



Festival Traditions and Cultural Heritage: A Study of Community Practices and Teachers’ Perspectives in Eastern Visayas

Geno M. Udtujan

udtulangno@gmail.com

Masters of Arts in Education Major in Filipino

Graduate School, Leyte Normal University

P. Paterno St. Tacloban City, Philippines, 6520

Abstract

Festivals are a bridge in knowing the people, livelihood, the historical roots and unique culture within the community. This study aimed to determine the role of festival traditions and cultural heritage practices in Eastern Visayas on teachers' perspectives. This study is a descriptive qualitative research design and the researcher used purposive sampling in selecting the participants. There are fifteen (15) respondents to this study. A structured interview guide was the main instrument for gathering the data using a messenger platform and the researcher employed a thematic analysis to present the data using tables. The study's findings showed that festivals foster cultural exchange by promoting and preserving cultural identity, celebrating cultural diversity and solidarity, and raising historical and educational awareness. They also honor patron saints and the significance of religious practices, as well as by encouraging community engagement and historical commemorations. Additionally, the teachers' opinions on the function of festivals included local identity and connection-making, cultural heritage preservation, young cultural awareness and education, pride in the history and legacy of the town, and significant learning experiences. Teachers' and community leaders' collaboration is essential to promoting and maintaining the festival customs, as well as to helping the next generation value and live with cultural pride.

Keywords: festival; tradition; Eastern Visayas, teachers’ perspective, cultural heritage



1. Introduction

Dances have long been regarded as one of the greatest forms of self-expression, and from a religious perspective, they are now a component of religious rituals and worship. Festivals are common events in the Philippines, where Christianity is the predominant religion (Ortiz et.al, 2017). Celebrations of festivals typically focusing around several topics that hold importance for the community, such as agriculture, religion, culture, tradition, history, and folklore. Festivals like the Sangyaw and Pintados-Kasadyaan in Eastern Visayas showcase the region's rich cultural heritage and provide a unique perspective on Waray customs. These celebrations serve as avenues for cultural diffusion, where different cultural aspects mix and influence one another while preserving local traditions.

Fallasi (1987) defined festivals are events and social phenomena that occur in almost every human culture. According to its etymology, the word "festival" comes from the Latin *festum* which means "public joy, merriment, revelry," and *feria*, which means "abstinence from work in honour of the gods," were the original Latin names for festive occasions.

Most people think of a festival as a day of festivities or celebration. The Philippines is not an exception to the numerous festivals observed around the globe. In the Philippines, provinces, towns, and municipalities frequently hold festivals to educate the public and the next generation about the history, identity, and values of the area and its residents (Luna, 2015).

Meyer (2022) mentioned that cultural festivals foster social cohesion and cultural diversity by facilitating bonding rituals, sensuous encounters, and socio-cultural exchanges among diverse ethnic groups, enhancing social sustainability in urban areas. Furthermore, Fallasi (1987) explained that its colourful variety and dramatic intensity of its dynamic choreographic and aesthetic aspects, the signs of deep meaning underlying them, its historical roots, and the involvement of the "natives" have always attracted the attention of casual visitors.

Adiova (2014) states that traditional practices such as festivals are considered as factors that cause people to travel to other countries to learn about local art, culture, and history. The development of local festivals has increased cultural tourism and provides tourist destinations with economic and cultural benefits.

According to the Philippine News Agency, DOT 8 (Eastern Visayas) Director Karina Rosa Tiopes emphasized that festivals are not just one big dance competition but a reflection of local



culture, traditions, history, and way of life. *"This is not just a playground demonstration; it has value to us,"* she said. Tiopes added, *"Festivals should not only be a display of dances but should be anchored in culture, heritage, and the way of life"* (Amazona, 2024).

Hence, a festival prepares a communicative scenery for manifestations of ethnicity and cultural unity with the special objective to demonstrate and experience a particular identity. Kuutma (1998) stressed that the festival brings the group together and communicates about the society itself and the role of the individual in it. In addition to Luna (2015), the hosting place is impacted by a festival since it serves as a means of attracting tourists to the province, town, or municipality.

Hong (2011) also added that the preservation of cultural aspects, including food, clothes, housing, and language, can be accomplished in a variety of ways. Putting physical cultural artifacts on exhibit at museums is one approach to do this. This approach is typically regarded as "authentic" and "memorializing" preservation. Similar to this, festivals can help preserve intangible cultural assets that museums are unable to sufficiently exhibit, like living cultural knowledge, identity, meaning, and basic values ingrained in certain ancient behaviours or rituals.

