

Pastores Talisay: A phenomenological study

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Abstract

This study explored the phenomenological understanding of Pastores Talisay, a traditional religious folk dance in Talisay, Camarines Norte. It aimed to describe its cultural elements, examine the lived experiences of key performers, identify preservation practices, determine the factors affecting its sustainability, and propose recommendations for its continued preservation.

Using a qualitative phenomenological research design, the study gathered data through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and observation. Participants included key performers, elders, choreographers, and community members involved in the tradition. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to extract meaningful patterns and themes.

Findings revealed that Pastores Talisay is deeply rooted in the community's religious and cultural identity, particularly connected to the Nativity and Christmas celebrations. The dance is characterized by simple and repetitive movements, accompanied by music and songs with religious themes, and performed using colorful costumes and traditional props.

Based on these findings, the study recommends strengthening youth engagement, enhancing community and institutional support, and prioritizing the documentation and formalization of the dance. As a concrete output of the study, the researcher developed the Pastores Talisay Folk Dance Literature Lecture and Tutorial Notes, which aim to serve as instructional and reference material to support teaching, learning, and the continuous preservation of the dance tradition. Through these efforts, Pastores Talisay can be sustained as a living cultural heritage for future generations.

Keywords: Folk Dance; Pastores Talisay; Cultural heritage; Qualitative phenomenological research design

1. Introduction

The conservation of culture heavily relies on folk dances because they illustrate how a society used to live through its shared values, traditions, and beliefs. Beyond serving as aesthetic expressions of movement and rhythm, folk dances act as vital historical evidence, preserving and transmitting a community's lifestyle from generation to generation. For most nations, folk dance is a meaningful way to strengthen social bonds and foster a sense of community.

In Camarines Norte, a prominent example of this localized cultural expression is the Pastores Talisay—a folk dance that depicts the Nativity through song, music, and movement. Unlike the versions of Pastores found in Albay, Cebu, and Leyte, the specific version performed by the people of Talisay, Camarines Norte, has never been documented, archived, or recorded by the municipal tourism office. This research was initiated precisely because there are no existing documents or literature regarding the Pastores Talisay. Without reference materials, the dance must be immediately documented and analyzed to preserve this vital trace of local provincial culture. Currently, its survival relies entirely on oral transmission and the dedication of its aging practitioners. As younger generations are increasingly exposed to modern

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media, this transmission chain risks being broken, which could lead to the permanent loss of the dance. This vulnerability exists primarily because written accounts and academic discussions are too scarce to fully articulate the actual experiences of Pastores Talisay from the community's own perspective. Without sufficient records, this rich tradition may gradually fade away without receiving due recognition for its historical significance.

Therefore, it is necessary to explore not only the movements, music, and costumes of the dance, but also the lived experiences and deeper meanings it holds for the dancers and community members. To truly understand this tradition, it must be analyzed through the lens of how the local society embraces and reinforces it. The ultimate value of this study lies in the opportunity to contribute directly to the preservation and enrichment of Camarines Norte's cultural heritage.

By conducting this research, the author gains a profound understanding of the practices, belief systems, and identity of the people of Talisay. Furthermore, this study allows the researcher to hone vital skills in cultural documentation and qualitative research methodologies, while providing a meaningful service to a vanishing tradition. As part of an active effort to safeguard the intangible heritage of the Philippines, this study achieves its goals by chronicling the daily lives and insights of the practitioners and community members. The Talisaynons of Camarines Norte stand to benefit significantly from this research, as it validates and formally recognizes their local culture. Documenting the Pastores Talisay will instill a sense of cultural pride and enthusiasm among younger generations, inspiring them to cherish and maintain the practice. It will also serve as a lasting legacy for the town's residents, providing a tangible historical record for years to come. Additionally, this research can stimulate cultural awareness and local tourism initiatives by establishing the Pastores Talisay as one of the municipality's premier cultural treasures. Ultimately, the community's lived experiences, beliefs, practices, and expressions have been captured and evaluated through a phenomenological approach to preserve an essential piece of Philippine and Camarines Norte history. Through its collection of narratives, this study seeks to firmly establish the Pastores Talisay community within the broader fabric of Philippine culture—serving as a testament to the community's enduring faith, life, and history.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

This study aims to determine the cultural religious and artistic significance of Pastores Talisay.

