

FAITH IN MOTION: THE RELEVANCE OF RELIGIOUS FESTIVAL DANCES TO KAPAMPANGAN YOUTH

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Abstract

This study investigated the relevance of religious festival dances to Kapampangan youth in Pampanga, Philippines, focusing on their level of knowledge of historical and cultural relevance, positive perception and appreciation, engagement, and frequency of exposure. A quantitative, descriptive-comparative design was employed involving 200 Kapampangan youth aged 15–24 years from selected cities and municipalities in Pampanga. Data were gathered using a researcher-developed, expert-validated survey questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale. They were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) and an independent-samples t-test at the 0.05 level of significance.

Findings indicated that respondents demonstrated a high level of knowledge regarding religious festival dances (overall $M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.47$) and a very high level of positive perception and appreciation (overall $M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.39$). Engagement among youth actively exposed through school programs was moderate (overall $M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.58$), while overall frequency of exposure to religious festival dances was also moderate (overall $M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.64$). The t-test results revealed a statistically significant difference in engagement between youth exposed to religious festival dances through school programs and those not exposed ($t = 3.41$, $p = 0.001$), indicating that structured educational exposure is associated with higher engagement. The results underscore the importance of institutional and community mechanisms for cultural transmission and suggest the need to strengthen school-based initiatives to sustain youth participation in religious festival dances. Proposed interventions include integrating festival dance modules in MAPEH, conducting inter-school cultural exhibitions, and implementing community-based cultural immersion programs.

Keywords: Kapampangan Youth; Religious Festival Dances; Cultural Heritage; Perception and Appreciation; Engagement; Exposure; MAPEH; Pampanga

1. Introduction

Religious festival dances in the Philippines constitute a form of living heritage where movement, music, and embodied ritual mediate collective memory, devotional practice, and local identity. Within many Filipino communities, dance is not merely performative; it is a culturally authorized mode of participation in public religiosity—an enactment through which community members communicate gratitude, petition, and belonging in the context of patronal feasts and liturgical calendars. UNESCO frames intangible cultural heritage (ICH) as practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities recognize as part of their cultural heritage, sustained through ongoing re-creation and transmission across generations (UNESCO, 2003). In this sense, religious festival dances are not static “folk artifacts,” but dynamic social practices whose relevance depends on whether younger generations continue to learn, value, and participate in them (UNESCO, n.d.-b).

The safeguarding and educational transmission of such practices is both a global and national priority. UNESCO has explicitly emphasized the role of formal and non-formal education in safeguarding ICH, noting that ICH can provide context-specific content and pedagogy that

strengthen the relevance and quality of education (UNESCO, n.d.-a). In the Philippine context, this orientation is reinforced by state commitments to culture and education: the 1987 Philippine Constitution directs the State to foster preservation and enrichment of national culture and to protect rights to cultural development (1987 Philippine Constitution, n.d.). Complementing this constitutional mandate, the National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009 (Republic Act No. 10066) provides a statutory framework for the protection and conservation of national cultural heritage, including intangible forms such as traditional practices and expressions (Republic Act No. 10066, 2009). Meanwhile, the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (Republic Act No. 10533) underscores curriculum principles of cultural sensitivity, contextualization, and localization, enabling schools to embed local heritage in learning experiences in ways that are responsive to community context (Republic Act No. 10533, 2013). These policy foundations legitimize treating religious festival dances not only as community traditions but also as educational resources that may support youth formation, identity development, and civic-cultural participation.

Notwithstanding these frameworks, the empirical problem is practical and immediate: the continuity of religious festival dances depends on youth knowledge, perception, and engagement. Globalization, shifting leisure ecologies, and changing patterns of religious participation can erode the everyday visibility of traditional practices unless deliberate community and school-based mechanisms support transmission. UNESCO's safeguarding guidance explicitly warns against "freezing" heritage; instead, heritage must remain relevant to communities and be continuously transmitted and recreated (UNESCO, n.d.-b). For religious festival dances, this raises a central educational and cultural question: what conditions make these dances meaningful and participation-worthy for contemporary youth?

Pampanga offers a salient site for investigating this question, given its rich repertoire of Kapampangan religious traditions and festival practices. Among these is the *kuraldal* of Sasmuan, a Catholic ritual dance associated with devotion to St. Lucy, illustrating how dance can function as both communal ritual and public testimony (e.g., narratives of ritual dance practice in Pampanga document *kuraldal* as a devotional performance embedded in local religious life) (see, for example, related anthropological treatment of *kuraldal* in Pampanga) (Flores, n.d.). Contemporary public accounts likewise underscore the continuing visibility of the *Kuraldal Festival* as an event where devotion and communal identity are enacted in mass participation (Gloton, 2025). However, visibility alone does not guarantee sustained youth engagement. Participation may be episodic, and knowledge of historical and symbolic meanings may vary depending on whether exposure is active (e.g., dance training, school performance, organizing roles) or passive (e.g., watching during festivals or via media).