Festivals serve to raise awareness of a town's early residents' way of life, folklore, legends, and local history. One of the regions in the Philippines is Eastern Visayas, which is rich in cultural traditions and customs. Festivals cater not only to attract tourists and economic benefits but also a way for cultural exchange and diffusion, reflecting its historical roots and promoting the beauty of the local heritage. Coskun (2021) defined cultural diffusion is the spread of cultural aspects as a result of interactions between individuals from various cultural backgrounds. Numerous studies have focused on festivals, mainly in terms of their entertainment value or economic impact, but there has been limited exploration of their role in facilitating cultural diffusion, particularly in preserving and promoting local heritage that remains undiscovered.

Based on the study conducted by Stankova and Vassenska (2015), the region's cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, is therefore the unquestionable source of a region's cultural identity. The community's ideas of the world, the surrounding reality, other people, and themselves have been affected by century-old customs, traditions, and beliefs that have been preserved. According to the study conducted by Rutagand (2024), by conserving cultural history and encouraging a sense of community among many people, cultural festivals were essential in developing social cohesion and cross-cultural understanding.



A religious festival is celebrated in a distinctive and vibrant manner by the Leyteños. At events like the Pintados-Kasadyaan Festival, both men and women enjoy getting body tattoos because Visayans are skilled in this art (Amber, 2019). In other towns, such as Calbiga, Samar's Pahoy-Pahoy (scarecrow) Festival, Gandara, Samar's Carabao (water buffalo) Festival, Catbalogan City's Manaragat (fishermen) Festival, and others, people honour their livelihood, the things that help them get a good harvest, or the products for which the town is famous. The Bagasumbol Festival of Naval, the Lingganay Festival, and other celebrations, however, would portray myths or religious or historical occurrences. (Labro, 2012).

This study will give us a deeper understanding of these festivals among local communities in Eastern Visayas on cultural diffusion. Also, to emphasize the perspectives of the teachers in helping the young minds to connect and emphasize the significance of cultural heritage not only for entertainment but also appreciating our identity and local heritage.

Municipalities celebrate festivals every year. It is a means of honouring rich traditions, culture, and heritage. It also contributes significantly to increasing local tourism in the area. It is stated that job opportunities arise when tourism flourishes (Arcipe & Tinga, 2021). However, this study will address the gap by discovering how the festivals played a crucial role in cultural exchange among local communities, especially with regard to their local history and traditions. Moreover, this study will also analyse the viewpoints of the teachers as the agents and influencers in preserving and promoting cultural heritage and diversity, ensuring that the younger generations have a strong connection to their local heritage.

In a modern world, cultural festivals become a way for cultural exchange like customs and traditional beliefs and practices among local communities even across different regions. This study focuses on the role of festivals on cultural diffusion in Eastern Visayas, particularly in promoting and preserving cultural heritage through education, and to determine the different cultural practices of each traditional festival that reflect their customs and history as cultural representation.

1.1. Theoretical Framework

Each community has its own different historical narratives, customs, dances and rituals as well as festivals that reflect the identity of the local community. Festivals are a bridge in knowing the people, livelihood, the historical roots and unique culture within the community. There are theories that



support this study. Functional theory proposes that festivals meet specific needs of communities such as celebrating events or deities; Sociological theory suggests festivals reinforce social cohesion as people participate in traditions; and Symbolic interaction theory argues festivals involve interaction with symbols that take on shared cultural meanings (Meloy, 2023). In addition to that, social identity theory also describes the conditions under which social identity becomes more important than one's identity as an individual. The theory also specifies how social identity can influence intergroup behavior (Vinney, 2024). This theory explained the importance of how festivals shape the social identity of community members in Eastern Visayas. Furthermore, the constructivist theory also emphasizes that learners are active participants in their learning journey; knowledge is constructed based on experiences (Kurt, 2021). Teachers in Eastern Visayas should employ a constructivist approach to integrate local festivals in teaching and learning process. With a focus on the educational function of teachers, this framework integrates theoretical viewpoints to offer a comprehensive understanding of how festival customs are viewed and taught in Eastern Visayas.

1.2. Objectives of the study

This study aimed to determine the role of festival traditions and cultural heritage practices in Eastern Visayas on teacher's perspectives. It specifically sought to answer the following questions:

1. What role do festivals in Eastern Visayas play in facilitating cultural exchange between local communities and tourists?
2. What are the contributions of the festivals in the preservation and transmission of local cultural heritage in Eastern Visayas?
3. What are the perspectives of teachers on the role that festivals in Eastern Visayas play in preserving community heritage and educating young people?

