
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Pagellu as Cultural Praxis: Embodied Social Values in Torajan Traditional Dance

Nurlina Sjahrir¹✉, Bau Salawati², Alimuddin³, Andi Asrifan⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: Author's Name, Nurlina Sjahrir, E-mail: nurlina.sjahrir@unm.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Traditional dance serves as a vital manifestation of cultural identity and the transmission of values in numerous indigenous cultures. In Toraja, South Sulawesi, *Pagellu* plays a pivotal role in ceremonial life, representing spiritual devotion, communal cohesion, and ancestor veneration. Although previous studies have recorded its aesthetic and ritual components, there is limited understanding of how *Pagellu* operates as a cultural practice that actively incorporates and conveys social ideals. This study, conducted through ethnographic research, demonstrates that *Pagellu* functions as a dynamic pedagogy, incorporating embodied symbolism, intergenerational learning, and adaptive performance. The findings highlight the way the dance conveys religious, educational, economic, communicative, and patriotic ideals through its gestures, contexts, and modes of transmission. Despite its extension into contemporary environments, such as academic institutions and tourism, *Pagellu* preserves its cultural authenticity and educational profundity. These findings underscore the importance of traditional dance in preserving indigenous identity and highlight its ongoing relevance for cultural resilience in the face of modernization.

KEYWORDS

Pagellu Dance; Cultural Praxis; Embodied Social Values; Indigenous Pedagogy; Torajan Identity

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1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional dances are acknowledged as essential elements of intangible heritage, embodying the collective memory, value systems, and social identities of a community (Petkovski, 2024; Gwerevende & Mthombeni, 2023; Eichler, 2021; Ranwa, 2021). In Southeast Asia, dance serves not just as entertainment but also as a means of conserving cosmologies, rituals, and sociopolitical structures. In Indonesia, a country characterized by significant ethnic and cultural diversity, traditional dances play a crucial role in expressing communal values, organizing ceremonial life, and reinforcing local knowledge systems (Jamilah et al., 2025; Sakti et al., 2024; Menggo et al., 2021). The Javanese court dances, which express refinement and social hierarchy, with the lively Balinese *kecak* that illustrates legendary tales, serve as both aesthetic and ideological instruments inside society.

The *Pagellu* dance of the Torajan people in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, is a notable cultural expression (Alamiah, 2024; Lindarto & Harisdani, 2024). The Toraja are distinguished by their intricate burial rituals, stratified family structures, and steadfast commitment to ancestral customs rooted in the indigenous belief system known as *Aluk Todolo* (Wuryaningrat et al., 2023; Nooy-Palm, 2021). In this context, *Pagellu*—meaning "to dance joyfully"—has traditionally functioned as a ritual and celebratory dance performed during ceremonial events, particularly *Rambu Tuka'* (festivals of joy), including weddings, home inaugurations, and thanksgiving ceremonies. *Pagellu* has evolved beyond its ceremonial origins, emerging as a significant emblem of Torajan cultural identity, showcased in public festivals, tourism events, and educational initiatives (Blanza & Paborada, 2024).

Although numerous studies have recorded the choreography, structure, and historical development of *Pagellu*, fewer have examined the dance as a lived social practice, intricately intertwined with values that both influence and are influenced by the Torajan worldview. Dance, in this context, transcends a mere performance artifact for preservation; it is a dynamic, communicative act that encapsulates the religious, educational, economic, and relational aspects of communal existence (Grindheim & Grindheim, 2021; Giese & Keightley, 2024; Kempermann, 2022). Utilizing anthropological frameworks, especially Bourdieu's *habitus* and Taylor's (1994) concept of embodied cultural memory, dance can be perceived as a locus where

corporeality, significance, and structure intersect to generate and perpetuate social values (Basso et al., 2021; Hunter, 2021; Divon & Eriksson Krutrök, 2024; Rolla & Huffermann, 2022; Mabingo, 2024).

Pagellu specifically expresses and conveys communal values through a repertory of standardized movements, gendered expressions, spatial configurations, and associated rituals. Gestures like *pa'langkan-langkan* (eagle movement) symbolize heroism and embody traditional standards of leadership and valor. The *jinjit* (tiptoe) position, maintained during the performance, represents artistic mastery and spiritual ascendance—a physical metaphor for life's equilibrium. Moreover, the practice of *ma'toding* (monetary gifts to dancers) during performances emphasizes themes of reciprocity, kinship, and socio-economic support, underscoring the transactional and relational dynamics that uphold the dance's present significance.

Despite its richness, the existing literature predominantly emphasizes either choreographic documentation or socio-historical analyses of *Pagellu*, providing scant examination of its contemporary role as a cultural practice that adapts to the changing socio-cultural dynamics of Torajan society. Many accounts have not yet examined the perception, execution, and adaptation of *Pagellu* by diverse stakeholders—from traditional leaders to youth performers—in reaction to contemporary challenges such as urbanization, diminishing ritual participation, religious transformation, and cultural commodification via tourism. This deficiency in comprehending the social values inherent in and conveyed via dance creates a void in recognizing how traditional art forms such as *Pagellu* persist as vital instruments of social cohesion and cultural resilience.