The study is theoretically anchored in Social Identity Theory and Cultural Transmission Theory. Social Identity Theory posits that individuals derive aspects of self-concept from membership in social groups and that identification with an in-group shapes attitudes and behaviors toward group-associated practices (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Applied to religious festival dances, youth who more strongly identify with the Kapampangan cultural community and faith-based communal life may exhibit more favorable perceptions and stronger behavioral engagement. Cultural Transmission Theory, in turn, provides a mechanism-focused explanation: cultural traits persist through transmission pathways—vertical (family), oblique (other adults, institutions), and horizontal (peers)—and these pathways can be strengthened or weakened by exposure opportunities and social learning contexts (Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman, 1981). Together, these theories motivate a measurable model in which knowledge and perception (cognitive and affective correlates of identity) and frequency/mode of exposure (transmission conditions) predict engagement (behavioral participation).

Empirically, prior Philippine-focused studies commonly indicate that festivals and dance practices can reinforce cultural identity and socio-cultural values and may carry educational value for youth development. For example, a recent study on the Panagsana Festival in Ilocos Norte

emphasizes socio-cultural and educational impacts of festival participation on youth, suggesting that festival dance contexts can function as informal education that cultivates belonging and community pride (Gonzales & Rabago, 2025). Related work examining festival dances as reflections of cultural identity (e.g., in the Panaad Festival context) similarly positions festival dance as an expressive medium through which local identity is recognized and reproduced (Villones, 2020). However, a persistent gap remains in studies that isolate religious festival dances—particularly in Kapampangan contexts—as distinct objects of quantitative inquiry focused on youth knowledge (historical/cultural relevance), positive perception/appreciation, exposure frequency, and engagement, and that compare engagement outcomes between youth with structured school-based exposure and those without.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to examine the relevance of religious festival dances to Kapampangan youth by quantitatively assessing (a) youths' knowledge of the historical and cultural relevance of local religious festival dances, (b) their positive perception and appreciation, (c) their engagement levels, and (d) their frequency and mode of exposure, including whether structured exposure through school programs corresponds to higher engagement. This focus aligns with standard scientific article expectations: the introduction should state the objectives and provide adequate background without becoming a full literature survey. By clarifying the extent to which youth knowledge, attitudes, and exposure are associated with engagement, the study seeks to generate evidence to inform school-based cultural programming and community safeguarding strategies consistent with national policy and UNESCO's education-oriented safeguarding approach (Republic Act No. 10533, 2013; UNESCO, n.d.-a). Ultimately, the study treats religious festival dances as both cultural heritage and a contemporary educational concern: a living practice whose continuity depends on whether Kapampangan youth experience it as meaningful, identity-relevant, and worth sustaining.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, descriptive–comparative research design to examine the relevance of religious festival dances to Kapampangan youth in terms of their knowledge, perception, and appreciation, engagement, and exposure. The quantitative approach was selected to allow systematic measurement of variables, objective analysis of relationships, and statistical comparison between groups.

A descriptive design was used to determine the existing levels of knowledge, perception, and appreciation, engagement, and frequency of exposure of Kapampangan youth to religious festival dances. Descriptive statistics, including mean scores, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were used to summarize respondents' characteristics and responses. This component of the design provided an empirical profile of how religious festival dances are currently understood and experienced by youth, without manipulating variables or introducing experimental conditions.

In addition, the study included a comparative component to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in engagement levels between Kapampangan youth who were actively exposed to religious festival dances through school programs and those who were not. This non-experimental comparison was appropriate given the naturally occurring grouping of respondents based on educational exposure. An independent-samples comparison enabled the study to assess the role of formal educational exposure in determining youth engagement while maintaining ethical and practical feasibility.

The research design was grounded in the assumptions of Social Identity Theory and Cultural Transmission Theory, which posit that cultural knowledge, attitudes, and participation are shaped through exposure, social learning, and institutional mechanisms. These

theoretical foundations justified operationalizing variables into measurable constructs and supported the use of quantitative tools to test for differences and patterns. By translating abstract concepts such as cultural relevance, appreciation, and engagement into numerical indicators, the design ensured objectivity, replicability, and analytical rigor.

Data were collected at a single point in time using a structured survey questionnaire, making the study cross-sectional. This approach was appropriate for capturing prevailing perceptions and experiences of youth across different localities within Pampanga. The design did not attempt to establish causality; instead, it focused on identifying patterns, levels, and group differences that could inform educational and cultural interventions.

Overall, the quantitative descriptive–comparative design aligned with Elsevier’s standards for empirical research reporting by ensuring methodological clarity, coherence between research questions and analytical techniques, and transparency in data treatment. The design enabled the study to generate evidence-based findings on the relevance of religious festival dances to Kapampangan youth, providing a sound foundation for educational recommendations and future research.