Specifically, it sought to answers to the following questions:

- What are the cultural elements of Pastores Talisay along:
 - Historical origin
 - Music and songs
 - Dance movements
 - Costumes and props
 - Ritual and religious context?
- What are the significant experiences of key performers in the Pastores Talisay folk dance?
- What preservation practices are implemented to sustain the religious and cultural significance of the dance?
- What factors affect the sustainability of the Pastores Talisay dance tradition?
- What material can be developed based on the findings of the study?

1.2. Scope and Delimitation

The aim of this research was to conduct a phenomenological study on Pastores Talisay, the folk-dance tradition of Talisay, Camarines Norte. The locale of the study was within the municipality of Talisay, Camarines Norte. It was confined within the locality of the place where the Pastores Talisay is being held as part of local celebration or local practices. There were 8 individuals that were interviewed for this study. These members were composed of important performers of Pastores Talisay, elders and cultural officers from Talisay. These were chosen due to their being part of, know and experienced the folk-dance tradition.

This study delimited only the cultural aspect of the Pastores Talisay in terms of its origin and history, music and songs, dance steps, costumes and props, ritual and religious practices. It also includes significant experiences of the primary actors, as well as, conservation of the cultural dance in the community and the elements affecting the sustainability. However, this study is delimited to the Pastores Talisay only and excludes other folk dance.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design. Qualitative research explores human experiences and behaviors as a consequence of social or cultural factors in people's lives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2020). Complementing this, phenomenology aims to describe and understand the lived experiences of individuals in relation to a specific phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A phenomenological design is uniquely suited for this study as it provides an opportunity for the researcher to deeply understand the lived cultural practices of the Pastores Talisay—including its choreography, musical elements, costuming, rituals, and community traditions—which cannot be fully captured by quantifiable measurements alone. It enables the researcher to closely examine how performers, community elders, and local stakeholders perceive and value the Pastores Talisay as an integral part of their lives.

The data were collected through participant observation, unstructured interviews, and semi-structured questionnaires. Participant observation allowed the investigator to observe the practices and traditions of the dance in active performance, while the unstructured interviews and semi-structured dialogues provided deeper insights regarding the personal experiences, views, and beliefs of the participants. Through these combined qualitative methods, the investigator accumulated rich, thick descriptive data.

In addition, this methodological framework allows the researcher to develop actionable recommendations for the long-term preservation of the Pastores Talisay cultural heritage. The findings of this study can be utilized as a basis for future research conducted in relation to local folk dances, cultural pedagogy, and heritage safeguarding. Ultimately, this study serves as a vital avenue for preserving the cultural heritage and unique identity of Talisay, Camarines Norte.

2.2. Participants

The respondents of this study were persons who actively practices Pastores Talisay here in Talisay Camarines Norte. These persons are local artists, community elders and cultural officials who have knowledge in the dance in terms of its dances, music, costume, and traditions. These persons are the key informant in describing and document Pastores Talisay as intangible heritage. A purposive sampling was used to select informants who are competent to supply and provide sufficient and relevant data on the topic. The specific informant of this study are: (1) Local performers who has performed the dance for five years more and know the dance steps, music, and traditions and can communicate their experiences regarding the dance, (2) Community elders who are fifty years old and above who witness, perform or passed to other generations the Pastores Talisay and have knowledge on their culture and history concerning the dance and (3) Cultural officers from the local tourism office that are part of organizations that preserves folk dances in Talisay. Eight (8) respondents are involved in this study.