2. Methodology

This study utilized a descriptive qualitative research design to determine and explore the role of festival traditions and cultural heritage practices in Eastern Visayas on teachers' perspectives from different municipalities and provinces. Descriptive qualitative research is a method of research that is focused on understanding a phenomenon by examining its characteristics and qualities (Regoniel, 2023). The researcher used purposive sampling in selecting the participants of this study. Bisht (2024) defined purposive sampling as a non-randomized sampling technique that selects sampling units



based on certain criteria. In selecting the participants, criteria were set. The respondents of this research are the participants who are licensed teachers, either private or public school, a resident of a particular municipality or province in Eastern Visayas for 20 years and above, and who actively engage with their community. There are fifteen (15) respondents to this study. They are young teachers in this range of 24-28 years old. The majority of the respondents are secondary school teachers, and others are college teachers in either private or public schools. They are residents in various municipalities and provinces in Eastern Visayas. The teachers were selected as influencers on cultural transmission and festival behaviours due to their direct participation in educational, cultural, and community activities, ensuring that the younger generations have a strong connection to their local heritage. A structured interview guide was the main instrument for gathering the data. Open-ended questions from the interview guide were intended to determine and explore the respondents' perspectives, experiences, and understanding of their local festivals and cultural heritage. The questions were focusing on the teacher's perspectives on local festival practices and perceptions of the significance of these traditions in preservation, cultural exchange, and influences among neighbouring communities. To ensure that the instrument was clear and relevant, a small group of teachers pretested the said instrument.

The researcher gathered the data from the selected respondents through one-on-one interviews. The researcher gave a consent letter to ensure the ethical integrity of this study and the voluntary involvement of the respondents. and they were scheduled depending on the respondents' availability and location, either in person or online set-up via Messenger platform. Furthermore, the researcher employed a thematic analysis after the data gathered from the interviews to analyse and present the data using tables. Thematic analysis is a method of analysing qualitative data. It is usually applied to a set of texts, such as an interview or transcripts (Caulfield, 2023). All the responses of the respondents were thoroughly read, examined, and transcribed accurately. The researcher reviewed the themes for accuracy and presented them using a table. Each theme will be elaborated through narratives.



3. Results and discussion

Based on the study conducted by the researcher, the teachers across other municipalities and provinces in Eastern Visayas shared their experiences, historical knowledge and perspectives in preserving community heritage and educating young people.

Table 1. *Role of festivals in Eastern Visayas in facilitating cultural exchange between local communities and tourists*

Role of Festivals	Description	Statement
Historical identity and cultural preservation	Festivals showcasing local history and traditions through cultural performances.	<i>“The festival involves weaving demonstrations, street parades, and cultural performances, all reflecting the community's reliance on local resources...”</i>
Honoring patron saints and the importance of religious practices	Many festivals exhibit a deep religious root, parade with the patron saints, novenas and mass in honouring local patron saints symbolize a good harvest, health, peace and livelihood.	<i>“...in Taft, Eastern Samar is “Tubig Festival” which reflects Water as a vital resource... in honour of St. James...”</i> <i>“... in Tanauan Pasaka Festival...helps the community to gather an abundant harvest.”</i> <i>“The festival celebrates local harvests, showcasing traditional farming techniques and practices as an honour to St. Xavier.”</i>
Historical commemorations and community engagement	Other festivals commemorate historical events through historical narratives and performances that fosters cooperation among residents and from other neighbouring towns.	<i>“Commemoration of Balangiga Encounter Day... tells the story of the suffering of Balangigan-ons in the hands of American soldiers and also the bravery of our local heroes.”</i> <i>“Cultural practice relates to the community's history way back World War II where natives used bamboo to signal and inform the presence of invaders/Japanese.”</i>
Local artistry and cultural exchange	Festival dance and performances showcase artistic talents among local communities that create	<i>“Tacloban celebrates the Sangyaw Festival, which showcases local dances, music, and colourful parades.”</i>