Furthermore, despite the increasing global interest in embodied knowledge systems—the concept that bodies convey and perpetuate culture through movement and ritual—research connecting these ideas with localized representations such as *Pagellu* is limited (Nanbu & Greer, 2024; Catanzariti, 2023). This approach is especially pertinent in the postcolonial Indonesian setting, where indigenous knowledge systems have frequently been suppressed or essentialized within state-defined narratives of cultural identity (Zembylas, 2022; So & Lee, 2025). Rectifying this deficiency is essential for both decolonizing performance studies and fostering a more sophisticated understanding of how traditional dances function as dynamic pedagogies, influencing ethical conduct, social behavior, and intergenerational memory.

This study demonstrates, through ethnographic fieldwork in North Toraja, that *Pagellu* operates as a cultural practice wherein performative acts serve not only as expressions of heritage but also as active mediums that enact and reinforce social values such as religiosity, communal solidarity, discipline, communication, economic exchange, and patriotism. Through comprehensive interviews with dancers, traditional leaders, cultural officials, and community members, as well as direct observations of performances in various ritual contexts, we examine how *Pagellu* persists as a locus of cultural negotiation and value transmission.

This study presents three significant contributions. Initially, it conceptualizes *Pagellu* not merely as a performance legacy but as embodied social capital, in which physical gestures and ritual behaviors facilitate and generate social interactions. Secondly, it demonstrates the current adaptation of *Pagellu* in reconciling its religious role with its educational and economic functions within contemporary Torajan culture. Finally, it exemplifies the intergenerational discussions facilitated by dance, wherein elders and young collaboratively construct meaning, contest conventions, and navigate their roles within a swiftly evolving cultural milieu.

This article emphasizes the social function and embodied symbolism of *Pagellu*, prompting a reevaluation of traditional dances as essential mechanisms for social integration, ethical modeling, and cultural sustainability, rather than merely objects of aesthetic appreciation. By doing so, we contribute to extensive academic discussions in the anthropology of performance, indigenous epistemology, and Southeast Asian cultural studies. Ultimately, our findings confirm that in the Torajan setting, dancing transcends mere movement; it embodies remembrance, affirmation, and transformation.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research design

This study utilized a qualitative research approach with an anthropological focus to investigate the embodied social values and cultural roles of the *Pagellu* dance within the Torajan community. Ethnography was selected for its capacity to enable the researcher to immerse themselves in the cultural setting, witness lived experiences, and analyze the symbolic meanings inherent in traditional behaviors. The study emphasizes both the artistic form of the dance and its social relevance and performative roles in ritual and communal life. The research directly engages with practitioners, audiences, and ritual contexts to illustrate how *Pagellu* incorporates principles of religiosity, solidarity, and cultural identity. This method is especially effective in revealing the intricate relationship among movement, belief systems, and social structure, providing a comprehensive understanding of dance as a cultural practice. Fieldwork was executed via observation, interviews, and documentation within ceremonial contexts throughout North Toraja.

2.2 Research Setting

The study was performed in North Toraja Regency, situated in South Sulawesi, Indonesia—an area renowned for its profound cultural heritage and robust commitment to ancestral customs. This region serves as the cultural epicenter of the Torajan people, preserving ritual customs, including ancient dances like *Pagellu*. The dance is vital in *Rambu Tuka'*, a sequence of jubilant ceremonial occasions encompassing marriages, housing blessings, and harvest festivities. In these situations, *Pagellu* serves as

both a spiritual manifestation and a social performance, strengthening communal ties and conveying ideals through generations. North Toraja was chosen as the research location because of its frequent ritual performances and the ongoing significance of Pagellu in community life. The location provides a dynamic context where tradition and modernity converge, making it suitable for examining how cultural practices are preserved, modified, and manifested in everyday social interactions.

2.3 Participants and Sampling

This study utilized purposive and snowball sampling methods to select participants with extensive knowledge and expertise concerning the Pagellu dance. The participant groups comprised traditional dancers, both current and retired, who provided insights into the technical and symbolic dimensions of performance. Cultural leaders, such as Tominaa and adat elders, provided insights on the significance of rituals and the continuation of history. Local artists and choreographers presented their perspectives on artistic evolution, while representatives from the Department of Culture and Tourism shared their views on preservation and promotion tactics. Community members and ritual observers were incorporated to comprehend audience impressions and the overarching social role of the dance. A total of 22 participants, aged between 25 and 75 years, included both male and female respondents. Their positions ranged from ceremonial officiants to cultural caretakers, providing a diversified representation of voices within the Torajan community's cultural environment.

Table 1. Participant Demographics Table

Participant Group	Number of Participants	Age Range	Gender Representation
Traditional Dancers (Active)	5	25-40	3M, 2F
Traditional Dancers (Retired)	3	50-65	1M, 2F
Cultural Leaders (Tominaa, Elders)	4	60-75	3M, 1F
Local Artists & Choreographers	3	30-55	2M, 1F
Dept. of Culture & Tourism Representatives	2	35-50	2M
Community Members & Ritual Observers	5	25-60	3M, 2F

Table 1 provides a comprehensive breakdown of the participant demographics in this ethnographic study of the *Pagellu* dance. Participants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling to guarantee a representative mix of traditional dancers, cultural leaders, artists, and spectators. The age range is from 25 to 75 years, including both younger and older stakeholders, with a very balanced gender representation within groups. This diversity enriches the material by including intergenerational knowledge, performance approaches, and cultural interpretations from many perspectives. The integration of professional cultural agents with grassroots participation augments the legitimacy and cultural depth of the outcomes.