2.3. Research Instrument

To gather the necessary information for this study, the primary data gathering instruments comprised survey questionnaires, semi-structured interview guides, and observation checklists. These tools were designed to gather qualitative data from the participants regarding the components of the Pastores Talisay and its socio-cultural significance to the local community. The data were gathered exclusively from the firsthand experiences and cultural knowledge of the residents and tradition bearers in Talisay, Camarines Norte.

Questionnaire. To assess the respondents' familiarity with and perceptions of the Pastores Talisay, a qualitative survey questionnaire was developed. It was composed of both open-ended and closed-ended questions that evaluated the participants' knowledge regarding the basic steps, musical elements, attire, and performance venues of the Pastores Talisay, as well as its significance to the local culture. Relevant literature on folk dance documentation guided the creation of the survey. To ensure appropriateness and validity, the instrument was subjected to content validation by experts in physical education and cultural studies. The administration of the questionnaires was managed personally by the researcher, and completed forms were collected immediately after completion.

Semi-Structured Interview Guide. To obtain in-depth, qualitative data from local performers, community elders, and cultural bearers, a semi-structured interview guide was utilized. This tool consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed descriptions of the choreographic, musical, and ritual components of the Pastores Talisay. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions, probe for additional details, and verify or triangulate the initial responses gathered from the written questionnaires.

Observation Checklist. To establish a structured record of the performance aspects of the Pastores Talisay, an observation checklist was employed. The checklist contained specific sections for documenting body movements, musical accompaniment, and traditional attire, alongside contextual details regarding the performance venues and audience dynamics. These observations were recorded systematically while the performers executed the Pastores live during community performances and local rehearsals. The checklist enabled the researcher to maintain an objective record of the technical aspects of the dance and the environmental context in which it was performed, thereby revealing common historical and culture-based trends.

Documentary Analysis Guide. Documentary analysis was employed to examine available written, visual, and archival materials related to the tradition. The sources analyzed included local government records, historical photographs, video recordings of past performances, event programs, and relevant cultural documents. This method served to validate and support the empirical data gathered through interviews and observations, allowing the researcher to map out the historical origins, evolution of music, dance movements, costuming, and the overall religious context of the Pastores Talisay.

Direct Observation Protocol. Direct observation was used during actual performances and practices of the Pastores Talisay. Through this method, the researcher recorded visible cultural and performance elements, such as specific dance formations, symbolic gestures, props, and embedded ritualistic practices. Detailed field notes were maintained to supplement the participants' interview responses and to provide a thick description of how the dance is physically enacted and sustained within the community.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 Thematic Analysis of the Cultural Elements of Pastores Talisay

Theme	Sub-theme	Coding (Excerpts from Participants)
Historical Origin	Nativity Roots	"Birth of Jesus Christ, shepherds, Bethlehem"
	Oral Transmission	"Passed down by elders, inherited tradition"
	Colonial Influence	"May Spanish influence"
Music and Songs	Religious Melodies	"Christmas songs, worship songs"
	Instrumental Accompaniment	"Rondalla, violins, tambourine"
	Participatory Singing	"Live kasi nila yun kinakanta habang sumasayaw " – Lola Edna
Dance and Movement	Simple Choreography	"Hop dance, turning."
	Symbolic Expressions	"May part ng step ng boys na normal na tumatakbo..." — Renz Caraon
		"Step-close step, hop-step... to show appreciation, joy" — Faith Tenebro
Costumes and Props	Traditional Attire	"Ribbon dresses, veils, camisa"
	Symbolic Props	"Flower arch, lantern, papier-mâché horse"
	Visual Identity	"Colorfully dress gown for girls..."
Ritual and Religious Context	Spiritual Devotion	"Praise, worship, and celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ"
	Community Ritual	"Commonly, we perform this every ber months or town fiesta"
	Christmas Celebration	"Bands of singing and dancing groups who roam the streets..."

