthetics. The first movement, known as *a'liff* (Figure 1), symbolises the starting point of all steps and is named after the initial Arabic letter in Islam. It requires the performer to stand upright with feet together, hands by the sides, spine and head aligned—signifying discipline and readiness.

This is followed by the *kudo-kudo* or *balapeh* movement (Figure 2), comprising three stances: front, middle, and back. The performer transitions from the *a'liff* stance into a bent-knee position, extending the right hand forward while the left hand rests on the thigh.



Figure 1. *A'liff* sign movements



Figure 2. Kudo-kudo / balapeh movements

These stances mirror traditional combat positions, but within *Randai*, they are slowed and rhythmically coordinated.

The *gelek* movement is then introduced, allowing directional shifts in the performance (Figure 3). It appears in two forms—static and lifted. In both cases, the torso rotates to change direction, maintaining fluidity within the *kudo-kudo* frame. The lifted version

adds dynamism by incorporating a foot lift, allowing expressive transitions across stage space.

Next, the *gantuang* movement (Figure 4) involves lifting the left leg to waist height while the right hand extends forward. The hand must remain below shoulder level, adhering to cultural etiquette. This gesture blends martial formality with performative poise.

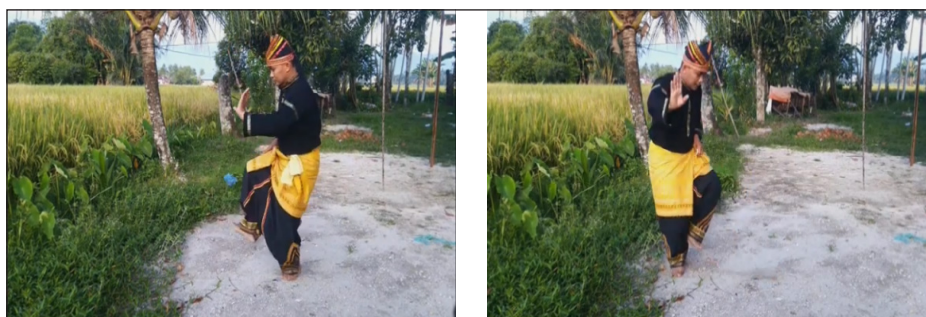


Figure 3. Gelek movements



Figure 4. *Gantuang* /*gantung* movements

The *simpir* or sweeping movement (Figure 5), typically defensive in combat, follows the *gantuang* movement. Here, the foot slides outward while the hands open in expressive gestures—one at chest level and the other pointing downward (*cukap*), signifying alertness.

The *cross* or *lintang* movement (Figure 6) expands on the previous gesture, with both hands raised and heels slightly lifted. This movement has three body levels—high, mid, and low—each offering dramatic emphasis during conflict scenes.

The *tampuah* movement (Figure 7) serves as an opening stance for attack. It adopts the middle *kudo-kudo* base with one hand thrust forward and the other guarding the chest, symbolising intent and balance.

Other adapted sequences include a *gelek-gantuang* (Figure 8) combination, *sintak* (a step backward to evade) (Figure 9), and *palintang sutor* (Figure 10), which incorporates a rotating arm movement ending in a seated position—emphasising theatricality over aggression.

The *sembah* gesture (Figure 11), adapted for *Randai*, signals respect through upright or seated forms. It reflects ceremonial values rather than combative action.

Finally, the *galembong* movement (Figure 12) concludes the performance. The wide-legged stance and rhythmic slapping of traditional trousers (*seluar galembong*) produce audible cues. This signature movement showcases the performer's timing, strength, and artistry, highlighting how traditional combat elements are transformed into performative expression in *Randai* dramatics.

The movement elements in *Randai* performances in Negeri Sembilan have evolved beyond their original Minangkabau form through a variety of local adaptations (Kechot, 2009; Pauka, 1998). These changes are not limited to physical gestures but extend to language, music, narrative structure, and costume, all contributing to the unique identity of *Randai* in Jelevu. The adoption of the Negeri Sembilan dialect, replacing Minangkabau language, enhances the performance's local resonance, reflecting a broader cultural transformation (Brandon, 1989; Hall, 1971).