Figure 1. Distribution of Participants by Group

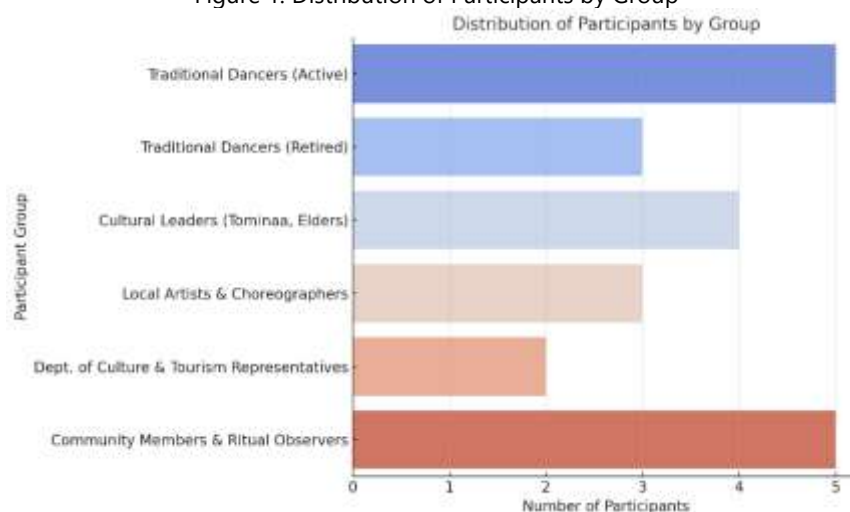


Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of participation across six principal stakeholder groups within the Torajan cultural ecosystem. Traditional dancers, whether active or retired, represent a substantial segment, underscoring their vital position in the embodied practice of *Pagellu*. The presence of community members and ritual watchers constitutes a significant collective, highlighting the participatory and social aspects of the dance. Cultural leaders, local artists, and government officials provide institutional and

artistic perspectives. This visual depiction highlights the collaborative and polyphonic essence of the research, illustrating how traditional knowledge is preserved through a network of varied social agents.

2.4 Data Collection Methods

This research utilized three principal methods of data collection: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document and visual analysis. Participant observation was undertaken during both ceremonial and public *Pagellu* performances, enabling the researcher to immerse themselves in the cultural environment and record dance sequences, gestures, rituals, and audience reactions. This immersive method facilitated the capture of nuanced embodied significances and social interactions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with dancers, elders, and cultural officials, utilizing open-ended questions to investigate personal experiences, symbolic interpretations, and perceived social values associated with the dance. Interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes, conducted on-site in either Torajan or Bahasa Indonesia, and were audio-recorded with permission. Furthermore, the investigation of documents and visuals encompassed the examination of historical photographs, cultural manuscripts, video recordings of performances, and governmental policy documents pertaining to cultural preservation and local festivals. These integrated sources enhanced the ethnographic narrative and facilitated triangulation.

2.5 Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis adhered to the Miles and Huberman (1994) framework, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion formulation. Data reduction entailed the systematic organization and condensation of extensive field notes, interview transcripts, and visual resources into digestible categories pertinent to the research emphasis. Thematic coding was employed to identify recurring patterns and themes, particularly those related to embodied societal values such as spirituality, education, communication, and patriotism. Codes were created to investigate embodied meaning in dance movements and the functional evolution of *Pagellu* in modern Torajan society. The data presentation incorporated matrices and narrative summaries to enhance interpretation. Triangulation was conducted utilizing data sources—participant observations, interviews, and archive materials—to establish validity and corroborate emerging ideas. This process facilitated a comprehensive grasp of the cultural importance of *Pagellu* and enhanced the study's interpretive validity within its anthropological framework.

2.6 Trustworthiness and Rigor

Multiple measures were implemented to guarantee the study's reliability and rigor. Extended involvement in the domain facilitated a profound comprehension of the cultural context and fostered trust among participants. Member verification was performed by disseminating preliminary findings to key informants to verify accuracy and interpretation. An audit trail was preserved via rigorous recording of data collecting, coding, and analysis operations, assuring transparency and reliability. A reflexive journal was maintained during the fieldwork to document researcher biases, decisions, and reflections, hence improving confirmability and facilitating critical self-awareness throughout the interpretation of cultural data.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were emphasized during the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to interviews and observations, with explicit explanations provided regarding the study's objectives, methodologies, and voluntary participation. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained through the use of pseudonyms and the secure storage of sensitive information. The research was conducted with cultural sensitivity, particularly in respecting holy rituals and traditional practices during ceremonies. Engagement with community leaders was sustained to preserve ethical rapport and mutual comprehension. Institutional review and ethical approval were obtained when necessary to adhere to academic standards and safeguard the rights and dignity of all people involved.

3. RESULTS

3.1 *Pagellu* as a Ritual and Social Performance

Field observations indicated that *Pagellu* remains an essential ritual and social performance within the Torajan community, especially at *Rambu Tuka'* ceremonies, traditional weddings, house inaugurations, and the sacred *Ma'bu'a* rituals. In these circumstances, *Pagellu* functions as both a festive statement and a vehicle for cultural affirmation. The dance is often executed by a collective of female dancers, although recent years have seen the emergence of versions that include male participants. Each performance commences with a sequence of organized movements adhering to traditional patterns, starting with the opening gesture (*Gellu' Siman Dipabunga'*) as a symbol of welcome, succeeded by a number of emblematic postures and circular motions. Audience engagement is a crucial element, particularly during the *Ma'toding* phase, where attendees contribute money to the dancers' headpieces as a sign of gratitude and support. These exchanges strengthen the social and reciprocal essence of the performance.

