

The Birth of Sacred Syncretism in the Matigsalug Indigenous Dance: A Modern World Perspective

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Abstract

Indigenous dance is gradually disappearing. Guided by Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, which posits that Indigenous dance encompasses dynamic motivation, societal structures and rules, and means of performance. I explored the experiences of Matigsalug Indigenous Cultural Communities using a qualitative descriptive approach. The data from the focus group discussion with eight (8) purposively selected cultural bearers were thematically analyzed. The findings indicated sacred syncretism manifested in spiritual rituals and contemporary fusion, showing how traditional practices adapt to modern influences while preserving authenticity. Hence, Indigenous dance is a vital expression of ancestral preservation, dance as cultural expression, and community engagement. Further, it emphasized the importance of guided cultural leadership, preservation of cultural order, and community. In addition, indigenous dance is viewed as a performative culture deeply connected to courtship practices and musical coordination. The community leaders, policymakers, and local government should create community-led workshops, mentorship programs, and heritage celebrations that actively engage the community. Future studies may use comparative analysis to explore the changes across indigenous communities, a longitudinal study to examine intergenerational transmission, and an experimental design to investigate the impacts of modern elements.

Keywords: ancestral preservation; contemporary fusion; cultural identity; heritage; sacred syncretism; spiritual rituals; Kitaotao Bukidnon Philippines

Introduction

Indigenous dance is a cultural expression that reflects a community's values, traditions, and history (Hou, 2025). However, a noticeable decline in indigenous dance is observed in the majority of countries (Liu et al., 2025; Lobo, 2025). Consequently, there is a decline in participation in indigenous dance, which consider as broader societal problem (Yuan et al., 2025; Leng et al., 2025; Younging, 2025). Meanwhile, indigenous dances have gradually disappeared (He, 2025; Xu, 2025; Behera, 2025).

In North America, Indigenous dances are declining and disappearing (DuVal, 2025). Similarly, there is a decline in the popularity of indigenous dance among cultural tourism in countries like Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa (Pandey, 2025). Likewise, in the Northeast Indian district of Mokokchang in Nagaland, there is a refusal of indigenous dance forms during festivals and traditional celebrations (Paul, 2025). Further, Bahrain is considered culturally abundant, but indigenous dances have been largely abandoned (Sattar et al., 2025). Additionally, in the Yakkure and Henanigala Vedda villages, indigenous dances are rarely performed and are disappearing (Ananda & Nahallage, 2025).

This concern is also evident in the Philippines. A study reveals that the indigenous community in the southern part of Luzon has experienced a decline in indigenous dance (Candelario-Aplaon, 2025). Meanwhile, in the Cordillera provinces, the indigenous dance declined among indigenous communities (Jacoba, 2025). Likewise, in Central Luzon, the indigenous dance has suddenly disappeared (Salonga, 2025). Also, the Blaan community in Southern Mindanao declined indigenous dance (Fajinmi & Oloyede, 2025). Moreover, a study conducted in Lanao del Sur found that indigenous dance was dismissed by many and labeled as outdated or irrelevant (Camama-Azis & Ampaso, 2025).

The present concerns of indigenous dance have significantly declined for a variety of factors, drawing state lines and breaking up tribal groups, and deemphasizing the importance of individual tribes, which impacted tribal culture (Rani, 2025; Hughes, 2025; Berman et al., 2025). Additionally, the absence of formal documentation, limited digitized and linguistic resources, and the shortage of practitioners further hinder preservation efforts (Shanmuga et al., 2025; Daryanti, 2025; Tella et al., 2025). These challenges place indigenous dance traditions at risk of gradual disappearance. This alarming decline underscores the urgent need to document, preserve, and revitalize indigenous dance traditions before they are irreversibly lost. Thus, this study is conducted.

Significance of the Study

This study on indigenous dance is meaningful to the Department of Education, schools, and the community a better chance to understand the cultural experiences of the Matigsalug indigenous people. For the Department of Education, the study preserves cultural heritage but also encourages respect for diversity and the integration of local wisdom into the curriculum. At the school level, it serves as a tool for teachers and learners to connect with heritage-based learning, strengthening cultural identity and appreciation among students. For the community, it affirms that indigenous traditions are not just practices of the past but living knowledge systems that enrich lifelong learning and cultural preservation. Hence, this study holds significance as a scholarly reference for future research, advancing understanding of the Matigsalug Indigenous dances while promoting cultural preservation, diversity, and heritage-based education.

Further, it also advances the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) by promoting inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive learning through the documentation of Indigenous experiences, and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by supporting the preservation and protection of Indigenous cultural heritage, fostering community identity, cultural sustainability, and intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge.

Research Questions

This study explores the perspective of Matigsalug Indigenous Cultural Communities on Indigenous Dance. It had the following specific research questions:

1. What are the perspectives of the Matigsalug Communities on dynamic motivation behind their Indigenous dance?
2. What are the perspectives of the Matigsalug Communities on societal structures and rules governing their Indigenous dance practices?
3. What are the perspectives of the Matigsalug Communities on means of performance of their Indigenous dance?

Theoretical Lens

This study is anchored to Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Activity Theory by Nickerson in the year 2023, which posits that human activities can be described and analyzed by considering the dynamic motivation, societal structures and rules, and the means of performance. This study uses Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) to understand how the Matigsalug Indigenous dance is shaped by core components—motivation, societal rules, and means of performance, which help explain how these dances are transmitted, preserved, and adapted over time, balancing tradition with modern influences while maintaining their spiritual significance.

In the context of this study, the human activities will be replaced by the indigenous dance of the Matigsalug Indigenous Cultural Communities, which is shaped by three key elements. The dynamic motivation reflects their reasons for dancing, such as spirituality, pride, community, and identity. Next, societal structures and rules highlight traditions and expectations that guide when and how dances are performed. Lastly, means of performance include music, rhythms, steps, costumes, and gestures that bring the dances to life. Together, these elements show how Matigsalug dances preserve heritage and pass on cultural values.

Methodology

In this section, I presented the research design, locale, sample and sampling technique, data-gathering procedure, data-analysis technique, and trustworthiness to ensure the integrity of the research process.

Research Design

In this study, I employed a qualitative descriptive research design. According to Creswell et al. (2018), qualitative research is an inquiry process that explores and interprets language, narratives, and experiences to uncover meaning. Furthermore, the descriptive approach seeks to precisely delineate the attributes of a population, circumstance, or describe phenomena, conditions, or characteristics (Bisaria et al., 2026; Pohan et al., 2026). Specifically, it sought to understand how their indigenous dance was preserved, adapted, and imbued with meaning amid cultural change in the modern world. I utilized the framework of Braun and Clarke, which provides a systematic process. This approach allowed me to closely examine participants' narratives and organize their experiences.

Locale of the Study

I conducted the study in Panganan, Kitaotao, Bukidnon, Region X, the ancestral domain of the Matigsalug Indigenous Cultural Communities in Northern Mindanao, Philippines. This rural community is recognized for its strong adherence to traditional practices, where indigenous dances are carefully preserved and passed down through generations. As a living cultural environment deeply rooted in indigenous knowledge, rituals, and artistic expression, Panganan stands as the most appropriate locale to examine indigenous dance amid the forces of modernization.

Sample and Sampling Technique

To identify participants, I used purposive sampling, as explained by Oluka (2025), which allows researchers to intentionally select individuals who provide meaningful insights, as supported by Lim (2025) in

collecting rich experiences that meet the following inclusion criteria: being a Matigsalug ICCs member, 18 or older, active performers or cultural bearers, community participants, knowledgeable about dance meanings, and willing to share lived experiences. These criteria ensured reliable, diverse perspectives from the participants. Antoniadou (2025) supports Creswell's recommendation of 5–25 participants, making eight participants for a focus group discussion (FGD) sufficient.