	cultural sharing and appreciation.	<i>“The richness of cultures of neighbouring communities helped in the exchange such as conducting festivals where each community showcase their own festival.”</i>
Agricultural Practices and Sustainability	Many festivals present their traditional practices and beliefs based on agricultural livelihood for promoting sustainability and cultural exchange.	<i>“In Pamagpagan Festival of Pastrana showcase the primary livelihood in our town Pastrana which is farming...”</i> <i>“I think primarily because we are an agricultural community. Just putting up a pahoy in front of the houses and the festival dance as well... we have the same culture which is rooted in agriculture hence the similarities among cultures are visible.”</i> <i>“...we also have the same kind of living in farming and celebrating local harvests, showcasing traditional farming.”</i>
Tourism and economic development	Festivals contribute an opportunity to local economies in enhancing cultural exchange, businesses, and attracting tourists.	<i>“The Solusugue festival in Balangiga Eastern, Samar, is a reminder that our town is blessed with abundant supplies of blue marlin which helps the economy ever since.”</i> <i>“Cultural ritual shows relate to our town’s history as these represent the MacArthurnon identity of solidarity in the community... invites everyone not just from the town residents but everyone who is interested in history, culture, and tourism.”</i>

Based on the table above, it can be seen that festivals have a big role in facilitating cultural exchange between local communities and tourists by promoting and preserving cultural identity. It gives a great importance in honouring patron saints among local communities, and other religious practices like the Tubig Festivals in Taft Eastern, Samar, Pasaka Festival in Tanauan, and Batong Festival in Babatngon, Leyte. Furthermore, festivals are a way also to commemorate historical events, like the Balangiga Encounter Day, encouraging respect and unity. Moreover, festivals also emphasize the agricultural practices and the roots of the people in the community where it reflects their way of



living like in Pamagpagan Festival in Pastrana, and Pahoy Festival in Calbiga, Samar that focuses on farming. Tourism is a big help also for cultural exchange and influence of other tourists to know more about the community's culture through different traditional dances, drama, rituals, and other cultural elements. \

These results are aligned to the study conducted by Rutagand (2024) that cultural festivals played a crucial role in fostering social cohesion and cultural understanding by preserving cultural heritage and promoting a sense of community among diverse populations. He noted that festivals have a crucial role for cultural diffusion and influence among other nearby towns or municipalities through cultural understanding and awareness about the role and cultural significance as well as preserving cultural heritage.

Table 2. *Contributions of festivals in the preservation and transmission of local cultural heritage*

Contributions of Festival	Description	Statement
Promoting and preserving cultural identity	Festivals serve as a way to promote and preserve local heritage by showcasing traditional practices, historical narratives, and unique cultural elements from generation to generation.	<p><i>“Festivals allow the people around Eastern Visayas to know more about the cultures of the specific town.”</i></p> <p><i>“By participating in these celebrations, people can gain a deeper understanding of their history while learning to appreciate one another, despite the diversity in local traditions.”</i></p> <p><i>“Every festival tells us a story of the past, livelihood, and the rich culture of the place.”</i></p>
Celebrating cultural diversity and solidarity	Festivals in different towns and communities fostered unity in celebrating unique heritage despite cultural differences.	<p><i>“Festivals help in showcasing a variety and richness of culture in the Eastern Visayas. This is one of the proofs that the Eastern Visayas is abundant in local heritage, cultures and traditions.”</i></p> <p><i>“By celebrating festivals, Eastern Visayas preserves its rich cultural heritage</i></p>



		<i>and promotes diversity, inclusivity, and community unity.”</i>
Historical and Educational Awareness	Many festivals share their local history and roots through different performances and educate locals and visitors to appreciate and learn heritage.	<p><i>“Every festival tells us a story of the past, livelihood, and the rich culture of the place.”</i></p> <p><i>“Festivals mirrors the unique qualities of different places”</i></p>
Promoting for local heritage, tourism, and cultural pride	Festivals help the town for economic development by sharing its cultural practices and pride that leads to appreciation and respect for Eastern Visayan heritage across municipalities and provinces.	<p><i>“This shared experience fosters unity and helps individuals recognize the value of different cultural backgrounds, creating a more inclusive and harmonious community.”</i></p> <p><i>“Festivals can bring people together from different communities, promote understanding and cooperation and attract tourists.”</i></p>

The table above shows the contributions of festivals for preservation and transmission of local culture. It shows that festivals in Eastern Visayas have a great contribution in promoting and preserving cultural identity, diversity and community engagement. Moreover, festivals contribute to local culture to continue the traditional practices across generations and appreciate the vibrant and rich culture. It boosts social and cultural awareness on the historical roots and narratives through educating people by these celebrations of fiestas and patron saints. Indeed, festivals can bring people together from different communities and influence them that may leads to support tourism and the local economy like the Banigan-Kawayan Festival of Basey, Samar highlights the community's weaving tradition, particularly the craftsmanship of “banig” (woven mats) and bamboo products and Solusugue festival in Balangigas Samar, a reminder that our town is blessed with abundant supplies of blue marlin which helps the economy ever since.