Participation encompasses several generations, from young students to seniors, demonstrating that *Pagellu* persists as a vibrant tradition integrated into both private and public spheres. The dance serves as both a visual show and a performative act that ritualistically enacts and reinforces societal harmony, ancestral veneration, and community delight.

Table 2. Pagellu Performance Contexts and Features

Ceremonial Context	Primary Function	Dancer Composition	Audience Interaction
Rambu Tuka'	Joyful celebration & thanksgiving	Female dancers (youth to elders)	Ma'toding, cheering
Traditional Weddings	Entertainment & ancestral honoring	Mixed gender, community-based	Applause, gift giving
Ma'bu'a Ritual	Sacred ritual & spiritual offering	Selected female dancers with sacred role	Ritual observance, solemn
House Inauguration	Blessing and communal harmony	Youth performers, often female	Community gathering, symbolic acts
Cultural Festivals	Tourism and cultural preservation	Mixed gender, including school troupes	Public engagement, photography

The chart delineates the several ceremonial situations in which *Pagellu* is executed, highlighting its multidimensional significance within Torajan society. Every setting—from religious rites such as *Ma'bu'a* to festive celebrations—imbues the dance with unique purposes and social significances. The composition of dancers differs per event, featuring female dancers in sacred rituals and mixed-gender ensembles in public presentations. Audience interaction varies from solemn attention in religious contexts to participatory activities such as *Ma'toding* during communal festivities. This variation illustrates how *Pagellu* adjusts to circumstances while preserving its symbolic essence, reinforcing principles of appreciation, communal peace, and cultural identity throughout generations and environments.

Figure 2. Estimated Annual Occurrences of Pagellu by Context

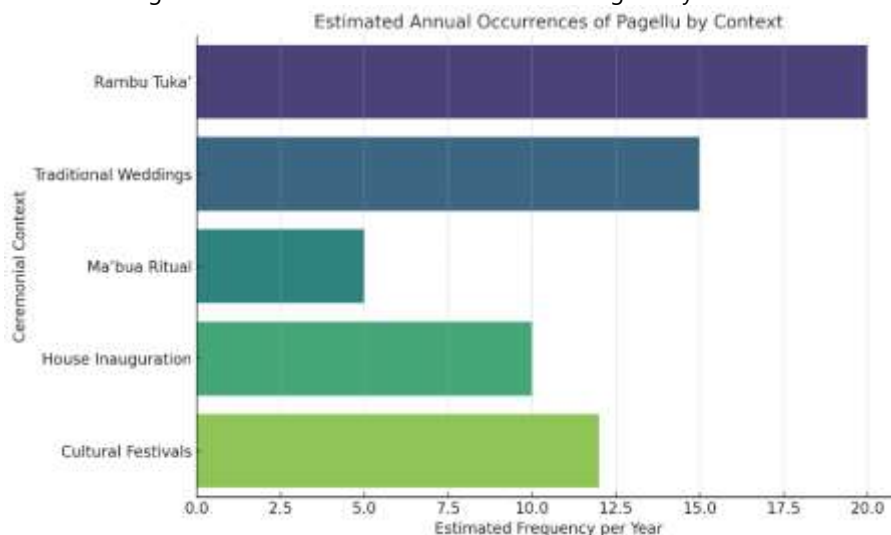


Figure 2 depicts the projected annual frequency of *Pagellu* performances within five principal ceremonial contexts. *Rambu Tuka'* predominates in frequency, highlighting its significance as a pivotal rite for social celebration and gratitude. Traditional weddings and cultural festivals exhibit a significant prevalence, underscoring their importance in social enjoyment and cultural representation. Conversely, religious rites such as *Ma'bu'a* are less frequent owing to their ceremonial specificity and spiritual gravity. The statistics indicate that *Pagellu* retains significant cultural relevance in both sacred and secular contexts, harmonizing tradition and adaptation while being a crucial manifestation of Torajan collective identity.

3.2 Embodied Symbolism in Pagellu Movements

Pagellu is imbued with embodied symbolism, wherein each gesture and movement encapsulates the cultural tales and fundamental societal ideals of the Torajan people. The *Pa'langkan-Langkan* movement, emulating the eagle's flight, represents boldness, leadership, and resilience, epitomizing the exemplary traits of a Torajan leader. The *Ma'toding* rite, in which spectators deposit money into the dancers' headpieces, represents appreciation, reciprocity, and communal benediction. These actions are not only performative but are profoundly imbued with social significance.

A characteristic physical trait of *Pagellu* is the perpetual tiptoe posture (*jinjit*), representing spiritual ascension, vigilance, and equilibrium in life. This stance necessitates stamina and precision, symbolically connecting physical discipline with ethical and social cohesion.

The dance comprises 12 prescribed movement styles, each conveying unique meanings. For instance, *Pa'kaka Bale* symbolizes endurance in the face of adversity, whereas *Passiri* signifies the discernment of good and evil. *Pa'tulekken* underscores the need of introspection and rectification, representing the necessity of self-evaluation in societal interactions. These choreographic aspects serve as lived lessons, conveying qualities such as patience, collaboration, ethical clarity, and communal accountability. Through these symbolic gestures, Pagellu transforms into a tangible language—preserving collective memory, directing conduct, and sustaining the ethical underpinnings of Torajan identity and social structure.