Table 1 presents historical origin as one of the cultural elements of Pastores Talisay, based on the performers' recollections and experiences. The respondents used the term religious and cultural performance to refer this dance, which is traditionally performed in Talisay, Camarines Norte, during the Christmas season. The instruments and the music of the Pastores were linked by one respondent to "the Filipino traditional church music" (villancico), and by another to "the performance of the pastor in church". Louela Obusan-Sarmiento also explained the music as a blend of

Bikol, Spanish and military influences, which are now played with the use of guitar, rondalla and live music, in front of the community. Emman Nagera added that the dance represented the shepherds' visit to the Child Jesus and that older members of the community had passed the tradition on to the younger members by observing and rehearsing them. Similarly, Obusan-Sarmiento noted that it went on before it was written down and became a part of the community's annual Christmas celebration.

Figure 1 shows a musical score for a piece titled "Pastores" (Shepherds). The score is for a voice and a guitar ensemble (Glockenspiel, Bandurria, D. bass, Tambourine). The tempo is marked as 98. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The score is divided into three systems, each with a first and second ending. The lyrics are in Spanish and describe the shepherds' visit to the Child Jesus. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like "p" (piano) and "rit." (ritardando).

Figure 1 Engraved in Muse Score by Jhan-Curt SG. Fernandez (2022)

The findings revealed that the origin of Pastores Talisay in history can be comprehended in terms of three interrelated cultural components, namely cultural foundation, colonial influence, and cultural transmission. The constant mentioning of the Nativity story suggested that this dance was rooted in Christian piety and was meant to be a symbolic act of the Shepherds' visit to Jesus. Second, "Spanish", "Bikol", and "Church-Music" influences indicated that the tradition was a result of cultural blending. Pastores may have been inspired by the Spanish religion and the Mexican Pastorela which were brought in during the colonial era, but the Talisay people used their own language, music, performance

style, and participation in the community to localize this tradition. Also, the above indicated that the tradition persisted primarily by oral means, rather than in writing, because the respondents' focus on observation, rehearsals, and elder-to-youth teaching highlighted that. So, Pastores Talisay turned out to be a religious expression and a local cultural performance that reflects the experiences of the community.

Furthermore, the results are in line with those of Petkovski (2021)¹ who emphasized that dance as intangible cultural heritage is passed on through bodies, memory and social contexts, and with those of Carr (2023)² who explained that dance is not only a visible phenomenon, but also an intangible phenomenon that contains the meanings of devotion, memory and identity. These ideas are reiterated at Pastores Talisay since its history is not just explained historically but is also performed, musically practiced, and meaningfully interpreted as a religious experience in the community.

In Pastores Talisay, the music serves as a catalyst that encourages both dancers and viewers to appreciate the underlying religious and cultural values. This outcome also resonates with Lobo (2026)³, who stated that cultural narratives are essential to making dance education meaningful, as well as Asuncion and Labaguis (2025)⁴, who noted the critical importance of localized music and dance resources in teaching. Finally, the findings mirror Khan's (2023)⁵ emphasis on the urgency of documenting intangible cultural heritage songs and performance contexts. For these reasons, the music and songs of Pastores Talisay must be thoroughly documented, as they encapsulate the tradition's devotional message, cultural identity, and performance structure.

Table 2 Sample Excerpt Song Lyrics and Filipino Translation

Original Spanish Lyrics	Filipino Translation
Pastores a Belén, Vamos con alegría	Tayo'y mga pastol na masayang pupunta sa Bethlehem
A ver a nuestro bien, El Hijo de María	Upang makita ang Anak ni Maria
Allí también, nos espera Jesús	Doon tayo hinihintay ni Hesus
Venid, pastores! ¡Venid a adorar!	Halina mga pastol at sumamba!

The musical composition of the Pastores Talisay, as with all other similar dances, exhibits Spanish influenced music and the Filipino style of performance. The persistent tempo and merry beat also enhance the festive feeling of the dance as well as its religious intention.

Listed in the above table are examples of religious Spanish songs translated in Tagalog. The messages focus on praise, worship, and celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, reinforcing the sacred nature of the performance.