Musically, instruments like the *tromba* and *rebana* have been incorporated or blended with traditional Minangkabau instruments such as the *talempong* and

*gendang panjang*, producing rhythmic arrangements that align with local preferences (Brandon, 1989; Pauka, 1998). Local folk songs, including *Anak Itik Tok Wi* and *Burung Pungguk*, further contribute to the musical and narrative layers of the performance (Kechot, 2009). These musical components harmonise with stylised martial art movements—particularly *bunga silat*—

ensuring cohesion between movement, melody, and story (Asriati et al., 2019).

*Randai* in Jelebu differs thematically from its Indonesian counterpart, which often draws from canonical *kaba* literature such as *Cindua Mato* and *Sabai Nan Aluih*. Instead, it foregrounds regional legends and historical episodes relevant to Negeri Sembilan (Brandon, 1989; Pauka, 1998).



Figure 5. *Simpir* movement



Figure 6. Cross motions



Figure 7. Open / *tampuah* movement



Figure 8. *Gelek* and hanging movements



Figure 9. *Sintak* movements



Figure 10. *Palintang sutor* movements



Figure 11. Sembah / sambah movement



Figure 12. Galembong movements

Costumes also reflect hybridisation, combining Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan aesthetics through adjustments in material, colour, and embroidery, aligning with local resources and tastes. These layers of adaptation illustrate a dynamic process of cultural negotiation and hybridity (Butler, 1990; Bhabha, 1994).

Mazlan and Shamsudin (2018) identify three primary groups within the *Randai* community in Negeri Sembilan: local performers, Minangkabau descendants from Indonesia, and outside contributors. This diverse composition reflects the inclusiveness and adaptability of *Randai*, sustaining its relevance across generations.

Supporting institutions have further reinforced this evolution. 'Laman Merewah' functions as a training and archiving centre for *Randai*. 'Persada Negeri Sembilan' promotes *Randai* at both state and national platforms, while KESET (Negeri Sembilan Theatre Association) encourages creative integration between *Randai* and contemporary theatrical forms (Mohd Faizal Musa, 2011; Norhayati Ahmad, 2010). Collectively, these organisations play a vital role in preserving and revitalising *Randai* as a living cultural practice amid ongoing social change.

In addition to the organisations mentioned above, there are also several individuals involved in *Randai* performances. These individuals are detailed in Table 1.

Scholars view *Randai* as a living tradition that continues to evolve within its cultural context. Mohd Anis Md Nor (1994) highlights its function as a medium of cultural communication among the Minangkabau diaspora in Negeri Sembilan, while Norhayati Ahmad (2010) emphasises its role in reflecting social change and hybridity.

Table 1

*Several individuals involved in Randai performances near Jelevu (Jabatan Kebudayaan dan Kesenian Negara Negeri Sembilan, 2020)*

Name	Role/Skill	Background	Performance/Contribution	District Focus
Sahrill	Young choreographer, <i>Randai</i> dancer	New generation, active in innovating <i>Randai</i> choreography	Creates both modern and traditional <i>Randai</i> choreography	Jelevu
JKKN Negeri Sembilan Group	Official state cultural troupe, active <i>Randai</i> performers	Comprised of talented youths from various districts, including Jelevu	Performs <i>Randai</i> at state and national festivals	Negeri Sembilan (main focus: Jelevu)
Mazdar Abd Aziz	Veteran <i>Randai</i> artist, actor and educator	Senior figure who has extensively documented <i>Randai</i>	Promotes <i>Randai</i> through traditional performances and teaching	Jelevu and Negeri Sembilan
Kamarul Ibrahim	Actor and <i>Randai</i> practitioner	<i>Randai</i> arts veteran with extensive experience	Lead actor in various <i>Randai</i> performances	Jelevu
Zuhairi	<i>Randai</i> arts practitioner and choreographer	Experienced in <i>Randai</i> dance and silat movements	Develops and preserves the original <i>Randai</i> style	Jelevu
Mat Desa Rahman	Artist and community figure in <i>Randai</i>	Known as a traditional <i>Randai</i> arts activist	Significant contributor in <i>Randai</i> training and performances	Jelevu
Norlela Ishak	Female <i>Randai</i> performer; skilled in traditional music and event coordination	Performs in <i>Randai</i> music ensembles; plays traditional instruments like rebana and tromba	<i>Randai</i> musician, singer, cultural coordinator	Jelevu

Mazlan and Shamsudin (2018) frame *Randai* as more than entertainment, seeing it as a site of cultural identity and social unity.