Data Gathering Technique

The data were obtained after I sought endorsement and received the certification from the Society for Moral Integrity and Legal Ethics (SMILE), followed by endorsement from the dean of the graduate school. A consultation and authorization from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), the Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative (IPMR), Tribal Council, and local leaders and elders of the Matigsalug indigenous cultural communities (ICCs) and participants was identified through the guidance of tribal leaders. Further, informed consent is obtained, as supported by Yang et al. (2026), who emphasize confidentiality under the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Expert-validated interviews were recorded with consent and transcribed.

Data Analysis Technique

In analyzing the data, I used the Clarke and Braun thematic analysis method, as outlined by Chen et al. (2025), which systematically extracts, examines, and interprets qualitative data from the participants. The process involved: familiarization with the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts, generating initial codes by identifying significant statements, searching for themes by clustering related codes, reviewing themes by refining and checking their consistency with the dataset, defining and naming themes by clarifying their meanings and essence, and producing the final report by integrating themes with the research questions, literature, and participant narratives. In addition, supported by Kushnir (2025), this approach revealed themes and sub-themes that authentically captured the meaning, emotions, and lived experiences of the participants.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Throughout the research process, I prioritized participants' well-being by upholding trustworthiness, as stipulated by Coester and Pohlmann (2025), grounded in a transfer of trust based on assumed similarity. Hence, the study followed Munzhedzi et al. (2025), trustworthiness includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Further, credibility ensures the accuracy of data and interpretations through member checking, engagement, and triangulation. Transferability refers to the applicability of findings to other contexts and is supported by thick descriptions. Dependability ensures consistency of findings over time through audit trails and systematic documentation, while confirmability ensures that results reflect participants' perspectives rather than researcher bias through reflexivity and triangulation. Moreover, the study was conducted with honesty, fairness, and respect for participants' rights. Ethical procedures were strictly followed by securing approval from the Dean of the College and obtaining a SMILE (ethics clearance) certificate prior to data collection. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Results

Results of this study are presented through the emerging themes derived from the transcripts of focus group discussions (FGD) revolving around their perspectives on the dynamic motivations, societal structures and rules, means of performance, and evolving cultural practices in modern cultural contexts.

The network of themes is shown in the thematic table. From these narratives, I identified three core ideas: ancestral preservation, cultural expression, and community engagement from dynamic motivation. Building on this understanding, societal structures and rules revealed guided cultural leadership, preserving cultural order, and community support. Further, I uncover that means of performance embody performative culture, courtship dance, and musical coordination, shaped by cultural norms and expectations. Finally, I uncover findings that reveal sacred syncretism, manifested through spiritual rituals and contemporary fusion, shaping the evolution of indigenous dance.

Thematic Table

Table 1. Thematic table for the theme, sub-theme, and core ideas.

Objectives	Theme	Sub theme	Core Ideas
What are the perspectives of the Matigsalug Communities on dynamic motivation behind their Indigenous dance?	Ancestral Preservation	Intergenerational Dance Transmission	Teaching traditional dances to children ensures the continuity of Indigenous identity despite the loss of elder knowledge.
		Cultural Skills Preservation	Elder guidance in teaching Kuglung, Saluray, and traditional dances ensures that Matigsalug musical and dance talents are preserved for future generations.
	Dance as Cultural Expression	Dance Affirming Identity	Performing both dance and song allows participants to demonstrate skill, convey purpose, and share cultural knowledge with the audience.
	Community Engagement	Empowering Cultural Participation	Active participation in tribal events ensures cultural practices are showcased and passed on to future generations.
What are the perspectives of the Matigsalug Communities on societal structures and rules governing their Indigenous dance practices?	Guided Cultural Leadership	Community-Driven Performance	Matigsalug dancing is structured around social gatherings and occurs only by invitation, emphasizing that performances are community-driven and follow established social protocols.

	Preserving Cultural Order	Cultural Protocol	Formal rules (balaod) and scheduled planning are established to organize teaching sessions, ensuring orderly participation and the effective transmission of Matigsalug dance.
	Community Support	Organized Teaching	Teaching Matigsalug dance is structured around a daily routine that balances formal schooling with cultural instruction from a maestro, ensuring children learn both education and tradition.
What are the perspectives of the Matigsalug Communities on means of performance of their Indigenous dance?	Performative Culture	Dance as Living Heritage	Performing traditional dances in coordinated patterns expresses collective joy and shared cultural identity. hospitality.
	Courtship Dance	Kubing as Social Communication	The kubing serves as a medium of communication among elders, including in social practices such as courting.
	Musical Coordination	Guiding Through Song Knowledge	Women lead cultural performances, directing actions through their songs. Sharing knowledge of songs enables participants to guide and acknowledge dancers during performances.
		Instruments Conveying Cultural Meaning	Different traditional instruments produce distinct sounds, each contributing unique musical expression to cultural practices.

I present the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the participants' narratives, highlighting the key patterns and insights relevant to the study.

Theme 1. Ancestral Preservation

Matigsalug Indigenous dance is a vital means of preserving ancestral memory and sustaining cultural continuity through intergenerational transmission and community participation. Elders actively pass on traditional dances and practices to the youth, ensuring that cultural identity, values, and heritage are continuously maintained through embodied practice.

Sub-theme 1.1. Intergenerational Dance Transmission

The dance transmission is a vital mechanism for preserving the cultural identity and heritage of the Matigsalug community. Elders play a crucial role in passing down traditional dances such as Sesalilid and ancestral practices to younger generations, ensuring the continuity of Indigenous identity. Despite this, the present study shows that Matigsalug elders and youth maintain strong engagement in dance practices, ensuring continuous and resilient cultural transmission. Building on this perspective, the participant shared:

Ang mga gigikanan nga maoy mag tudlo sa sayaw sa amoang pagka IP kinahanglan nga tudloan ang mga bata aron dili mawala ang amoang pagka IP. (Elders who used to teach us the dances as IPs are already gone, it is necessary to teach the children so that our identity as IPs will not disappear) P2-FGD, PG1, L26-27

One participant emphasized:

Gikan sa ka tiguwang sa una kani nga sayaw Sesalilid ug unsa pa diha nga kinabuhat sa mga katiguwangan....dili namo jud mabuhian ang ginahimo sa mga katigulangan sa una. (From the elders in the past, there were dances like Sesalilid and other practices of the ancestors...and we truly do not abandon what our ancestors practiced before) P3-FGD, PG2, L45-47

Supported by another participant:

Ang mga kabataan nga makabalo nga kini ang tribong mao kini ang batasan sa tribo aron dili sila malimot ug dili pasagadan. (The next generations must be taught so that traditions will not be erased or forgotten) P4-FGD, PG3, L86

Sub-theme 1.2. Cultural Skills Preservation

It demonstrates an essential component of sustaining the Matigsalug cultural heritage. Participants emphasized the importance of transmitting traditional knowledge and skills, particularly in playing indigenous musical instruments such as the Kuglung and Saluray, from elders and parents to younger generations. It was recognized that without intentional teaching and guidance, children may lose opportunities to learn these cultural practices, leading to the gradual disappearance of the tribe's unique talents and traditions. Furthermore, they highlighted the need for continuous practice in both traditional dances and indigenous musical instruments to ensure that cultural knowledge remains active and relevant within the community. As I

listened to one participant, I noticed a firm and assured tone. The participant shared:

Gikan sa atoa nga mga tiguwang nga naka sinati sa pag kudlit sa kuglung ug kudlit sa saluray kay ang mga bata dili na kabalo kung dili tudloan sa amahan. Ang mga bata makapadayon, dili matabunan ang talento sa tribong matigsalug. (From our elders who experienced playing the Kuglung and Saluray, the children would not know if they are not taught by their fathers. This is how the children can continue, so that the talents of the Matigsalug tribe are not lost) P7-FGD, PG5, L165-168

Another participant mentioned:

Kinahanglan nga ang mga kabataan pratison... sa sayaw ug unsa pa nga gamit sa matigsalug....dili nato palungon ang kultura. (The children need to practice...the dance and other Matigsalug instruments...so that our culture is not extinguished) P8-FGD, PG6, L199-200

As I reflected on the narratives, participants consistently viewed indigenous dance as a shared responsibility that connects generations and sustains cultural identity. Their stories revealed a deep commitment to teaching, learning, and practicing traditional dances and music, emphasizing that cultural preservation depends on the active involvement of both elders and youth. Through these collective efforts, indigenous dance continues to serve as a living bridge between the past and the future.