2.2 Participants

The participants of this study were Kapampangan youth aged 15–24 years residing in the Province of Pampanga, Philippines. A total of 200 respondents were included in the final sample, representing youth from selected localities in Pampanga, including San Fernando, Angeles City, Mabalacat, Guagua, Bacolor, and Mexico.

Participants were selected using a stratified random sampling approach to support representation across different municipalities/cities and educational backgrounds (e.g., public and private institutions). This sampling strategy was employed to reduce sampling bias and improve the generalizability of findings to the broader population of Kapampangan youth within the study locale.

Eligibility criteria were defined as follows: (i) age within the specified youth bracket (15–24 years), (ii) residence within Pampanga, and (iii) willingness to participate voluntarily. Data were collected through a structured survey questionnaire administered to respondents from identified schools and communities.

2.3 Instrumentation

Data were collected using a structured survey questionnaire developed by the researcher as the primary instrument for quantitatively assessing the relevance of religious festival dances to Kapampangan youth. The instrument was designed to assess respondents’ knowledge, perceptions, appreciation, engagement, exposure, and perceived relevance of religious festival dances.

The questionnaire consisted of two main parts: (i) demographic items (e.g., age, sex, educational level, place of residence) and (ii) construct-based statements corresponding to the study variables. Items were rated using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), to enable numerical aggregation and computation of descriptive and inferential statistics.

Prior studies and conceptual frameworks in cultural education, dance, and youth development informed the development of the instrument. To establish content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of three experts with specialization in cultural studies, physical education, and research methodology; expert feedback was incorporated to improve item clarity, structure, and relevance to the intended constructs.

A pilot test was conducted with 20 Kapampangan youth from a school outside the study locale to evaluate clarity and reliability. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha, yielding a

coefficient above 0.80, indicating high internal consistency; subsequent revisions were implemented to refine item wording and improve comprehensibility.

2.4 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were employed to address the first set of research questions concerning the levels of knowledge, perception, and appreciation, engagement, and frequency of exposure of Kapampangan youth to religious festival dances. Specifically, frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations were computed to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and to describe central tendencies and variability of responses across the measured variables. Mean scores were interpreted using predefined verbal descriptors to provide a clear quantitative description of the youth's cultural knowledge, attitudes, and engagement levels.

To determine whether a statistically significant difference existed in the mean engagement scores of Kapampangan youth who were actively exposed to religious festival dances through school programs and those who were not exposed, an independent-samples t-test was applied. This inferential statistical test was appropriate given the comparison of two independent groups and the continuous nature of the engagement scores. The test was conducted at a 0.05 level of significance, which served as the criterion for rejecting or failing to reject the null hypothesis.

All statistical analyses were carried out using appropriate statistical software to ensure the accuracy and reliability of results. Findings were presented in tabular form, followed by a concise interpretation aligned with the research questions and theoretical framework. The use of both descriptive and inferential statistics ensured an objective, systematic, and replicable analysis of data, in accordance with Elsevier's standards for empirical research reporting.

3 Results

Results showed that Kapampangan youth demonstrated a high level of knowledge regarding the historical and cultural relevance of religious festival dances. The computed overall mean score was 4.21 (SD = 0.47), indicating that respondents were generally aware of the origins, historical background, and cultural meanings of these dances. All indicators under this variable yielded mean values within the "high" range, suggesting consistent cognitive awareness across the sample.

Findings further revealed a very high level of positive perception and appreciation of religious festival dances among Kapampangan youth. The overall mean score of 4.33 (SD = 0.39) reflected strong agreement with statements describing religious festival dances as expressions of faith, cultural identity, unity, and heritage preservation. These results indicate that respondents not only understood the cultural relevance of festival dances but also valued them effectively.

Regarding engagement, respondents who reported exposure to religious festival dances through school programs exhibited a moderate level of engagement, with an overall mean score of 3.87 (SD = 0.58). Indicators related to participation in performances, attendance at school festival activities, and involvement in organizing dance-related events all fell within the moderate range. This suggests that while exposure exists, sustained and active youth participation remains limited.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine whether a significant difference existed between the engagement levels of youth who were actively exposed to religious festival dances through school programs and those who were not exposed. Results indicated a statistically significant difference in mean engagement scores ($t = 3.41$, $p = 0.001$). Youth who were exposed through school-based programs had a higher mean engagement score ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.54$) than non-exposed youth ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.62$). These findings led to the

rejection of the null hypothesis and suggest that formal educational exposure contributes significantly to higher engagement levels.

The analysis of exposure frequency revealed a moderate level of exposure to religious festival dances among Kapampangan youth, with an overall mean score of 3.76 (SD = 0.64). Exposure was most gained through community festivals, media platforms, and school or parish-based activities. Although multiple avenues of exposure were present, the moderate rating indicates that encounters with religious festival dances were occasional rather than frequent.