Table 3. Pagellu Movement Symbolism Table

Movement Name	Symbolic Meaning	Value Theme
<i>Pa'langkan-Langkan</i>	Courage, leadership, resilience	Patriotism
<i>Ma'toding</i>	Gratitude, reciprocity, communal blessing	Economic Reciprocity
<i>Pa'kaka Bale</i>	Perseverance against adversity	Resilience
<i>Passiri</i>	Discernment of good and evil	Ethical Clarity
<i>Pa'tulekken</i>	Reflection, evaluation, correction	Self-Reflection
<i>Pa'gellu' Tua</i>	Spiritual core and strength	Spirituality
<i>Penggirik Tang Tarru'</i>	Self-monitoring and adjustment	Responsibility
<i>Pa'unnorong</i>	Innocence, clarity, purity	Purity
<i>Pangra'pak Pentallun</i>	Sequential effort and discipline	Process Orientation
<i>Pangrampanan</i>	Rest, balance, self-care	Well-being
<i>Pa'passakke</i>	Gratitude and closure	Gratitude
<i>Gellu' Siman Dipabunga'</i>	Welcoming and respect	Hospitality

Table 3 delineates the symbolic significances inherent in twelve fundamental motions of the *Pagellu* dance, demonstrating how each gesture embodies profound cultural values within Torajan society. Movements like *Pa'langkan-Langkan* epitomize valor and leadership, whereas *Ma'toding* underscores reciprocity and communal assistance. Every movement is associated with a comprehensive value theme—spanning spirituality, self-reflection, and well-being—illustrating how *Pagellu* operates not merely as a physical performance but also as a moral and philosophical compass. These bodily expressions function as a mode of non-verbal narration, conveying traditional values across generations and strengthening the ethical framework of Torajan communal existence.

Figure 3. Frequency of Value Themes in Pagellu Movements

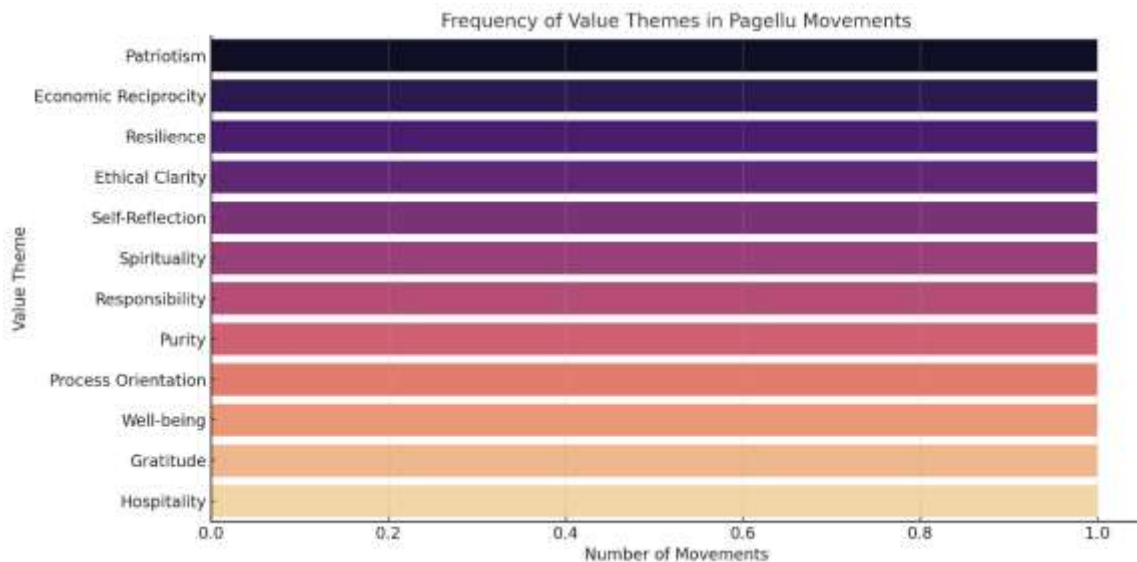


Figure 3 illustrates the variety of value concepts embodied in *Pagellu's* dance repertoire. Every movement represents a distinct concept, highlighting the comprehensive role of dance as a cultural instrument for ethical conveyance. Themes like patriotism, spirituality, appreciation, and self-reflection each manifest singularly, indicating that *Pagellu* embodies a diverse array of moral and social principles rather than prioritizing a singular subject. This distribution illustrates the multifaceted role of dancing in

Torajan civilization, serving as a dynamic medium for reflecting collective wisdom, directing behavior, and fostering emotional and social intelligence through culturally significant movement.

3.3 Results: Social Values Conveyed Through Pagellu

Field research indicated that the Pagellu dance serves as a significant medium for conveying fundamental social values in Torajan society. A predominant subject is religious significance, since the dance is frequently executed as an expression of appreciation and spiritual tribute to ancestor spirits and the divine, especially during the *Rambu Tuka'* and *Ma'bu'a* rites. This act of worship reinforces the community's spiritual identity and belief systems grounded on *Aluk Todolo*.