Theme 2. Dance as Cultural Expression

The use of movement, rhythm, and performance to communicate a community's identity, values, emotions, and traditions. It is more than entertainment because it carries cultural meaning and reflects how people understand and express their heritage. In Indigenous communities such as the Matigsalug, dance serves as a living expression of identity and belonging, where every step and gesture symbolizes cultural knowledge, shared history.

Sub-theme 2.1. Dance Affirming Identity

The indigenous people reveal that dance is a meaningful expression of Matigsalug identity. Through the *sikal* (steps), movements, and songs, dancers communicate the values, traditions, and purpose of their culture. Participants emphasized that dancing allows them to proudly showcase their heritage and be recognized as members of the Matigsalug tribe. Based on the experiences of the participants, as stated:

kung ako pananglitan kabalo ug sayaw ipakita gyud nako ang talento nako kauban mahitungod sa pag sikal (steps) sa pagsugod nga mag sayaw sa pag sugod ug tikang sa pagsayaw hangtud sa pag kanta ug dili lang pag kanta....gusto nako..nga adunay tumong ang akong pagkanta. (I will truly show my talent, including the sikal (steps) from the beginning of the dance, the start and the movements in dancing, up to the singing....because I want to share that my singing has a purpose) P1-FGD, PG1, L7-10

Sa akong pag-ila sa ingon ana ang akoa nga pag ila kay dako kaayo ang akong pag ila mahitungod sa pag sayaw kay aron maila ta nga usa ta nga matigsalug usa ta nga tribo. (My awareness and understanding of dancing is very deep. This is because, through dancing, we can be recognized as Matigsalug, as one tribe) P2-FGD, L37-38

I found that participants consistently described dance as a meaningful expression of Matigsalug identity and cultural pride. Their accounts revealed that every movement, step, and song carries purpose and reflects the values and traditions of their community. I observed that through dance, they not only showcase their talents but also affirm their belonging to the Matigsalug tribe, strengthening cultural awareness and preserving their collective identity.

Theme 3. Community Engagement

An active participation and involvement of community members in shared cultural practices, activities, and traditions. In Indigenous contexts such as the Matigsalug community, it highlights how elders, youth, and families work together to preserve and sustain cultural heritage through collective actions like dance, music, and ceremonies. This engagement strengthens social bonds, promotes cultural continuity, and ensures that traditions are passed on and experienced as a shared responsibility across generations.

Sub-theme 3.1. Empowering Cultural Participation

Importance of encouraging active involvement within the Matigsalug community to sustain cultural practices. Elders and community members emphasize the need to motivate youth to overcome shyness and confidently participate in traditional dances, ensuring cultural transmission is not interrupted. By inspiring collective participation and reinforcing the value of dance as a cultural expression, the community strengthens its commitment to preserving and celebrating Matigsalug identity so that it will not be forgotten or broken across generations. As participants shared:

Dili namo hawaon kung naay mga program/event sa araw ug naay IPs namo nga kinahanglan naay ipakita nga naay kabug-aton sa among tribo nga magpadayon ug inyo nga mapanunud sa mga kabataan aro dili malimot sila. (We do not avoid joining when there are programs or events during the araw, and when there are our IPs, it is necessary that something be shown that carries weight for our tribe, so that it will continue and be inherited by the children so that they will not forget) P4-FGD, PG3, L82-84

Para namo mao nay gusto nga kanang sumusunod na mga bata karon hangyuon nato na ayaw kamo ug kaulaw panahon na tudloan namo kamo para dili ma putol ang atong pagka matigsalug. (We want the children who follow now to be encouraged not to feel shy because it is time for us to teach you so that the Matigsalug tradition will not be broken) P6-FGD, PG4, L124-126

Another participant shared:

Kita, nga nagkatapok nga mga matigsalug awhagon siguro nato nga ang atong kultura nga dili jud nato kalimtan pinaagi sa pagsayaw ug dasigon nato sila sa pagsayaw. (We, who are gathered here as Matigsalug, should encourage that our culture is never forgotten through dance, and we should inspire them to dance) P8-FGD, PG6, L201-203

From the narratives shared by the participants, I realized that community engagement plays a vital role in sustaining Matigsalug cultural traditions. Their accounts highlighted the collective responsibility of elders and community members in encouraging the younger generation to participate actively in traditional

dances and cultural practices. I observed that through continuous motivation, guidance, and shared participation, the community fosters cultural continuity and ensures that Matigsalug identity remains alive and meaningful across generations.

Theme 4. Guided Cultural Leadership

The role of elders and experienced community members in directing, teaching, and preserving cultural traditions within the community. In Indigenous settings such as the Matigsalug, this leadership ensures that practices like dance, music, and rituals are performed correctly and respectfully in accordance with ancestral ways. Through their guidance, cultural knowledge is transmitted to younger generations, strengthening continuity, discipline, and respect for heritage while maintaining the authenticity of traditions.

Sub-theme 4.1. Community-Driven Performance

The Matigsalug indigenous dance is deeply rooted in community organization and collective practice, with performances guided by shared norms and group leadership. Dancing is typically initiated only at gatherings or upon invitation, highlighting its communal and situational nature. Participants also emphasized structured arrangements in performances, such as proper pairing, which is consistently observed even among children to maintain harmony and correctness in execution. Through these community-driven practices, the Matigsalug ensure that their dance traditions remain orderly, meaningful, and continuously preserved across generations. The participants shared their experiences:

Para sa akong side kong unsaon siya pag porma ang atoang pagsayaw unauan dili jud ta magsayaw kung dili matapok kay ang sinogdanan sa pagsayaw ayha ra mag sayaw kon naay mag invite mao na ang sugod sa pagsayaw. (From my side, regarding how our dancing is formed, first of all, we really do not dance if there is no gathering, because the beginning of dancing only happens when there is an invitation that is how the dancing starts) P1-FGD, PG7, L217-219

This was supported by another sentiment:

Ang pama-agi namo aron mahimutang ang among sayaw sa matigsalug ipares-pares namo...Bisan ang mga bata same lang gihapon ang pagtudlo nga ingon-anion sa pag pares-pares kung dili niya pares sa una katong babae ug lalaki ug bag-o ra sila ga pares dili mahibaloan na dili nindot ang pag sayaw nila tungod kay lain man iyang pares nga babae ug lain pud ang lalaki. (Our way of organizing our Matigsalug dance is that we pair them...Even for the children, the teaching is still the same in this way of pairing. If they are not paired at first—if the woman and the man are newly paired—it will be noticeable that their dancing is not good because the woman has a different partner and the man also has a different partner) P4-FGD, PG8, L263-268

As I analyzed the participants' accounts, a clear pattern emerged regarding the importance of guided cultural leadership in preserving Matigsalug dance traditions. Their narratives revealed that community leaders and experienced members provide direction on when and how dances should be performed, ensuring that cultural protocols and traditional arrangements are properly observed. I observed that, through this guidance, younger generations learn the correct forms and values of dancing.

Theme 5. Preserving Cultural Order

An order that establishes customs, structures, and practices that guide the proper conduct of cultural activities within a community. In the Matigsalug context, it ensures that dances, rituals, and other traditions are performed in accordance with ancestral norms, including proper roles, sequences, and cultural protocols. This order helps sustain discipline, respect, and authenticity in cultural expressions, allowing traditions to remain coherent and meaningfully passed on to future generations.