Overall, the results indicate that Kapampangan youth possess strong knowledge and positive attitudes toward religious festival dances, but their engagement and exposure levels are comparatively lower. The statistically significant difference between exposed and non-exposed groups underscores the role of school-based programs in enhancing youth engagement with religious festival dances.

4. Discussion

The finding that Kapampangan youth demonstrated a high level of knowledge about the historical and cultural relevance of religious festival dances suggests that cultural information about these practices continues to be effectively transmitted. This aligns with Cultural Transmission Theory, which posits that traditions persist when knowledge is systematically passed through formal and informal channels such as schools, families, and communities (Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman, 1981). Similar results have been reported in Philippine studies showing that youth exposed to local culture through education and community activities exhibit higher cultural awareness (Garcia, 2019; Lagman, 2021).

From an educational standpoint, this high level of knowledge supports UNESCO's assertion that integrating intangible cultural heritage into education strengthens learners' contextual understanding and cultural literacy (UNESCO, n.d.-a). In Pampanga, where religious festivals remain prominent, historical narratives and symbolic meanings embedded in dances such as the kuraldal appear to remain accessible to youth, even amid modernization. Knowledge, however, represents only the cognitive dimension of cultural relevance; its translation into sustained participation requires affective and behavioral reinforcement.

The very high level of positive perception and appreciation observed among respondents indicates that religious festival dances retain strong affective value for Kapampangan youth. This finding is consistent with Social Identity Theory, which argues that positive attitudes toward group-associated practices reflect identification with one's cultural and social group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). When youth perceive festival dances as expressions of faith, unity, and cultural pride, these practices serve as symbols that reinforce collective identity.

Comparable findings have been documented in studies on Filipino youth and festival participation, where positive perceptions of cultural practices were linked to feelings of belonging and pride (Del Mundo, 2021; Villanueva, 2018). In the context of Pampanga, this appreciation suggests that religious festival dances continue to resonate as meaningful expressions of communal and spiritual life rather than being viewed as obsolete traditions. This affective attachment is critical for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, as UNESCO emphasizes that heritage survives only when communities value it as relevant to their present lives (UNESCO, n.d.-b).

Despite high knowledge and appreciation, the study found only moderate levels of engagement among Kapampangan youth. This divergence highlights a common issue in cultural sustainability research: awareness and positive attitudes do not automatically translate into active participation. Similar patterns have been observed in studies where students expressed appreciation for traditional dances but participated only occasionally due to limited opportunities or competing academic and social demands (Tadeo, 2020; Hernandez, 2020).

This finding suggests structural and institutional constraints rather than cultural disinterest. Engagement requires accessible platforms for participation, rehearsal, and performance. Without sustained programs, youth involvement may remain episodic, occurring mainly during annual festivals. From a cultural transmission perspective, reduced frequency of participation weakens behavioral reinforcement, potentially affecting long-term continuity (Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman, 1981). Thus, moderate engagement should be interpreted not as cultural disengagement but as an indicator of insufficient institutional support mechanisms.

One of the most significant findings of the study was the statistically significant difference in engagement between youth exposed to religious festival dances through school programs and those who were not. This supports previous research demonstrating that structured educational exposure enhances participation in cultural practices (Santos, 2021; Bacani & De Leon, 2023). Schools serve as critical sites of cultural transmission by providing organized, repeated, and guided experiences that transform cultural knowledge into embodied practice.

This result aligns with the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, which emphasizes contextualized and localized learning, allowing schools to integrate local heritage into curricula such as MAPEH (Republic Act No. 10533, 2013). It also reinforces UNESCO's recommendation that education systems play a central role in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage by embedding it in learning processes rather than treating it as extracurricular or peripheral (UNESCO, n.d.-a). The findings suggest that when religious festival dances are taught, practiced, or performed within formal school settings, youth are more likely to engage actively and meaningfully.

Taken together, the results indicate that religious festival dances remain culturally and symbolically relevant to Kapampangan youth but require stronger institutional integration to sustain active participation. High knowledge and appreciation provide a strong foundation, yet engagement depends on frequency and mode of exposure. This underscores the need for deliberate educational and community-based strategies that move beyond awareness toward practice.

The findings support policy and programmatic initiatives that integrate religious festival dances into school curricula, inter-school cultural activities, and community-school partnerships. Such initiatives are consistent with national cultural policies and international safeguarding frameworks that emphasize participation, education, and relevance as key conditions for the survival of intangible cultural heritage (Republic Act No. 10066, 2009; UNESCO, n.d.-b). Ultimately, sustaining religious festival dances among Kapampangan youth requires aligning cultural values with institutional support, ensuring that tradition remains a lived and practiced dimension of contemporary youth identity.

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