Mohd Faizal Musa (2011) regards *Randai* as a vessel for oral tradition, reinforcing community cohesion. Khor (2007) and Tan (2015) underline its role in nurturing intergenerational connections, while Ismail and Ahmad (2013) demonstrate how community participation in *Randai* strengthens local identity. Lee (2019) introduces the notion of cultural transformation, showing how performers creatively reinterpret tradition to suit contemporary needs.

These perspectives illustrate that adaptations in *Randai*—particularly movement—are responses to broader cultural dynamics. In Jelevu, these transformations are embedded in local language, music, and storytelling. *Randai* thus remains rooted in tradition while adapting to modern contexts, sustained by cultural institutions, artists, and community actors committed to preserving its relevance and meaning.

### **Randai as a Dramatic Tradition: Adaptation of Elements in Contemporary Performance**

In Negeri Sembilan, particularly in Jelevu, *Randai* has evolved through creative adaptations that reflect local cultural values and modern sensibilities while retaining its core dramatic components. Central to *Randai* is its narrative structure, conveyed through *kaba* or epic tales performed by actor-dancers (Brandon, 1989; Pauka, 1998). One frequently staged tale in Jelevu

is *Rangkayo Mudo*, which follows a young man's journey in search of success—echoing the *Adat Perpatih* value of youth mobility and resilience (Asriati et al., 2019; Hall, 1971; Kechot, 2009).

Dialogic acting enables performers to embody roles through expressive speech and movement, often incorporating reflective and didactic dialogue to convey communal values (Kechot, 2009; Schechner, 1985; Turner, 1982). Dance elements, especially *gelombang* performed in a circular formation, symbolise unity and group coordination (Kechot, 2009). The *tukang goreh*, who leads both vocally and choreographically, is key to maintaining rhythm, structure, and emotional pace—drawing on *silat* and traditional Malay dance forms to create a stylised hybrid of movement.

Literary components such as *gurindam* are also integral to narration and scene transitions (Brandon, 1989; Pauka, 1998). These poetic verses, delivered in stylised Malay, evoke emotion and mark shifts in tone or atmosphere. Commonly recited titles include *Dayang Daini*, *Simarantang*, *Talipuak Layua*, and *Indang Kurinci* (Kechot, 2009), which require a performer with vocal strength and nuanced understanding of narrative flow (Asriati et al., 2019).

Music in *Randai* emerged organically from within the ensemble. Vocal interjections or *aba-aba* such as *hep*, *tah*, and *tih* are paired with body percussion and traditional instruments like *caklempong*, *bangsi*, and drums (Asriati et al., 2019; Pauka, 1998). These establish mood and indicate transitions.

In modern practice, expanded musical ensembles are occasionally introduced to increase emotional intensity (Kechot, 2009). The *tukang goreng* also functions as a dramaturge, modifying tempo and dynamics to match audience engagement (Brandon, 1989; Pauka, 1998).

Traditionally, *Randai* is performed outdoors in front of the *rumah gadang* and often continues through the night during communal rituals or festivities (Kechot, 2009; Schechner, 1985; Turner, 1982). This spatial-temporal setting reinforces the performance's link to communal identity and ritual life (Hall, 1971).

Islam also has deeply influenced *Randai*'s evolution. Historically, *Randai* served as a platform for Islamic preaching (Kayam, 1984), with performance elements such as the opening prayer gesture and the *a'liff* stance—where dancers stand still and composed—symbolising spiritual submission and discipline. Movements that were formerly animistic or animalistic in nature have been recontextualised into floral and geometric forms to align with Islamic aesthetics and values (Elias et al., 2015). However, in certain localities, animal-inspired gestures—such as those reflecting the movements—continue to be retained as part of the performative vocabulary.