Sub-theme 5.1. Cultural Protocol

This highlights that the Matigsalug indigenous dance is governed by cultural protocols that ensure proper organization, preparation, and respect for tradition. These include setting schedules for teaching and gatherings, preparing traditional attire, and using indigenous instruments during performances. Participants emphasized that dances are performed only when proper arrangements are made, including invitations, appropriate timing, and the availability of complete cultural materials, such as traditional clothing and instruments. Through these established protocols, the community ensures that every performance is conducted with cultural integrity, reinforcing respect for ancestral practices. As the participant shared:

Gusto nako pud nga maghatag ug balaod nga kina na adlaw magtudlo aron maka schedule sa paglakaw kon kanus-a maka lakaw. (I also want to give a rules that on that day there will be teaching so that we can make a schedule for going, when we can go)
 P6-FGD, PG9, L307

One participant stated:

Ang sayawan matigsalug mangandam ta sa atong suoton nga kinaraan ug kana pung kumpasan (tambol) aron makatan-aw pud ta sa sinayawan sa matigsalug na kinaraan. (A Matigsalug sayawan—we prepare what we will wear that is kinaraan and also the kumpasan (drum) so that we can also watch the sinayawan of the kinaraan Matigsalug)
 P7-FGD, PG9, L305-307

As I listened to one participant, I noticed a firm and assured tone in his voice, and shared:

Dili sila maka tindog or maka sayaw kon wala kini among gamit and instruments such as Binekad and kuglung instrument (male attire), Imbelaran and saluray instrumeent (Female attire) dili maka sayaw sila kay kinahanglan jud kon asa sila gamiton kon asa ang invitation gamiton ang tribal nga sayaw sa amoa nga tradisyon ug mag sayaw jud sila suot ang complete attire. (They cannot stand or dance if they do not have the needed tools and instruments such as Binekad and kuglung instrument (male attire), Imbelaran and saluray instrument (female attire). They cannot dance because it is really necessary that wherever they are used, wherever the invitation is, the tribal dance of our tradition is used, and they truly dance wearing the complete attire) P8-FGD, PG10, L312-316

As I analyzed the participants' accounts, a clear pattern emerged regarding the importance of cultural protocols in preserving Matigsalug dance traditions. Their narratives revealed that performances are carefully guided by established rules governing scheduling, attire, instruments, and invitations to ensure that every activity adheres to proper cultural preparation. I observed that, under these protocols, dances are performed

only when all traditional requirements are met, reinforcing discipline, authenticity, and respect for ancestral practices.

Theme 6. Community Support

A collective encouragement, assistance, and participation of community members in sustaining cultural practices and traditions. In Indigenous contexts such as the Matigsalug, it involves the active participation of elders, youth, and families in teaching, learning, and performing cultural expressions such as dance and music. This shared support strengthens unity, ensures the continuity of heritage, and fosters a sense of responsibility among members to preserve and value their cultural identity across generations.

Sub-theme 6.1. Organized Teaching

The transmission is carried out through structured, intentional teaching practices that ensure the continuity of cultural knowledge. Elders and knowledgeable members facilitate learning sessions, often combining rituals such as *panubad/ampo* with dance instruction, and then schedule teaching moments for children after school. Participants emphasized the importance of organizing specific days and times for learning, allowing children to consistently engage with traditional dances and instruments such as the *kuglung* and *panalurey*. Through this organized approach, the community ensures that cultural skills are systematically passed on, strengthening discipline. Drawing from its own experiences, the participant reflected:

Akoa pud na hibaloan mag panubad/ampo ug mag sayaw pag human sa sayaw magtudlo sa mga bata nga mao kini ang buhata ninyo skwela mo mag uli mo na nag skwela sa hapon adto mo sa maestro nga makabalo ug sayaw ug panalurey ug kuglung. (What I also know is that we do *panubad/ampo* and dance, and after the dance we teach the children, telling them that this is what you should do: go to school, go home after attending school in the afternoon, then go to the maestro who knows how to dance *panalurey* and *kuglung*) P5-FGD, PG8, L281-283

Another participant shared with determination:

Kabahin ana isip hisgutan sa pagsayaw same sa amoa nga kabalo mag schedule mi kong unsa nga adlaw nga mag tapok mi sa hapon pinaagi sa pagtoon sa pag sayaw sa mga bata kay kini talento pinaagi sa kaning kuglung. (Part of this, as a topic in dancing, is that we, those of us who know, also know how to make a schedule regarding which day we will gather in the afternoon through teaching the children how to dance, because this is a talent through this *kuglung*) P6-FGD, L291-293

As I delved deeper into the participants' narratives, I recognized the vital role of community support in sustaining the transmission of Matigsalug dance traditions. Their accounts highlighted how elders and knowledgeable members work together to organize teaching activities, guide children, and create regular opportunities for learning traditional dances and musical instruments. I observed that this collective commitment fosters discipline, participation, and cultural continuity, ensuring that Matigsalug heritage is actively preserved and passed on to future generations through structured and meaningful learning experiences.

Theme 7. Performative Culture

The community expresses its identity, values, and traditions through performance-based activities such as dance, music, rituals, and storytelling. In Indigenous contexts such as the Matigsalug, culture is not only preserved in memory but also actively performed and experienced through collective performances. These performances serve as living expressions of heritage, allowing cultural meanings to be communicated, shared, and sustained across generations while strengthening community identity and continuity.

Sub-theme 7.1. Dance as Living Heritage

This shows that indigenous dance serves as a meaningful form of cultural expression, in which movements convey emotions, social purpose, and communal identity. The circular movement (*paglibot-libot*) is associated with joy and happiness, reflecting the dance's celebratory nature during gatherings and guest visits. It is also viewed as a way to entertain and honor visitors while simultaneously demonstrating the dancers' skills and cultural knowledge to the community. Participants further explained that *paglipot* signals the conclusion of the performance, marking the end of the musical and dance sequence. Through these expressive movements, Matigsalug dance becomes a living representation of emotion, hospitality, and cultural identity. As two participants joyfully recalled:

Ang kahulugan sa same ato nga sayaw himoon same sa pagsayaw nga maglibot-libot kahulugan na nalipay nami. (The meaning of performing the same dance in the same way—moving around in circles—signifies that we are happy) P1-FGD, PG10, L338

Kanang paglibot-libot mag sayaw ang pangalan ana ug mag pahalipay sa mga bisita kong naay bisita. (The paglibot-libot or moving around in circles is called dancing, and it is done to entertain and please the visitors when there are guests) P5-FGD, PG11, L364

One participant emphasized: Another participant shared:

Ok so kana pong pag sayaw jud nga nakita ninyo nga maglibot na sila nag paila nga kabalo na sila para makita tanan sa kinatibok-an nga nag tapok nga nagpaila sila nga kabalo. (As for the dancing, when you see them moving around in circles, it shows that they are knowledgeable) P6-FGD, PG11, L388

Another participant shared:

Ang katong paglipot, boot pasabot natapos na ang music sa pagsayaw nila. (The paglipot signals that the music and dance have finished) P8-FGD, L412

Further, I understood that performative culture is central to how the Matigsalug people express and sustain their identity. Their accounts revealed that dance serves as a meaningful cultural expression in which movements convey emotions, hospitality, and communal values, particularly during gatherings and the reception of guests. I observed that through expressive forms such as *paglibot-libot* and *paglipot*, performances become living representations of joy, cultural knowledge, and social connection, reinforcing continuity and shared identity across generations.

Theme 8. Courtship Dance

The dance is used in Indigenous communities as a medium for expressing affection, attraction, and social connection, often linked to courtship practices. In the Matigsalug context, it serves as a cultural expression in which gestures, movements, and musical accompaniment communicate intentions and emotions in a socially acceptable and symbolic way. Beyond entertainment, it reflects cultural values, social relationships, and traditional ways of forming bonds within the community.