The dance possesses significant educational value, particularly for younger participants who assimilate discipline, collaboration, and respect through joint rehearsals and public performances. Senior dancers act as moral exemplars, imparting etiquette, stance, and humility—fundamental values in Torajan socialization. Pagellu is integrated into a ceremonial economy regarding its economic significance. Dancers participating in the Ma'toding tradition receive monetary gifts, representing communal support, reciprocity, and economic interaction within a religious framework.

Pagellu, as a collective performance, enhances communication value by facilitating interaction, mutual appreciation, and social bonding. Ultimately, the dance strengthens patriotism and social identity, highlighting cultural pride, historical continuity, and communal leadership. The continual performance across generations reinforces a collective sense of belonging and validates the unique identity of the Torajan people.

Table 4. Social Values in Pagellu Dance

Social Value	Core Function	Key Expression in Pagellu
Religious Value	Expression of gratitude and spiritual offering	Ritual setting in Rambu Tuka', Ma'bu'a
Educational Value	Discipline, cooperation, and moral learning	Training and performance process
Economic Value	Ritual gifting and performer compensation	Ma'toding (monetary gift practice)
Communicative Value	Fostering dialogue and social cohesion	Audience interaction and gathering
Patriotism and Social Identity	Cultural pride, heritage, and leadership	Symbolic gestures and ceremonial attire

Table 4 delineates five fundamental societal principles inherent in the *Pagellu* dance and demonstrates their functional and symbolic manifestations. Religious significance is manifested through spiritual ceremonies such as *Rambu Tuka'* and *Ma'bu'a*, and educational value arises from the collective learning experience involved in practicing the dance. The Ma'toding rite uniquely embodies economic value through symbolic monetary transaction. Communication transpires throughout performances as the audience and dancers engage, strengthening social connections. Ultimately, gestures and clothing express patriotism and social identity. This multifaceted depiction illustrates that Pagellu serves as both an artistic expression and a cohesive cultural mechanism inside Torajan culture.

Figure 4. Domains of Social Values Expressed Through Pagellu

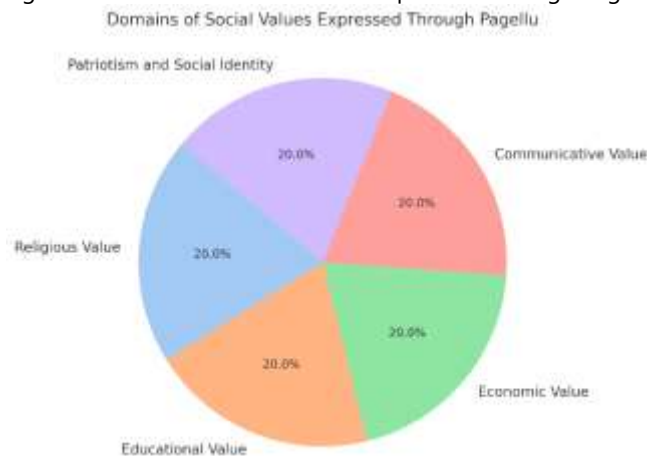


Figure 4 depicts the equal and interrelated contributions of five principal social value areas represented in the Pagellu dance. Pagellu functions holistically, integrating spirituality, education, economy, communication, and identity, rather than prioritizing a

singular value system. This equitable distribution highlights that dance in Torajan culture serves not only as entertainment but also as a dynamic, embodied form of education. Each segment of the pie symbolizes a fundamental element of collective existence that is bolstered by every performance. The chart visually substantiates the assertion that traditional arts such as Pagellu serve as dynamic frameworks for ethical conduct, intergenerational education, and cultural resilience.

3.4 Transformations and Continuity

Pagellu has experienced substantial changes in its role and performance context over time, while preserving cultural continuity. Historically conducted during religious rituals like *Rambu Tuka'* and *Ma'buu*, *Pagellu* is now included in tourism initiatives, academic contests, cultural festivals, and national heritage celebrations. The new settings indicate a transition from ceremonial seclusion to public awareness, accommodating wider audiences while maintaining their symbolic significance. Although the spiritual aspect may be downplayed in public performances, the dance continues to express cultural pride and ancestral values. Robust intergenerational transmission mechanisms underpin this evolution. In numerous Torajan educational institutions, *Pagellu* is incorporated into cultural arts programs, promoting early involvement and artistic rigor among young individuals. Government entities and local cultural organizations actively facilitate seminars, festivals, and training programs, assuring the preservation and responsible adaptation of traditional knowledge. Senior figures and traditional leaders persist in guiding newer dancers, offering contextual insights, and rectifying movement accuracy. Despite industrialization and the emergence of digital media, *Pagellu* persists as a crucial living tradition—sustained not merely by ritual necessity but also by intentional educational and cultural efforts that guarantee its significance for future generations while respecting its sacred beginnings.