The term *Randai* is believed to derive from the Arabic *ra'yan li da'i*, suggesting its role in spiritual and moral guidance (Azmi et al., 2021). Vocal calls like *hep* and *tah* may also reflect Sufi breathing techniques, particularly from the Naqshbandi tradition. In terms of content, pre-Islamic myths have

been slowly replaced with Islamic moral tales and ethical parables. Nevertheless, *Randai* maintains its folk roots through communal involvement and symbolic storytelling (Azmi et al., 2021).

In Jelebu, *Randai* reflects a dynamic interplay between inherited tradition and local reinvention. Elements such as language, costume, and instrumentation have been localised to suit the Negeri Sembilan context. Dialects replace Minangkabau speech, local folklore supplements *kaba*, and costumes blend Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan designs—marking a hybridised aesthetic.

This adaptation is not viewed as a deviation but a process of cultural negotiation and sustainability. *Randai* is reimaged through community practices and institutional support, including training centres like 'Laman Merewah' and organisations such as 'Persada Negeri Sembilan' and 'KESET', which facilitate both preservation and innovation (Mohd Faizal Musa, 2011; Norhayati Ahmad, 2010).

The relevance of *Randai* extends beyond performance. It has implications for cultural policy, advocating for tradition-based innovation, and for education, offering experiential avenues for moral and cultural learning. From a performance studies perspective, *Randai* challenges essentialist views of authenticity, showcasing how tradition evolves in response to lived realities.

In essence, *Randai* dramatists in Jelebu embody an integrated performance

system—interweaving narrative, gesture, sound, and spirituality—allowing the art form to flourish as a conduit for both cultural heritage and contemporary expression. Through selective reinvention grounded in local identity and community collaboration, *Randai* continues to thrive as a meaningful, living tradition.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Randai* in Negeri Sembilan represents a culturally rich and aesthetically refined traditional art form that continues to evolve through localised adaptation. The integration of movements such as *silat Gayung Patani*, *silat Gayung Malaysia*, *Seni Silat Tanah Bahru* and the replacement of animistic or animal-based elements with floral-inspired gestures reflect efforts to harmonise the performance with Islamic values and local sensibilities although in certain localities, animal-inspired gestures continue to be retained. But, for instance, the *a'liff* movement symbolises a shift towards spiritual introspection, replacing earlier forms that lacked Islamic influence.

This study highlights the need to preserve *Randai* as a cultural legacy that embodies historical values, identity, and social transformation. A bottom-up, community-centred approach reveals how the *Randai* tradition remains relevant by adapting to changing contexts without losing its essence.

To ensure its continuity, the younger generation must develop an appreciation for *Randai*. Collective efforts—especially by policymakers, cultural practitioners, and

communities—are essential to safeguard this intangible heritage before it fades beyond recovery. Preservation today ensures relevance tomorrow.

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study offers concrete strategies for sustaining and revitalising *Randai* as a living cultural tradition. For artists and practitioners, community-based adaptation workshops can serve as training platforms for new performers to engage with updated *Randai* movements and narratives that respond to contemporary issues. Additionally, digital platforms such as 'YouTube', 'Tiktok' and other social media should be leveraged to document and disseminate adapted performances to a wider and more diverse audience.

For educators and academic institutions, the development of teaching modules based on *Randai* adaptations as case studies can enrich curricula in performing arts and cultural studies. Collaboration between universities and local arts communities can further strengthen community engagement initiatives. Meanwhile, cultural and heritage institutions are encouraged to establish a digital archive that includes videos, scripts, photographs, and oral histories of adapted *Randai* performances. Recognising *Randai* in Jelebu district within national heritage planning will further emphasise its role in shaping Malaysia's multicultural identity.

For future research should focus on digital archiving as a critical tool for documentation, education, and long-term preservation. Technological integration

ensures intergenerational accessibility and knowledge transfer. Cross-cultural collaborations—especially with Minangkabau communities in Indonesia or international artists—could further enrich Randai’s adaptive potential through cultural dialogue and exchange. Ultimately, this study should inform strategic planning by heritage institutions such as the National Heritage Department or the National Art Gallery, ensuring that *Randai* is not only preserved but actively nurtured as a dynamic and evolving cultural legacy.