Sub-theme 8.1. Kubing as Social Communication

The kubing serves as an important traditional medium of communication within Matigsalug culture, particularly in expressing emotions and intentions during social interactions such as courting. Elders recall that the kubing was traditionally used as a form of nonverbal communication, in which individuals, especially men, conveyed messages of affection and interest to women through its sound. Participants emphasized that this practice reflects the creativity and cultural richness of the community's early forms of communication. As the participant shared:

Ang akoo rapud na nahibaloan sa kubing ang kanang kubing sa katigulangan aron pag storyahanay sila ipanguyab (courting) sa mga tigulang. (What I also know about the kubing is that the elders use the kubing to converse with each other, like during ipanguyab or courting) P5-FGD, PG11, L359

As another participant spoke, I noticed a joyful face when she articulated:

Sa una nga panahon ang kubing mao na ang courting mangubing ang laki nga storyahan daw ko niya mao nang sa una pagpangnguyabay karon. (In the old times, the kubing was used for courting; the man would play the kubing to talk to the woman. That is how pangnguyabay (courting) used to be done in the past) P6-FGD, PG11, L379-380

As I reviewed the participants' narratives, I found that courtship dance in Matigsalug culture functions as a meaningful medium for expressing affection, emotions, and social connection within culturally accepted forms. Their accounts highlighted how gestures, movements, and musical elements, such as the kubing, are used to convey intentions, particularly during traditional courting practices. I observed that beyond entertainment, these expressive forms reflect deep cultural values and serve as symbolic tools for building relationships and sustaining social bonds within the community.

Theme 9. Musical Coordination

This allows the harmonious alignment of instruments, rhythm, voice, and movement during cultural performances. In Indigenous contexts such as the Matigsalug, it involves the synchronized use of traditional instruments and songs to guide and support dance and storytelling. This coordination ensures that performances are orderly, expressive, and culturally meaningful, allowing music and movement to work together in conveying shared cultural identity and traditions.

Sub-theme 9.1. Guiding Through Song Knowledge

The song plays a guiding role in Matigsalug cultural performances, where individuals use singing and vocal cues to direct and support dance activities. Women are often seen as leaders in initiating songs and shaping the flow of performance, depending on the type of chant or music being used. Participants also emphasized the role of vocal expressions such as calling out or giving recognition to dancers, which helps coordinate movements and acknowledge participation. Drawing from their own experiences, as participant reflected:

Ang mga babae kay sila ang pasiugda nga sila depende kung unsa ang ilang kantahon.
 (The women are the ones who lead, depending on what they are singing) P2-FGD, PG10, L340

One participant shared:

Ug kon ipasabot nako ang akong nahibaloan nga awit dali rako magsinggit ug maghatag ug pahinungod sa nag sayaw. Also, when I explain what I know about the songs, I can quickly magsinggit (call out/shout) and give recognition to those who are dancing) P3-FGD, PG11, L358

Sub-theme 9.2. Instruments Conveying Cultural Meaning

Matigsalug musical instruments carry deep cultural meanings beyond their sound, serving as symbolic expressions of identity and tradition. Instruments such as the pulendag (bamboo flute) and kubing (bamboo string) are described as having distinct sounds, yet both are valued for the meanings they convey within cultural practice. Participants emphasized that these instruments are not only appreciated for their auditory qualities but also for the messages and cultural significance embedded in their use. They further explained the complementary roles of instruments such as the salurey for women and kuglung for men, which produce harmonized sounds during performances. Through these practices, Matigsalug instruments function as cultural carriers that express meaning, reinforce gender roles, and sustain musical traditions within the community.

This finding is supported by Hou (2025), who argues that Indigenous and traditional dances, when staged or adapted in contemporary contexts, risk losing their original cultural meanings due to aesthetic reinterpretation, a concern addressed in this study through the continued grounding of instruments in cultural practice. Similarly, Dangaura (2025) argues that the modification of performance can transform Indigenous dance into a commodified cultural display, detached from its original community context. These are consistent in the participants' narratives:

Ang kanang pulendag (Bamboo flute) naay kanta pud ang kubing (Bamboo string) pariho lang gihapon sila pero lahi ug sound. (The pulendag (bamboo flute) has its songs, and the kubing (bamboo string) also has songs; they are similar but have different sounds) P4-FGD, PG11, L361

One participant clarified that:

Ang kanang kubing same ra sila sa pulendag ang pulendag maayo nga paminawon pero kanang unsay kaluwasan didto sa ginaingon sa pulendag. (The kubing is similar to the pulendag; the pulendag sounds pleasant to hear, but its true significance lies in what the pulendag conveys) P5-FGD, PG11, L373

One participant added:

Kining salurey kani ang gamit sa babae nga pares sa kuglung kay duyugan sa kanta kani ug unsaon pag kanta nga makaduyog ang sound. (The salurey is used by the women as a pair to the kuglung, accompanying the song, and showing how to sing so that its sound can harmonize) P8-FGD, PG12, L407

Drawing from the participants' accounts, I came to understand that musical coordination is essential in shaping the structure and meaning of Matigsalug cultural performances. Their narratives revealed how songs, vocal cues, and traditional instruments are carefully synchronized to guide dance and storytelling, ensuring harmony, order, and cultural coherence. I observed that beyond technical alignment, these musical elements carry deep cultural significance, reinforcing identity, expressing shared values, and sustaining the continuity of Matigsalug musical traditions.

In this section, I present the emerging theme of Sacred Syncretism as reflected in the Matigsalug Indigenous dance practices. I further examine how spiritual rituals and contemporary fusion intertwine to preserve cultural identity, maintain spiritual significance, and sustain traditions.

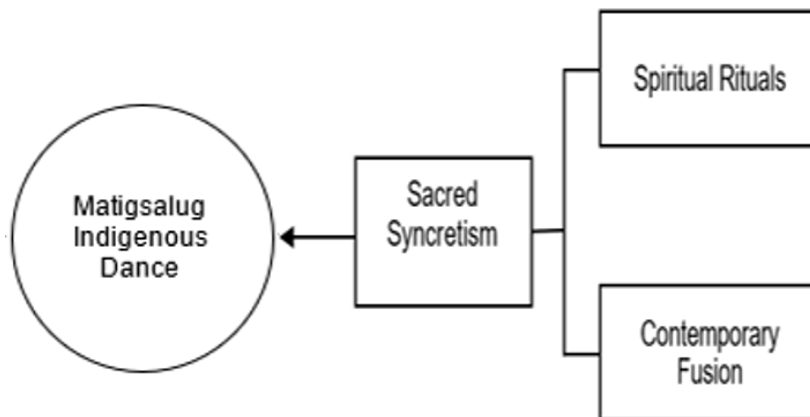


Figure 1. Emerging Theme

Theme 10. Sacred Syncretism

In the context of indigenous dance, spiritual expressions such as rituals, prayers, and ceremonial dances may combine ancestral practices with evolving influences while remaining rooted in cultural identity. This fusion helps preserve spiritual significance while allowing traditions to adapt and endure across changing social contexts.