Table 4. Transformation and Continuity of Pagellu

Performance Context	Past Function	Current Function	Transmission Mechanism
Traditional Rituals (<i>Rambu Tuka'</i> , <i>Ma'buu</i>)	Spiritual offering and ancestral worship	Still sacred but more inclusive	Oral tradition, family lineage
School Cultural Programs	Rarely formalized in education	Curriculum-based dance education	Teacher-led classroom training
Tourism and Cultural Festivals	Not present	Touristic showcase with cultural narration	Tour guides and curated scripts
Government Cultural Events	Not officially recognized	Promotional heritage tool	Policy-driven cultural campaigns
Local Workshops and Youth Competitions	Community-based only	Structured mentorship and competition	Peer learning, youth mentorship

Table 4 delineates the changing contexts and roles of *Pagellu* throughout five principal categories, encompassing holy rites, educational environments, and promotional settings. Historically grounded on spiritual offerings and ancestral rituals, *Pagellu* has now expanded into educational institutions, tourism, and governmental initiatives. This transition illustrates the dance's durability and adaptability to contemporary cultural forces. Every performance context is associated with a unique transmission method, encompassing oral tradition, classroom instruction, and policy-driven cultural activities. The table illustrates the preservation of continuity via innovation, with intergenerational mentorship, structured education, and cultural advocacy ensuring that *Pagellu* retains its relevance while upholding its traditional importance.

Figure 5. Transformation of Pagellu Across Contexts: Past vs. Present

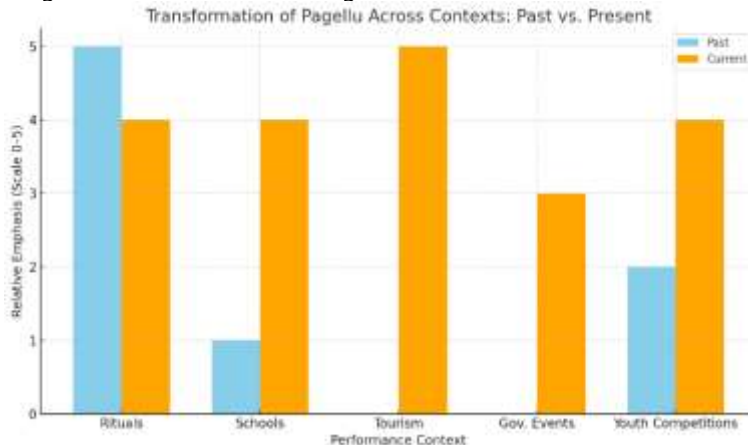


Figure 5 illustrates the comparative focus of Pagellu in various situations throughout two distinct timeframes—historical and contemporary. Although rituals continue to be crucial, their preeminence has somewhat waned due to the emergence of novel circumstances. Significantly, educational initiatives, tourism activities, and youth contests now assume a more prominent role in the preservation of Pagellu. Tourism has the most significant growth, indicating its expanding influence on cultural commodification and identity enhancement. This picture highlights the evolution of the dance from a singular ritualistic act to a complex representation of identity. It asserts that continuity in cultural activity is not fixed but is dynamically reinterpreted across generations and mediums.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Pagellu as Cultural Praxis

The results of this study confirm that Pagellu operates not just as a conventional dance but also as a dynamic type of cultural praxis, a concept that synthesizes theory with social action and lived experience. Utilizing Bourdieu's concept of habitus, Pagellu can be perceived as a corporeal practice through which social structures, norms, and values are internalized and perpetuated (Von Redecker, 2021; La'biran, 2024). The dance embodies and strengthens the ethical, spiritual, and community structures of Torajan existence, achieved not by official teaching, but through engagement, observation, and physical repetition. Through this performative involvement, individuals comprehend the essence of community membership, show gratitude, and confirm their identity (Sumiaty et al., 2023; Pasoloran et al., 2024; Allo et al., 2025).

Furthermore, Taylor's theory of embodied cultural memory highlights how Pagellu functions as a conduit for conveying history and significance (Taylor, 2025; Carraro et al., 2022). The Torajan people encode knowledge through movement, gesture, rhythm, and ritual performance, rather than depending exclusively on written texts. Pagellu, with its structured motions and emblematic forms, facilitates the body's ability to "remember" and convey ideals such as discipline, harmony, and resilience across generations.

Pagellu, as a living tradition, connects the ceremonial with the mundane, the holy with the social. It is present not only in temples and family residences, but also in educational institutions, festivals, and contemporary venues—demonstrating its fluidity and versatility. This study interprets dance as cultural praxis, demonstrating how traditional performance facilitates an ongoing conversation between the past and present, as well as between embodied memory and growing cultural identity (Hwang et al. 2024; Piwowar-Sulej, 2021; Agung et al., 2024).

4.2 Dance as a Medium of Value Transmission

The findings emphasize that *Pagellu* serves as an effective conduit for conveying societal values, which are manifested through choreographed movements and emotionally assimilated through ritual experience. Every movement conveys significance beyond mere aesthetics; it transforms into a symbolic gesture that educates, recalls, and strengthens the essence of living in harmony within the Torajan moral and cultural framework (Agwu et al., 2024; La'biran, 2024). The elegant accuracy of Pa'tulekken represents introspection and accountability, whereas the Ma'toding rite tangibly manifests the principles of reciprocity and social solidarity. Dancers, particularly young ones, do not simply acquire moves; they assimilate ethical frameworks through repetitive physical practice, emotional engagement, and collective affirmation.

This technique corresponds with anthropological research from many cultural traditions. In Balinese legong, structured choreography imparts lessons on elegance, social propriety, and spiritual cultivation to girls. In Hawaiian hula, movement serves as a narrative mechanism for safeguarding mythology, promoting environmental stewardship, and conveying cultural knowledge (Coates & Indonesia, 2022; Anjani et al., 2024; Beaman, 2023). In all instances, dancing serves as a culturally ingrained pedagogy, where knowledge is transmitted not through explicit teaching but through physical involvement and emotional connection.