Table 3 Thematic Analysis of the Significant Experiences of Key Performers

Theme	Sub-theme	Coding (Excerpts from Participants)
Emotional Fulfillment	Personal Joy	"Joy, fulfillment, cultural pride during performance"
	Cultural Pride	"May we always dance with the same joy and unity" "Masaya kapag nakikitang natutuwa ang mga nanonood sa tradisyon"
Cultural Learning	Heritage Awareness	"Learning tradition, understanding culture deeper"
	Intergenerational Growth	"Malaman ng mga susunod na generation ang Pastores Talisay" "Passing the steps and lyrics from elders to the youth"
Social Connection	Community Bonding	"Teamwork, rehearsals, unity within the group"
	Teamwork & Cohesion	"Helps build cohesion in the community during December" "Nagsasama-sama ang matatanda at kabataan sa pag-eensayo"
Spiritual Experience	Religious Devotion	"Faith, worship, thanksgiving to God"
	Faith Expression	"Expression of faith rooted in Christian piety" "Deepening of spiritual connection through the shepherd's journey"

Most of the participants indicated that their involvement in Pastores Talisay has been a great source of joy, pride, satisfaction, and personal fulfillment. Based on the interview results, the performers felt emotionally attached to the activity since through it they had the chance to promote and preserve their community's culture.

As indicated by Ms. Faith Tenebro, who actively participates in the dance, she feels very proud every time she takes part in Pastores Talisay because she gets a chance to carry forward the traditions of her predecessors. She shared her deep fulfillment by stating, "Happy dahil nalalaman ko yung kultura namin, lalong lalo na sa panahon na walang makakalimot; nakakatuwa pa rin ang ating sayaw." In her opinion, taking part in the dance has helped her appreciate more the culture and religious practices of her community.

The above findings suggest that the dancers have an emotional as well as cultural connection with the performance of Pastores Talisay. It enhances their self-worth, sense of belongingness, and cultural identity, showing that cultural activities like Pastores Talisay help in instilling cultural pride among community members. The reason why the dancers derive satisfaction from their participation in the dance is due to the realization that through their efforts, they are aiding in keeping a traditional dance within the municipality's heritage alive.

The results also indicate that one factor responsible for the continuation of the dance is emotional attachment. The dancers who find themselves attached to the traditional dance are bound to keep on performing, passing on the knowledge of the dance to others, including the new generation. Finally, these findings support UNESCO's concept of the intangible cultural heritage, by means of which customs contribute to social identity, continuation, and memory of cultures. The feelings expressed by the respondents reveal clearly that Pastores Talisay is more than a show, their dance is part of their identity and heritage.

Table 4 Thematic Analysis of Sustainability Factors

Theme	Sub-theme	Coding (Excerpts from Participants)
Strengths	Community Support	<i>"Annual participation, cultural pride of the people"</i>
	Religious Significance	<i>"Traditions deeply entrenched in faith and local identity"</i>
		<i>"Institutional support from schools, LGU, and tourism office"</i>
Challenges	Youth Disinterest	<i>"Kulang sa dokumento sa aming tourism office." — Jelaine Abante</i>
	Lack of Documentation	<i>"Mayroong internet pero walang references sa history ng ating Pastores."</i>
		<i>"Modern trends, lack of youth participation, threat of modernization"</i>
Opportunities	Educational Integration	<i>"Pagsulat ng documentation para malaman ng mga susunod na generation..."</i>
	Cultural Archiving	<i>"Educational activities, workshops, and school integration"</i>
		<i>"Recording choreography, music, and local historical records"</i>
Continuous Practice	Annual Presentation	<i>"Young performers learn through modeling behavior learned by observation..."</i>
	Community Transmission	<i>"Annual Presentation, continuous rehearsals, and active performance"</i>
		<i>"Elder-to-youth teaching to prevent the total disappearance of dance"</i>

3.1. Challenges Facing the Tradition

Despite these organizational and community strengths, Pastores Talisay faces serious contemporary threats that jeopardize its long-term continuity. The most pressing challenge is youth disinterest driven by modern influence. Choreographers and senior performers expressed deep worries that the younger generation is drifting away from traditional folk dances in favor of modern global trends. As choreographer Emman Nagera pointed out:

"Marami ng bagong trend dance na mas ginagaya ng mga kabataan ngayon kaysa sa mga traditional na sayaw."