Sub-theme 10.1. Spiritual Rituals

This reflects on the Matigsalug community, particularly *panubad*, a sacred practice performed before events, including dances, to invoke protection and unity. These rituals involve prayers; symbolic offerings such as three chickens, which embody the colors red, black, and white; coins; eggs; moments of silence; guidance from the *Datu*; and cultural songs in the community's dialect, all of which reinforce spiritual belief. The practice of *pagpanubad* during gatherings and assemblies demonstrates tribal unity, while seasonal or situational variations of the ritual, including roasting a chicken or burning torn clothes, are performed to ward off negative spirits. These spiritual practices are evident in the participants' narratives:

Dako pud ang apekto niini ang pagpanubad o pagampo sa amoa nga tribo nga kini pud ang ginaingon nga pagampo sa amoa nga tribo. (This also has a significant effect on our tribe's *pagpanubad* (prayer/ritual) or *pagampo* (prayer), which is what is referred to as the prayer of our tribe) P1-FGD, PG10, L337

One participant pointed out:

Sa pag panubad gamiton kini sa pagpanubad pareho sa pagtapoktapok sumbunganan aron pagpaila nga usa mi ka tribo. (Regarding *pagpanubad* (prayer/ritual), it is used in *panubad* as in *tapok-tapok sumbunganan* (gathering/assembly) to show that we are one tribe) P2-FGD, PG10, L348

Another participant shared:

Ang akua pud manubad mi kung maglain ang panahon magpanubad mi magpamalas o ihaw ug manok ug mag sunog ug gisi na sanina aron mawala ang dautan nga mag abot diri sa amoa. (For me, in *panubad* (prayer/ritual), if the time or season changes, we perform *panubad* by demonstrating through *ihaw* (roasting) a chicken and burning torn clothes to remove any bad spirits that might come to us) P6-FGD, PG11, L385-386

Sub-theme 10.2. Contemporary Fusion

Their indigenous dance reflects the blending of traditional steps and instruments with new trends and adaptations. During the interviews, participants shared the different types of dancing influences on the new trend and demonstrated the original steps, highlighting how tradition and innovation coexist. Instruments like the *kuglung* are modified, for example by removing the *hagting* (ring or decoration for plucking) once it becomes permanent, allowing it to accompany songs even outside the traditional repertoire. In the middle of our interview, I witnessed the different variations in their indigenous dance. They show significant differences in the steps and in how they played the instruments. Traditional dances, including the *kinaraan* style and *pagadlit*, show differences in steps, songs, and techniques compared to the past, while newer variations, like

balihon ang kuglung, are taught to children and differ in steps and exhibition, with adaptations for occasions such as welcoming visitors, with new elements being taught. These are based on the experiences of the participant, as he narrates:

Ang kinaraan nga pagsayaw adunay lain pud nga awit or kanta lahi napud ang pag step pag kadlit sa kuglung ikatulo lahi napud ang awit o kanta lahi napud ang pag step ug pag kadlit sa kuglung ika upat ang kining karon nga itudlo sa mga kabataan ang ginaingon na balihon ang kuglung....nga awit pinaagi sa pagdayeg sa mga bisita. (The old or kinaraan one has a different way of dancing; the kinaraan dance has a different awit or kanta, and the steps and kadlit of the kuglung are also different. The third one again has a different awit or kanta and different steps and kadlit of the kuglung. The fourth is what is taught to the children now, which is called balihon ang kuglung....used through praising the arriving visitors) P6-FGD, PG9, L294-297

Another participant supported:

Kining kinaraan nga pagkadlit lahilahi ang pagsayaw lahilahi ang exhibition sa pag sayaw sa karaan naay bag-o karon nga gina tun-an. (The old style of pagadlit (traditional dance) differs in steps and in exhibition compared to the past, but now new elements are being taught) P7-FGD, PG12, L399-400

As I listened to the participant's narrative, Sacred Syncretism emerged as a blend of spiritual rituals and contemporary fusion within Matigsalug cultural practice. Rituals like panubad establish sacred protection and unity through prayers, offerings, and communal guidance, while contemporary fusion reflects the adaptation of traditional dance and instruments to new styles and contexts. Together, these show how tradition is not replaced but continuously reshaped while preserving its cultural meaning.

Furthermore, I understood that sacred syncretism reflects the enduring connection between spirituality and cultural practice in Matigsalug indigenous dance. Their accounts revealed that rituals such as panubad and pagampo remain central in ensuring protection, unity, and spiritual grounding before cultural activities, while incorporating symbolic offerings and guided communal actions. I observed that alongside these sacred practices, contemporary adaptations in dance and instruments demonstrate how tradition continues to evolve, blending ancestral expressions with new forms while still preserving cultural meaning and identity.

Summary of Findings

1. The Matigsalug Indigenous Cultural Communities perceive Indigenous dance as a vital expression of ancestral preservation, dance as cultural expression, and community engagement, where Indigenous dances serve as a means of transmitting traditions, values, and heritage from one generation to another.
2. It emphasized the importance of guided cultural leadership, preservation of cultural order, and community support in sustaining Indigenous dance practices and in ensuring their continued protection within the community.
3. The Matigsalug Indigenous Cultural Communities view Indigenous dance as a performative culture deeply connected to courtship practices, musical coordination accompanied by instruments, and movements that reflect cultural identity.
4. The sacred syncretism emerged, reflecting the community's ability to integrate spiritual rituals

with contemporary fusion by adapting dances, music, and instruments to modern contexts, demonstrating that Matigsalug cultural practices are dynamic and evolving while still maintaining their cultural and spiritual significance.

Discussions

In this section, I discuss the study's findings in relation to the existing literature and relevant studies. I further examined the implications of these findings for understanding the role of Indigenous dance in preserving cultural identity and traditions, and for practice and future research directions.

Ancestral Preservation

The findings of my study demonstrate that the Matigsalug Indigenous Cultural Communities preserve their ancestral heritage through the continuous practice and transmission of traditional dances and Indigenous musical traditions. The participants revealed that Indigenous dance serves as a vital medium for sustaining ancestral memory, strengthening cultural identity, and ensuring the passing on of traditional knowledge to younger generations. These findings support Palabrica's (2025) assertion that Indigenous communities preserve their cultural dance heritage and sustain their identity despite modern influences. This is consistent with Imbang et al. (2025), who found that cultural continuity is maintained through embodied practices that strengthen tradition and identity across generations. Similarly, Magbanua (2025) highlighted that Indigenous dances remain central to intergenerational cultural preservation and identity formation as lived expressions of community heritage. These studies affirm my findings that Matigsalug Indigenous dance is not merely a performance but a living system of cultural preservation that reinforces ancestral memory and community identity.

Furthermore, the participants emphasized the importance of continuously practicing traditional dances and Indigenous musical instruments to ensure that cultural knowledge remains active and relevant within the community. This finding aligns with Musungwini et al. (2026), who emphasized that Indigenous knowledge systems remain resilient when cultural practices are continuously performed, taught, and socially embedded within communities. Similarly, Hashemzadeh et al. (2026) asserted that cultural preservation can be strengthened through structured documentation and community-centered learning systems that bridge oral traditions and modern preservation methods. In addition, Fortune et al. (2025) highlighted that adaptive learning systems and active community engagement contribute significantly to the preservation of Indigenous traditions in contemporary contexts. These studies further validate my study's findings that sustained practice, community participation, and intergenerational learning are essential to preserving the Matigsalug ancestral heritage.

However, the findings of my study contradict Haenraets et al.'s (2025) assertion that external cultural influences may weaken traditional knowledge systems if cultural transmission is not actively sustained. Likewise, Guittap and Rabago (2025) noted that modernization and changing social contexts may place Indigenous practices at risk of reinterpretation or decline when intergenerational transmission is not supported through formal and informal learning systems. In contrast, the findings of my study reveal that the Matigsalug Indigenous Cultural Communities continue to demonstrate strong intergenerational engagement, where elders actively transmit cultural knowledge and younger members willingly participate in traditional dance practices. This active participation ensures that ancestral preservation remains dynamic, collective, and resilient despite the challenges posed by modernization.

Dance as Cultural Expression

The cultural expression was demonstrated among the Matigsalug Indigenous communities, who perceive dance as a significant means of communicating their identity, values, traditions, and collective experiences. The participants revealed that Indigenous dance serves not only as a performance but also as a medium for expressing cultural meanings, preserving ancestral knowledge, and reinforcing their sense of belonging within the community. These findings support Yijun (2025) assertion that dance is a multimodal form of communication in which gestures and bodily movements convey culturally encoded knowledge that reflects social identity and collective memory. This is consistent with Celeste (2024), who found that in Indigenous contexts, dance serves as a living expression of heritage and belonging, in which performance becomes a space to reinforce ancestral connections and cultural continuity.