### **LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

In the Malaysian context, cultural heritage is often shaped by political and institutional forces—through national representation, funding priorities, and heritage policies. Local art forms such as *Randai* in Jelevu district are not immune to these dynamics. Adapted performances frequently provoke questions of authenticity and authority: who decides what constitutes 'legitimate' heritage, and should preservation entail conserving tradition in static form or allowing recontextualisation that reflects contemporary realities. Government bodies often prioritise original forms for tourism and national branding, restricting community agency in creatively reimagining traditions. This tension between preservation and innovation is a central theme in *Randai*'s evolution.

Preservation is often narrowly defined as replication, yet this approach fails to

acknowledge shifting social realities. In contrast, adapted *Randai* in Jelevu exemplifies cultural continuity through transformation—where movement vocabularies, performance structures, and narratives are reshaped in response to urbanisation, education, and generational shifts. This study challenges rigid preservation models, advocating instead for community-centred and context-sensitive frameworks that reflect lived experiences.

To deepen the study’s conceptual grounding, relevant theories from cultural politics (e.g. Homi Bhabha, 1995; Stuart Hall, 1971) and performance studies (e.g. Richard Schechner, 1985) may be applied to frame adaptation as a legitimate strategy for cultural survival. Contrasting institutional discourses with community perspectives allows for a richer narrative that highlights the rationales, tensions, and negotiations behind adaptation. This reflexive analysis positions the researcher as both documentarian and cultural advocate.

Key terms from performance studies—such as embodiment, performativity, intercultural performance, and liminality—enhance analytical precision, while concepts from ethnomusicology—such as musical syncretism, transmission, contextual listening, and cultural sustainability—highlight how music and movement operate within evolving cultural landscapes. These terminologies anchor the research within relevant disciplinary discourses.

Ultimately, integrating these frameworks is not merely stylistic—it affirms the study’s academic rigour, epistemological awareness, and potential to contribute to

global dialogues on intangible cultural heritage. By embedding *Randai* in Jelebu district in broader scholarly conversations, this research not only uplifts a local tradition but also informs critical discussions on adaptation, identity, and sustainability in Southeast Asian performing arts.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Acknowledgements are extended to the interview respondents who provided invaluable assistance, particularly in the data findings section. Gratitude is also expressed to the co-author and all parties involved in the success of this study, whether directly or indirectly.

## REFERENCES

- Abdullah, W. D. (1980). *Adat Perpatih: Sejarah dan perkembangannya*. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. <https://doi.org/10.15294/harmonia.v19i1.16106>
- Asriati, A., Kosasih, A., & Desfiarni, D. (2019). Silat as the source and identity of the Minangkabau ethnic dance. *Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research and Education*, 19(1), 71-83. <https://doi.org/10.15294/harmonia.v19i1.16106>
- Azmi, N. A., Idris, Z., & Kechot, A. S. (2022). Kesenian randai sebagai manifestasi budaya masyarakat Perpatih di Negeri Sembilan. *Geografia: Malaysian Journal of Society and Space*.
- Berg, B. L. (1995). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (2nd ed.). Allyn & Bacon.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- Brandon, J. R. (1989). *Seni pertunjukan di Asia Tenggara [Theatre in Southeast Asia]*. ISI Yogyakarta Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Elias, M. S., Ismail, S., Abdul Hamid, N., & Mohamed Shapie, M. N. (2015). *Kurikulum seni silat Malaysia serta sumbangannya kepada warisan dan tamadun Melayu*.
- Hall, D. G. E. (1971). *Sejarah Asia Tenggara*. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Hum, A. M., & Kuniang, E. K. N. (2015). Nilai-nilai pendidikan karakter dalam randai bujang sampai: Values of character education in Randai Bujang Sampai. *Jurnal Peradaban Melayu*, 10, 108-122.
- Indrayuda, I., & Samsuddin, M. E. (2021). Changes in form and style in randai performance at the Minangkabau diaspora in Malaysia. *Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research and Education*, 21(2), 340-355. <https://doi.org/10.15294/harmonia.v19i1.16106>
- Ismail, R., & Ahmad, N. (2013). Randai: An ethnographic study of its performance and community involvement in Negeri Sembilan. *Jurnal Pengajian Melayu*, 24(2), 71-90.
- Jabatan Kebudayaan dan Kesenian Negara Negeri Sembilan. (2020). *Laporan tahunan aktiviti seni dan budaya Negeri Sembilan*.
- Kayam, U. (1981). *Seni, tradisi, masyarakat*. Sinar Harapan.
- Kechot, A. S. (2009). Laporan kajian randai warisan masyarakat Minang Negeri Sembilan: Meneroka perkembangan dan taburannya. *Jurnal Melayu*, 4, 161-172.
- Khor, G. L. (2007). Performing identities: Randai and the negotiation of Minangkabau cultural identity