Pagellu provides comparable educational efficacy. Its enduring performance across generations ensures that values such as reverence for ancestors, communal solidarity, and moral integrity remain culturally prominent and emotionally impactful. Examining Pagellu from this perspective reveals that dance functions not merely as a performative art but as a cultural curriculum—an interactive, affective, and embodied environment where social learning and identity development occur within a defined cultural framework (Gatdet, 2025; Lindarto & Harisdani, 2024; Kiyala, 2024).

4.3 Negotiating Modernity and Tradition

The current practice of Pagellu demonstrates a notable capacity to adapt and endure in changing socio-cultural environments, striking a balance between tradition and modernity. As dance transitions from sacred rituals to domains such as tourism, formal education, and public festivals, its function becomes progressively diverse (Shiferaw, 2025; Gatdet, 2025). It currently serves as both a ceremonial offering and a cultural exhibition—a venue for preserving legacy and showcasing performance for external audiences. This adaptive characteristic illustrates the community's purposeful involvement with modernization, enabling Pagellu to maintain relevance while remaining grounded in its ancestral heritage.

This transition is accompanied by tension. The growth of Pagellu into tourist venues and educational competitions raises concerns over cultural commodification and the possible erosion of its spiritual components. In ritual situations, Pagellu carries spiritual significance, conducted as a sacrifice to ancestors and deities (La'biran, 2024; Lindarto & Harisdani, 2024). Conversely,

when presented to external audiences, the dance may be modified or abbreviated to align with audience expectations, potentially diminishing it to a purely aesthetic exhibition. This establishes a nuanced equilibrium between genuineness and accessibility.

Notwithstanding these constraints, the Torajan community exhibits resilience by preserving discrete boundaries between ceremonial and performative adaptations. Senior figures, cultural authorities, and educators play a pivotal role in preserving the authenticity of holy texts while allowing for creative reinterpretation in secular contexts (Patiung & Sitoto, 2021; Jamilah et al., 2025; Brigita, 2025; Azka et al., 2024). This dual role signifies not a decline of tradition, but a deliberate negotiation—an endeavor to maintain cultural integrity while adopting new roles. Consequently, Pagellu serves as both a custodian of heritage and a catalyst for cultural innovation.

4.4 Implications for Cultural Sustainability

The continuous practice of Pagellu has considerable consequences for cultural sustainability, especially in maintaining Torajan identity and promoting intergenerational knowledge transfer. *Pagellu* serves as a cultural anchor, linking contemporary Torajans to their ancient past. Its persistent existence in both holy and secular contexts guarantees that fundamental values, perspectives, and social behaviors remain prominent and pertinent across generations. Older generations act as guardians of symbolic significance, whilst younger individuals acquire this wisdom through active engagement, narrative sharing, and ritual participation—establishing a cyclical mechanism of cultural rejuvenation.

Furthermore, Pagellu illustrates the capacity of traditional dance as a medium of indigenous education. In contrast to conventional educational frameworks that depend on theoretical instruction, Pagellu imparts knowledge through physical engagement, emotional resonance, and shared experiences. It conveys qualities including discipline, humility, unity, and reverence for the environment and ancestors—essential elements of sustainable cultural systems. These embodied teachings are both symbolic and enacted in real-time, sustaining cultural memory through repetition and collective performance.

In an era of rapid globalization and cultural homogeneity, Pagellu proposes a framework for leveraging traditional behaviors as tools for communal resilience. By integrating both continuity and adaptation, the dance serves as a strategic platform for declaring identity, fostering cultural pride, and combating cultural erosion (Nugroho et al., 2023; Gatdet, 2025; Djam'an et al., 2023). Facilitating these practices via education, cultural policy, and community initiatives is crucial for preserving indigenous knowledge systems—such as those inherent in Pagellu—ensuring they remain vibrant, productive, and firmly established in the lives of future generations (Williams, 2024; Huaman & Walker, 2023; Spennemann, 2023; Redvers et al., 2023).

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined Pagellu as a cultural practice that incorporates and conveys societal values among the Torajan community of South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The analysis of its uses, symbolic gestures, and developing situations reveals that Pagellu is not simply a traditional dance but a dynamic cultural practice that encompasses ritual, pedagogy, and identity building.

The results indicate that Pagellu fulfills several roles in both ceremonial and public domains. As a ceremonial act, it conveys appreciation, veneration for forebears, and spiritual commitment. It conveys qualities such as bravery, introspection, and social cohesion through its physical movements. In contemporary settings, the dance has evolved to encompass tourism, education, and governmental efforts, broadening its function while preserving its symbolic essence. The intergenerational transmission of Pagellu—via educational institutions, community mentorship, and ceremonial practices—highlights its significance as a dynamic tradition grounded in cultural resilience and indigenous teaching.

Notwithstanding its evolution, Pagellu continues to connect the sacred and the social, safeguarding Torajan identity through both ancestral rites and modern performances. Its adaptability demonstrates how traditional arts can maintain relevance in the face of societal change, thereby maintaining cultural memory and ethical behavior.

Future research may further investigate the impact of digital media and globalization on the performance and perception of Pagellu, particularly among younger demographics. Moreover, comparative analyses of indigenous dances in Indonesia or Southeast Asia could enhance our comprehension of how performative traditions serve as arenas of resilience, negotiation, and cultural continuity across diverse communities.

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