

## The Caci Dance as Informal Education for Developing Youth Character and Social Skills in Manggarai

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### Abstract

This study explores the role of the Caci dance in Manggarai East Nusa Tenggara as a form of informal education that develops youth character and social skills. Using a qualitative ethnographic approach data were collected through semi-structured interviews with active and former dancers, cultural leaders and participant observations of live performances supported by video analysis. The findings show that Caci functions as an informal learning system that transmits essential values such as discipline, courage, humility, perseverance, respect and emotional regulation. It also helps develop socio-emotional skills like communication, collaboration, empathy, conflict resolution and social awareness. These values are expressed through costume preparation, symbolic rituals, movement patterns, chanting and reconciliation. The study proposes a conceptual model explaining how ritual participation supports the acquisition and application of social-emotional skills in everyday life. It highlights the importance of culturally based learning practices in complementing formal education while preserving indigenous wisdom and contributes to broader discussions on informal learning and socio-emotional development.

**Keywords:** Caci Dance, Informal Education, Character Development, Social Skills, Manggarai Youth

### INTRODUCTION

Traditional cultural performances are not only forms of artistic expression, but also function as living systems that preserve values and shape the moral and social development of communities (Fernandez, 2025; Onuoha, 2025). Within many societies, these performances operate as informal educational spaces where learning occurs through participation, observation, and lived experience rather than formal classroom instruction. In Indonesia, various ritual dances have been recognized as part of experiential learning environments that naturally embed cultural values, social norms, and behavioral expectations into everyday life (Arsih et al., 2025; Astuti et al., 2025; Denham & Brown, 2021). This perspective positions traditional

performance as an important medium for transmitting knowledge across generations while simultaneously reinforcing collective identity and social cohesion.

In the context of the Manggarai people of East Nusa Tenggara, the Caci dance represents a cultural expression that goes beyond its visual identity as a whip-fighting ritual. It symbolizes strength, bravery, and communal unity, while also functioning as a structured social practice that carries educational meaning. Within this tradition, Caci can be understood as a “living curriculum” where young people are introduced to values such as discipline, resilience, respect, empathy, and cooperation through direct participation in ritual performance (Aninda & Sihombing, 2022; Jama & Menggo, 2023). The learning process is embedded in bodily

experience and social interaction, making it a culturally grounded mechanism for youth development.

Although previous research has explored the role of dance in youth development and social learning, limited attention has been given to understanding how Caci specifically functions as an informal educational system (Manafe et al., 2025; Natar & Age, 2023). Most studies tend to emphasize performance, symbolism, or cultural identity, rather than examining how its ritual structure contributes to everyday character formation and socio-emotional competence. This gap highlights the need for a more focused investigation into how ritual components such as costume preparation, movement patterns, chanting, and collective participation operate as learning mechanisms within the Caci tradition.

From a theoretical perspective, informal learning in cultural contexts is strongly supported by Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes that individuals acquire knowledge and behavior through observation and imitation of others (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Rumjaun & Narod, 2025). Complementing this, Situated Learning Theory explains that learning occurs effectively when individuals participate directly in authentic social and cultural practices within a community (Lave, 1991). In relation to traditional performances, these theories suggest that cultural rituals such as Caci provide immersive environments where learning is not separated from practice, but rather embedded within it.

Empirical studies further reinforce the educational significance of traditional dance practices. Research by Suyitno et al. (2023) shows that ritual-based performances encourage

cooperation, discipline, and respect among participants, while Aninda & Sihombing (2022) dan Narikbayeva et al. (2025) highlight the role of dance in strengthening social character and interpersonal skills. Similarly, international findings by Narikbayeva et al. (2025) indicate that participation in traditional and performative arts contributes to the development of empathy and socio-emotional competence. These studies collectively demonstrate that dance-based traditions play an important role in shaping social behavior and emotional intelligence.

In the Indonesian cultural landscape, Caci has been widely discussed as a representation of Manggarai identity (Aninda & Sihombing, 2022), as a ritualized form of combat performance (Haeril et al., 2025), and as a semiotic system containing moral meanings embedded in symbolic actions (Jama & Menggo, 2023). However, its function as a structured learning environment remains underexplored. While its cultural and symbolic dimensions have been acknowledged, the pedagogical processes embedded within its ritual practice have not been sufficiently analyzed, particularly in relation to youth character development.