Similarly, Chou (2025) cited that dance functions as an embodied form of identity construction in which movement becomes a visible expression of belonging and cultural recognition. This finding is further supported by Isnaeni et al. (2025), who noted that Indigenous performance traditions serve as identity markers, strengthening collective memory and community cohesion. Furthermore, Chu (2025) highlighted cultural practices, such as dance, help sustain Indigenous identity by linking present generations to ancestral knowledge and lived traditions. These studies affirm my findings that Matigsalug Indigenous dance is a meaningful cultural expression that strengthens identity, preserves heritage, and fosters a strong sense of community among its members.

Community Engagement

An engagement plays a vital role in sustaining the cultural practices of the Matigsalug Indigenous Cultural Communities. The participants revealed that Indigenous dance is maintained through the active involvement of community members, where traditions are collectively practiced, shared, and transmitted across generations. This engagement strengthens social bonds, promotes cultural continuity, and ensures that cultural traditions are experienced as a shared responsibility rather than an individual undertaking. These findings support the assertion by Dushkova and Ivlieva (2024), who emphasized the participatory nature of Indigenous communities, in which knowledge, skills, and cultural practices are collectively maintained rather than individually owned.

Consequently, Rakhoveio et al. (2025) found that such cultural practices enhance the resilience of Indigenous heritage by reinforcing identity, belonging, and social cohesion within communities. In addition, Lansiw et al. (2024) manifested that community-based cultural engagement serves as a protective mechanism against cultural loss, particularly when traditions are actively practiced and embedded in everyday social life. Furthermore, the participants highlighted the importance of active youth involvement in cultural activities, in which learning occurs through guidance, participation, and collective community support.

This finding aligns with Sanchez et al. (2023), who emphasized the significance of active youth participation, noting that cultural learning is strengthened through guided practice, mentorship, and community encouragement. Likewise, Buckingham et al. (2023) asserted that cultural continuity develops when elders create inclusive spaces that support experiential learning of traditional performance practices. These studies affirm my findings that community engagement remains fundamental to preserving Matigsalug Indigenous dance by fostering intergenerational learning, strengthening social relationships, and ensuring the continuity of cultural heritage.

Guided Cultural Leadership

Leadership plays a crucial role in the preservation and transmission of the Matigsalug Indigenous dance. The participants revealed that elders and cultural leaders serve as primary guides in ensuring that dance practices remain authentic, meaningful, and aligned with traditional values. Through mentorship, instruction, and active involvement in community activities, cultural knowledge is passed on to younger generations in a structured and meaningful way. This finding supports the assertion of Washington and Johnson (2023), who emphasized that Indigenous leadership and community engagement are vital in sustaining cultural knowledge and practices. Similarly, Safarzade et al. (2026) highlighted that cultural continuity is sustained through elder-led mentorship, in which authority is exercised through teaching, modeling, and ongoing community engagement.

This is consistent with Vázquez-Atochero's (2024) study, which noted that elders serve as cultural gatekeepers, safeguarding intangible heritage by ensuring that performance practices remain rooted in their original meanings and community values. This is consistent with Kelly and Nicholson (2022), who found that Indigenous leadership in cultural transmission strengthens intergenerational learning systems and prevents cultural distortion caused by external influences or generational disconnection. In addition, Lamino et al. (2025) emphasized that Indigenous leadership is grounded in cultural solidarity, collective responsibility, and intergenerational guidance. These studies affirm my study's findings that guided cultural leadership is essential to maintaining the integrity, continuity, and authenticity of Matigsalug Indigenous dance.

Moreover, the participants emphasized that cultural leadership is reinforced through community protocols that determine when, how, and by whom cultural expressions are performed. This aligns with Tetteh (2025), who highlighted that community protocols regulate cultural practices to ensure respect for tradition and meaning. Likewise, Le Minh and Anh (2025) asserted that community-based cultural practices strengthen cultural continuity by embedding performance within shared responsibility and communal decision-making processes. These findings further illustrate that guided cultural leadership fosters structured cultural transmission, ensuring that Indigenous dance remains a respected and collective expression of Matigsalug heritage.

Preserving Cultural Order

This is essential in maintaining the structure, meaning, and authenticity of Matigsalug Indigenous dance. The participants revealed that Indigenous dance practices are guided by established norms, protocols, and communal expectations that regulate participation. This structured system ensures that traditions are consistently observed and properly transmitted across generations. These findings support the assertion of Porya and Chowdhary (2026), who emphasized that Indigenous cultural systems depend on structured normative frameworks that regulate participation and sustain the coherence of traditional practices across generations. Similarly, Sjahrir et al. (2026) recognized cultural order as vital in preserving the integrity of performance-based traditions by ensuring that meanings, sequences, and cultural roles remain consistent over time.

Furthermore, Chotib (2024) highlighted that Indigenous governance systems serve to preserve cultural discipline and continuity, particularly through leadership structures that guide communal practices. In addition, Annet (2025) explained that cultural order strengthens intergenerational transmission by providing standards for learning and practicing traditions correctly. These studies affirm my findings that structured cultural systems are necessary to sustain the authenticity and continuity of Matigsalug Indigenous dance.

Meanwhile, the participants emphasized that adherence to cultural protocols governs participation, preparation, and performance, ensuring that traditions are performed with respect and accuracy. This aligns with Khati et al. (2026), who noted that protocols regulate cultural participation and performance to preserve authenticity and meaning. Likewise, Odusanya (2025) asserted that adherence to cultural procedures prevents traditional expressions from being reduced to informal or decontextualized performances. Similarly, Nemogá et al. (2022) emphasized that cultural protocols serve as safeguarding mechanisms that maintain respect for ancestral knowledge by guiding the organization and enactment of cultural events. And so, Opesemowo (2025) highlighted that structured cultural procedures enhance continuity by ensuring that traditions are transmitted in their proper form across generations. These findings collectively affirm that cultural order is a fundamental mechanism in preserving the integrity and sustainability of Matigsalug Indigenous dance.

Community Support

The support is a key factor in sustaining the practice and transmission of Matigsalug Indigenous dance. The participants revealed that the active involvement of elders, youth, and other community members provides a strong foundation for learning, practicing, and preserving traditional dances. These findings support the assertion by Hammood et al. (2025), who emphasized that strong intergenerational involvement enhances cultural resilience by encouraging active participation by both elders and younger members in traditional practices. Similarly, Dushkova and Ivlieva (2024) noted that community-based support strengthens cultural identity by providing consistent opportunities to learn, practice, and reinforce traditions. In addition, Wang et al. (2023) highlighted that community involvement is essential in ensuring the continuity and vitality of living traditions.

Perhaps the participants emphasized that structured guidance and communal participation play important roles in transmitting Indigenous knowledge to younger generations. This aligns with Yembuu (2025), who explained that community support ensures traditions are systematically passed on to younger generations. Likewise, Bihari (2023) described that such practices strengthen both understanding and retention of Indigenous skills. Similarly, Ullah et al. (2023) noted that organized instruction increases youth participation and supports disciplined learning of traditional practices. These studies affirm my findings that strong community support fosters active engagement, strengthens cultural learning, and ensures the continuity of Matigsalug Indigenous dance across generations.

Performative Culture

An Indigenous dance among the Matigsalug is deeply rooted in performative culture, where movement, music, and social interaction function as interconnected expressions of identity, values, and traditions. The participants revealed that dance is not merely an artistic activity but a lived cultural practice that communicates meaning, preserves history, and reinforces community relationships. These findings support Mabingo's (2024) assertion that Indigenous dance is grounded in culturally transmitted performance structures in which music, movement, and social interaction are inseparable. Similarly, Austin et al. (2026) highlighted embodied practice as a form of knowledge transmission in which understanding is communicated through movement, sound, and participation rather than through written forms.

Hence, Shrestha and L'Espoir Decosta (2025) noted that performative traditions are essential to sustaining cultural continuity, as they allow history, beliefs, and identity to be actively re-enacted within community contexts. This is often evident in the findings of Afolaranmi (2024), who explained that dances carry symbolic meanings that reflect emotions, social relationships, and cultural values within the community. Likewise, Xu and Qin (2026) emphasized that living heritage is sustained through embodied practice, in

which cultural meaning is carried by movement and rhythm.