This shift in preference slowly isolates the folk dance from the very demographic needed to carry it forward. Former dancer Renz Caraon shared a similar sentiment, noting,

"Natatabunan unti-unti ang culture dance dahil we are now living in a modern days,"

This is a reality that local tourism workers also feel, warning that the heavy influence of commercial entertainment causes people to lose interest in native expressions. Active dancer Faith Tenebro directly tied this to a lack of awareness, sharing that:

"Ang mabibigat o hamon ay mawalan ng mga kalahok dahil sa kawalan ng kaalaman tungkol sa Pastores Talisay Folk Dance."

This problem is further worsened by a critical lack of documentation and limited resources. Because the dance has historically relied on word-of-mouth and bodily memory, there is a severe shortage of tangible historical references. Senior performer Louela Obusan-Sarmiento expressed her frustration regarding this modern paradox.

"Mayroong internet pero sa ngayon minimal lang ang references sa history ng ating Pastores Talisay Folk Dance. Paano yung walang alam sa kanta, steps, o performance, baka mabago pa nila o mapalitan ng ibang steps."

Without official materials in our community or in Tourism Office, the dance faces the danger of being distorted or completely forgotten. This archive gap was directly validated by local officials who explicitly admitted.

"To be honest ma'am Donna, kulang talaga sa dokumento ang aming office." – Jelaine A. Abante – tourism Officer

Additionally, structural problems like the financial burden of costumes, set designs, and training costs make it difficult to organize performances consistently, showing that community passion alone cannot survive without proper material and institutional backing.

4. Proposed Lecture Guide and Cultural Preservation Material

More than just a collection of numbers, tables, and interviews, the true heartbeat of this research lies in its power to keep a beautiful tradition alive in the real world specially in Talisay, Camarines Norte. To ensure that the voices and memories of our elders do not fade away, this section presents a practical, living educational tool designed for classrooms, cultural advocates, and local communities. This guide is crafted to bridge the gap between rigorous academic documentation and the vibrant, lived reality of the classroom. Written from the perspective of an educator who understands the daily joys and challenges of teaching, it transforms complex phenomenological data into accessible, meaningful lesson guides, clear cultural definitions, and engaging activities. By putting this material into the hands of teachers and cultural workers, Pastores Talisay ceases to be just a subject in a thesis—it becomes a living prayer, a celebrated history, and a shared responsibility that the next generation can proudly dance, sing, and carry forward.

5. Conclusion

In light of the foregoing findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

- The cultural elements of Pastores Talisay reflect a deep connection to the community's religious traditions and cultural identity, rooted in the Nativity story and continuously practiced during Christmas and other religious activities. Its music, movements, costumes, and props contribute to its symbolic meaning and accessibility to participants.
- The experiences of performers show that the dance serves as a meaningful expression of joy, pride, and cultural identity, while fostering unity and an appreciation of local heritage.
- The sustainability of the tradition largely depends on community participation and the effective transmission of knowledge from elders and experienced performers to younger generations.
- Challenges such as declining youth interest, modern influences, a lack of documentation, and limited support may threaten the long-term preservation of the tradition if not properly addressed.
- There is a clear need for collaborative efforts to strengthen youth participation, improve documentation, and enhance institutional support to ensure the continuity of Pastores Talisay.

Compliance with ethical standards

Acknowledgments

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." — Jeremiah 29:11. This verse has been my constant reminder and source of strength throughout this journey, guiding me in moments of doubt and inspiring me to keep moving forward.

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

I declare that I have no conflicts of interest related to this research. I have no personal or financial relationships that could influence my work.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study

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