Drawing on the perspective of culturally responsive pedagogy, Banks (2008) emphasizes that learning is most meaningful when it is connected to learners' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences. In line with this view, Caci can be understood as a living site of informal education where cultural rituals function simultaneously as a mechanism of knowledge preservation and a medium for moral and social formation. This perspective positions Caci not merely as a cultural performance, but as an

educational practice that integrates values, skills, and identity formation within a single lived experience.

Therefore, this study aims to explore how the Caci dance functions as an informal educational system in Manggarai, particularly in developing youth character and social skills. Specifically, it investigates how ritual elements such as preparation, performance, and reconciliation contribute to the formation of discipline, empathy, courage, cooperation, and communication skills among young participants. Through this exploration, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of Caci as a culturally grounded educational practice that supports both personal development and community continuity.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative ethnographic approach to explore how the Caci dance functions as an informal educational practice within the Manggarai community. The ethnographic approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand cultural phenomena in depth within the natural context of the community, particularly related to the learning processes that occur through ritual practices (Nasution, 2023; Susanto et al., 2025). This method focuses on the social meanings that emerge from interactions, experiences, and direct involvement in Caci cultural activities, thereby able to depict an educational process that is not formally structured but alive in community practices.

The subjects of this research consist of young Caci dancers, senior practitioners experienced in performances, and traditional elders or

leaders who play a role in organizing and preserving the Caci tradition. The selection of subjects was conducted purposively based on their involvement in Caci activities and their understanding of the cultural values contained within. These three groups of subjects are considered capable of providing comprehensive information regarding the learning process, social values, and character formation that occur through the Caci practice.

This research was conducted during the cultural festival and traditional ceremonies featuring the Caci performance in the Manggarai region, East Nusa Tenggara. The research was conducted directly during the series of cultural activities, allowing the researchers to observe the process naturally without any manipulation of the situation. The research location was chosen because it is the center of the Caci tradition, which is still actively practiced by the local community, thus enabling the collection of rich and contextual data in accordance with the research objectives.

Data collection techniques were carried out through semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and video analysis of the Caci performance. Interviews were conducted to explore the experiences, views, and interpretations of the participants regarding the learning process in Caci. Observation was used to directly observe the interactions, behaviors, and social dynamics that occurred during the performance, while video analysis was used to review the details of movements, symbols, and interactions that might not be captured directly in the field.

The data analysis technique is conducted through a thematic analysis approach with stages of open coding and axial coding to identify patterns of

meaning that emerge from the data. This analysis process is guided by the informal learning theory framework (Denham & Brown, 2021), social learning (Bandura & Walters, 1977), dan situated learning (Lave, 1991). Data collected from interviews, field notes, and videos were systematically transcribed and then coded to identify themes related to character formation and social skills in Caci.

To maintain the validity and credibility of the data, this research uses data source triangulation and member checking by involving participants in the process of verifying the interpretation results. Additionally, local terms such as panggag, nggorong, danding, paci, lomes, and towe songke are retained in the analysis process to preserve the authenticity of the cultural context. This process ensures that the cultural meaning is not distorted and is able to accurately represent how the elements of the Caci ritual shape the social-emotional competence and character of the participants in the Manggarai community.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### Embodied Discipline

Research findings indicate that bodily discipline in the Caci performance is formed from the early stages of preparation, systematically conducted by the participants. This process involves the preparation of equipment such as panggag, towe songke, and nggorong, which are not only treated as performance attributes but also as an important part of the ritual sequence that must be prepared with great precision. Each element is prepared thru specific

stages that have become a collective habit within the community, forming a work pattern that is orderly, consistent, and repetitive in each performance. In this process, the young dancers learn to follow the preparation flow by paying attention to the details carried out by the senior performers.

In addition, discipline is also evident in the participants' adherence to the ritual rules that govern the performance from start to finish. Each dancer performs their designated role, follows the sequence of movements, and adheres to the spatial and temporal boundaries agreed upon in tradition. There is no improvisation that deviates from the main structure, as all actions are within the framework of established rules passed down thru generations. This shows that discipline is not only individual but also collective, as all participants are involved in maintaining the order of the performance together.

#### Ritualized Courage and Emotional Regulation

Research findings indicate that courage in the Caci performance emerges thru direct involvement in physically challenging situations. The dancers are in conditions that allow for physical contact with the whips, yet they continue their movements without stopping the performance. This situation demonstrates the mental readiness built thru repeated experiences in previous rehearsals and performances. That courage is not only displayed spontaneously, but is formed thru habituation in a cultural context that considers physical challenges as part of the learning process.