- in Negeri Sembilan. *Asian Theatre Journal*, 24(2), 307-325.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (1995). Theorising heritage. *Ethnomusicology*, 39(2), 367-380. <https://doi.org/10.15294/harmonia.v19i1.16106>
- Larasati, R. D. (2013). *The dance that makes you vanish: Cultural reconstruction in post-genocide Indonesia*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Lee, S. Y. (2019). Cultural transmission and transformation in randai performance: An ethnographic perspective. *Malaysian Journal of Cultural Studies*, 14(3), 55-74.
- Marican, S. (2005). *Kaedah penyelidikan sains sosial*. Prentice Hall/Pearson Malaysia.
- Mazlan, A., & Shamsudin, S. (2018). Randai dalam konteks komuniti kontemporari Negeri Sembilan. *Jurnal Warisan dan Budaya*, 12(2), 33-48. <https://doi.org/10.15294/harmonia.v19i1.16106>
- Mohd Anis Md Nor. (1994). *Randai and its place in Malay performing arts*. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Mohd Faizal Musa. (2011). *Budaya dan kuasa: Tradisi lisan dalam masyarakat Melayu*. UM Press.
- Mohd Taib Osman. (1989). *Malay folk literature and oral traditions*. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Mustafar, F. W., & A'zmi, A. A. (2023). Sungai Muar laluan air penting dalam penubuhan awal Kampung Pasir Besar, Gemas, Negeri Sembilan. In *Seminar Antarabangsa Susastera, Bahasa & Budaya Nusantara (SUTERA 2023)*.
- Netrirosa, A. (2010). *Kompleksiti persembahan randai dalam kehidupan masyarakat Minangkabau di Sumatera Barat* (Master's thesis, Universiti Sains Malaysia).
- Norhayati Ahmad. (2010). Adaptasi randai Minangkabau dalam budaya Negeri Sembilan. *Jurnal Seni Persembahan*, 5(1), 45-58.
- Ramli, M. A. (2006). Islamisasi di Tanah Melayu: Analisis terhadap proses interaksi antara adat dan syariah Islam. In Hashim Awang et al. (Eds.), *[Title of book/proceedings needed]* (pp. 424-434).
- Rosidi, A. (2022). *Candra Kirana: Sebuah saduran atas cerita Panji*. Nuansa Cendekia.
- Schechner, R. (1985). *Between theatre and anthropology*. University of Pennsylvania Press. <https://doi.org/10.15294/harmonia.v19i1.16106>
- Shamsul Amri Baharuddin. (2005). *Budaya dan pembangunan: Kajian kes randai dan seni persembahan tradisional*. Institut Kajian Malaysia dan Antarabangsa (IKMAS), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Tan, M. K. (2015). The role of Randai in community cohesion among the Minangkabau in Malaysia. *Journal of Ethnographic Studies*, 9(1), 12-27.
- Turner, V. W. (1982). *From ritual to theatre: The human seriousness of play*. Performing Arts Journal Publications.
- Zulkifli, Z. (2017). Randai sebagai teater rakyat Minangkabau: Alternatif pembinaan dan pengembangan. *Garak Jo Garik: Jurnal Pengkajian dan Penciptaan Seni*, 9(1).