This study is aligned to the article by Hong (2011), Festivals all share the trait of celebration, giving the host community a specifically designated period of time and place to acknowledge and increase public awareness of cultural significance. An abstract tradition can be given shape by the symbols and rituals of a traditional celebration, and this cultural representation can occasionally be



achieved by innovative, contemporary methods. He noted that festivals are a way to let other people know the heritage of the community that serves as the intangible wealth of the local people by showing cultural significance.

Table 3. *Perspective of teachers on the role of festivals in preserving community heritage and educating young people*

Perspective of teachers	Description	Statement
Local identity and building connections	Teachers noted that festivals are a bridge across generations and emphasize that our community heritage and roots are still alive and strongly appreciating customs and values of the community.	<i>"As a teacher, the role of a festival is to preserve our identity." "Festivals allow the younger generation to experience the culture first-hand, thereby reinforcing their identity and connection to their roots." "Festivals are a bridge between young generations and old locals, helping them connect with their cultural identity."</i>
Preservation of cultural heritage	Festivals are now a core tradition which every locality celebrates. Teachers are the model of preserving cultural heritage and instruments to encourage learners to love their culture.	<i>"Festivals play a vital role in keeping our community's heritage alive." "Festivals are a living museum which can be passed from generation to generation." "They help keep history alive by allowing people to express their culture through dance, music, and food."</i>
Cultural Awareness and Youth education to the Youth	Many teachers emphasize the value of festivals and traditions to young learners to gain deeper understanding and guide them to appreciate, give respect and understand cultural significance.	<i>"Festivals provide hands-on learning experiences, teaching youth about their heritage." "By participating, young people can learn about traditional customs, music, and dance." "This gives students a powerful way to connect with their heritage and inspire them to continue our tradition."</i>
Cultural Pride of Community's	Teachers believe that festivals reflect the identity of the local	<i>"Festivals foster a sense of belonging and pride in young people." "They provide a sense of pride and continuity"</i>



history and heritage	community that fosters a sense of pride for cultural uniqueness. Teachers serve as a cultural advocate for young generations.	<i>between generations." "Festivals help youth to appreciate and take pride in their cultural heritage."</i>
Meaningful Learning Experience	Festivals play a vital role in providing experiential teaching and learning process through community engagement where students gain cultural insights, values and historical knowledge.	<i>"Festivals are effective because they offer experiential learning through participation." "They give young people a glimpse of their roots through engaging activities like dance, art, and music." "Festivals allow students to witness customs firsthand, creating a memorable learning experience."</i>

Based on the table above, it can be seen that teachers view festivals as a significant tool in appreciating customs and values for preserving and promoting the local history and traditions passing through generations to generations. Teachers are the cultural advocate to encourage and connect the younger generations to their cultural identity and deep connection to their roots. Moreover, teachers' perspective emphasizes on strengthening their awareness, sense of pride and continuing to provide a meaningful learning experience through studying culture in the teaching and learning process.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

Local festivals can be classified as folklore festival based on storytelling, dance and music; festivals that focuses on local agricultural products; festivals of traditional crafts; festivals on traditional rites/ rituals; festivals on natural resources; and festivals based on cultural/ historical heritage (Stankova and Vassenska, 2015). Based on the study, the role of festivals in facilitating cultural exchange between local communities and tourists are for historical identity and cultural preservation; honouring patron saints and the importance of religious practices; historical commemorations and community engagement; local artistry and cultural exchange; agricultural practices and sustainability; and tourism and economic development.

Furthermore, festivals have a big contribution in the preservation and transmission of local cultural heritage such as promoting and preserving cultural identity, celebrating cultural diversity and



solidarity, historical and educational awareness, and promoting local heritage, tourism, and cultural pride. In addition to that, local identity and building connections, preservation of cultural heritage, cultural awareness and education to the youth, cultural pride of community's history and heritage; and meaningful learning experience were the views of the teachers on the role of festivals in preserving community heritage and educating young people.

The researcher recommends the community leaders to continually preserve and promote their local festivals and traditions that reflects the identity and pride of the local residents. It can help the economy grow and for tourist attractions. The researcher recommends the students or young generations to appreciate and respect their culture and encourage them to be the influencer and actively engage for such activities especially about festivals, traditions and practices. The researcher also recommends the teachers to actively advocate for cultural aspects as they are the great provider of meaningful lessons, values and experiences to the learners. The researcher also recommends the other researchers to conduct further study on the other festivals, historical roots, traditions and practices of Eastern Visayas.

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