In addition, Mumford (2025) affirmed that Indigenous performance functions as an embodied knowledge system that preserves relational identity and cultural continuity through movement and ritual practice. These studies collectively affirm my study's finding that Matigsalug Indigenous dance is a performative culture that actively sustains identity, meaning, and heritage through embodied expression.

Courtship Dance

The study demonstrates that courtship dance among the Matigsalug Indigenous Cultural Communities functions as a culturally meaningful practice that expresses social relationships, identity, and community values. The participants revealed that this dance reflects creativity and serves as an early means of communication, allowing individuals to express emotions and intentions within culturally appropriate boundaries. These findings support Harman's (2025) assertion that dance functions as an interconnected practice involving human and more-than-human relations, reinforcing cultural belonging and shared identity.

Similarly, courtship dance contributes to strengthening social cohesion by reinforcing respectful interaction patterns and culturally appropriate ways of forming bonds within the community. In addition, Alfarisi et al. (2025) noted that courtship practices function both as personal expression and communal cultural practice. Furthermore, the participants emphasized that courtship dance reflects the creativity and cultural richness of Indigenous communication systems, where movement and performance convey meaning beyond verbal expression.

This is affirmed by Dix and Naar (2025), who argue that Indigenous performance serves as a site of relational knowledge production in which movement, sound, and social interaction create meaning within cultural systems. Likewise, Celidwen and Keltner (2023) highlighted that instruments such as the kubing play an important role in Indigenous social structures by enabling culturally coded interaction that reflects identity, emotion, and relational intent. Moreover, Liu et al. (2023) noted that social communication in Indigenous contexts provides culturally appropriate ways to express personal feelings within accepted behavioral norms. These studies collectively affirm my findings that courtship dance is a vital cultural expression that strengthens social connection, identity, and communication within the Matigsalug community.

Musical Coordination

This is essential in ensuring that Matigsalug Indigenous dance performances remain orderly, expressive, and culturally meaningful. The participants revealed that the synchronization of music, movement, and vocal expressions plays a central role in guiding dancers and conveying shared cultural identity and traditions. This coordination allows performers to move in unison, respond to rhythmic cues, and maintain the cultural integrity of the performance.

These findings support Dai et al.'s (2025) assertion that integrating sound, movement, and voice in traditional performances strengthens cultural transmission. Similarly, Brown (2024) emphasized the importance of synchronized movement, in which performers respond collectively to culturally defined rhythms and cues. In addition, Liu (2025) explained that musical coordination serves as a mechanism for preserving cultural identity by aligning artistic expression with shared memory, values, and communal participation.

Likewise, the participants emphasized the importance of vocal expressions such as calling out or providing cues to dancers, which help regulate timing and acknowledge participation during performances. This aligns with Sawicki (2025), who noted that song structures communicate timing, movement cues, and collective coordination in traditional performances. Likewise, Addaquay (2025) explained that song-based communication serves both expressive and regulatory functions, enabling synchronization while reinforcing shared cultural meaning. Moreover, Essel (2025) highlighted that song-based communication strengthens cultural continuity by embedding knowledge, identity, and coordination within oral and performative traditions.

And so, concerns were also noted regarding the potential loss of cultural meaning when traditional performances are adapted into contemporary or staged contexts. This is supported by Hou (2025), who argued that Indigenous and traditional dances risk losing their original cultural meanings due to aesthetic reinterpretation. Dangaura (2025) emphasized that performance modifications may transform Indigenous dance into a commodified cultural display detached from its original community context. These studies highlight the importance of maintaining authentic musical coordination to preserve cultural integrity.

Sacred Syncretism

This integration of indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices with external religious or cultural influences in dance while preserving their sacred essence. It demonstrates how indigenous communities adapt and transform their dance traditions in response to modern influences, ensuring the continuity of their spiritual, cultural, and communal identities. This understanding is supported by Wiryadinata (2026), who emphasized that indigenous dances function as communal expressions of religious teachings that reinforce spiritual values, while Shi (2026), Chukwuemeke and David (2026), and Havlin (2025) strongly agree that hybrid and syncretic forms allow dance to evolve while maintaining cultural meaning, demonstrating how indigenous expression negotiates modernity through creative adaptation. Hence, contrary to Despain's (2026) assertion, Indigenous practices are often adopted without acknowledgment and reshaped by dominant perspectives.

The practice aligns with Chung (2025), who explained that ritual systems in indigenous communities function as collective spiritual mechanisms that strengthen unity and cultural continuity through shared ceremonial action. This finding is consistent with Pires and Magalhães (2025), who stated that contemporary fusion integrates traditional and modern elements through music and movement, and with Wu et al. (2025), who explained that it is shaped by both global and local cultural influences. Tan (2026) further emphasized that fusion allows a balance between innovation and preservation through cultural exchange. Instruments like the *kuglung* are modified, for example, by removing the *hagting* (ring or decoration for plucking) once it becomes permanent, allowing it to accompany songs even outside the traditional repertoire. This supports Yüceland and Savaş (2026), who argued that ritual and cultural practices remain meaningful through continuous reinterpretation across generations, ensuring cultural endurance amid change.

Implications for Practice

As I synthesized the participants' narratives, I found that indigenous dance among the Matigsalug communities is a holistic and dynamic cultural practice. I observed that indigenous dance is not merely an artistic display but a dynamic motivation that shows each movement reflects a conscious effort to sustain traditions and transmit them across generations. At the same time, I noticed that societal structures and rules are guided by elders and cultural leaders, who ensure that performances adhere to proper protocols and uphold authenticity. I also found that the means of performance, including performative culture, courtship

dance, and musical coordination, provide a structured way for expressing meaning, while sacred syncretism, as an emerging theme, reveals the community's ability to integrate spiritual rituals with contemporary fusion.

From my standpoint, Sacred Syncretism through the integration of spiritual rituals and contemporary fusion clearly supports Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). The presence of rituals like *panubad* reflects how cultural practices are deeply rooted in historical and spiritual traditions, while the adaptation of dances and instruments to modern contexts shows that these activities are not static but continuously evolving. This aligns with CHAT's idea that human activities are shaped by cultural history and are mediated by tools, symbols, and social interaction over time. Thus, Sacred Syncretism not only affirms CHAT but also illustrates its dynamic nature, showing that cultural activities remain relevant by balancing continuity and transformation.

Future Directions of the Study

The findings of this study suggest that community leaders, cultural practitioners, and policymakers play a crucial role in safeguarding and promoting the Matigsalug community's indigenous dance. Indigenous leaders and elders are encouraged to develop systematic documentation strategies and cultural archives that capture both sacred rituals and contemporary fusion elements of their dances. Consequently, cultural practitioners may further enhance preservation efforts through community-led workshops, mentorship programs, and intercultural dialogues that reinforce traditional values while allowing for the thoughtful integration of contemporary influences.

Likewise, curriculum developers and educators, particularly in indigenous and rural contexts, are encouraged to integrate indigenous dance into arts education programs to foster cultural awareness, pride, and identity among learners. In addition, local government units may institutionalize community-based cultural programs, dance festivals, and heritage celebrations that actively engage both youth and elders. Finally, future researchers and cultural organizations are encouraged to adopt participatory and collaborative approaches that directly involve community members in documenting, interpreting, and revitalizing their heritage.

Future studies may employ a qualitative comparative analysis to explore how traditional dances adapt across different indigenous communities. Next, a longitudinal study examining the intergenerational transmission of indigenous dance to understand how these traditions evolve. Additionally, an experimental design could investigate the impact of incorporating modern elements into indigenous dance performances on community acceptance and cultural preservation. Lastly, future research might also focus on a participatory action approach, engaging community members actively in co-creating and documenting their dance traditions to foster sustainable heritage transmission.

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