Additionally, it was found that the participants developed strong emotional management skills during the performance. The pain that arose from

physical contact was not expressed excessively, but rather controlled in the form of calmness and focus on the performance. The dancers demonstrate the ability to restrain excessive emotional reactions, allowing the interaction to remain within controlled limits. This process demonstrates that emotional control is an important part of maintaining the continuity of rhythm and the overall atmosphere of the performance.

### **Collaboration and Kinesthetic Synchrony**

Research findings indicate that cooperation in Caci is formed thru the alignment of body movements with the rhythm of the accompanying live music. The dancers adjust their steps, positions, and movement rhythms to the sounds of drums, gongs, and *nggorong* that set the tempo of the performance. This process is not done individually, but thru a collective response to the dynamically changing rhythm of the music. This creates a close connection between the body, voice, and performance space.

Additionally, there is a development of kinesthetic synchronization thru practice and repeated engagement in performances. The dancers are able to read each other's movements and quickly adjust their body responses without explicit verbal instructions. This interaction forms stable coordination patterns among the participants, making their movements appear to merge into a harmonious unity. This synchronization shows that the movement skills in Caci are not only technical but also social, as they are formed thru intense group interactions.

### **Empathy and Conflict Resolution**

Research findings indicate that after the Caci performance, there is a series of social activities that lead to the restoration of relationships among participants. Although there was competitive physical contact during the performance, the situation did not escalate into social conflict outside the arena. The participants interact again in a calmer atmosphere and approach each other to mark the end of the performance activities. This process becomes an integrated part of the entire Caci tradition.

Additionally, it was found that the resolution of differences is carried out thru social mechanisms involving traditional leaders and participants directly involved in the performance. The dialog that occurs after the performance is used to ensure that there is no lingering tension among individuals or groups. This mediation process takes place in a familial atmosphere that emphasizes the importance of maintaining harmonious social relationships. Thus, post-performance interactions serve as a space for restoring social relations within the community.

### **Intergenerational Knowledge Transmission**

Research findings indicate that the process of knowledge transfer in Caci occurs thru the direct involvement of the younger generation in performance activities. The young participants gain an understanding of techniques, rules, and movement patterns by intensely observing the activities performed by more experienced dancers. This observation is not merely passive, but serves as a foundation for them to start trying and adapting to the existing practices. This process occurs naturally

within the context of ongoing community activities.

Moreover, direct involvement in performances provides an opportunity for the younger generation to experience the cultural practices themselves. They do not only learn thru verbal instruction, but thru real experiences that involve the body, space, and social interaction simultaneously. In this process, knowledge is not conveyed in a formal manner, but is formed thru active participation in joint activities. This creates a continuity of knowledge across generations that is ongoing.

### **Respect and Humility**

Research findings show that the attitude of respect in Caci emerges thru social interactions that occur after the performance is over. The participants show forms of respect thru handshakes, hugs, and other physical gestures that are performed spontaneously yet structured within cultural customs. This action is not only symbolic but also part of a social process that marks the end of competitive interactions in the arena. This creates a more fluid and harmonious atmosphere among the participants.

Additionally, it was found that humility was reflected in the way participants treated each other after the performance. There is no excessive dominance from those considered superior in the performance, as all participants return to an equal position in the social context. The interactions that occur demonstrate a shared awareness of maintaining balance in interpersonal relationships. This attitude strengthens social bonds within the community more broadly.

### **Communication and Expressive Skills**

Research findings indicate that communication in Caci occurs thru a combination of verbal language, rhythmic vocalizations, and body expressions. The participants use calls, chants, and specific vocal patterns performed together to regulate the rhythm and atmosphere of the performance. This communication not only serves as a tempo regulator but also as a means to build emotional engagement among participants. This activity creates simultaneous and responsive interactions.

Additionally, it was found that the participants' expressive skills developed thru active engagement in various forms of communication during the performance. The dancers showed an improvement in their ability to express themselves thru body movements, voice, and responses to situations occurring in the arena. This process occurs gradually thru practice and repeated experiences in cultural activities. Thus, communication in Caci becomes an ever-evolving space for expressive learning.

### **Recognition and Relational Competence**

Research findings indicate that involvement in Caci provides social recognition for individuals who participate in it. The dancers obtain a certain position within the social structure of the community based on their participation and involvement in the performances. This recognition is not only formal but also reflected in everyday social interactions outside the performance arena. This shows the connection between cultural participation and social status in society.

Additionally, it was found that relational competence develops thru interactions that occur during and after

the performance. Participants build closer relationships thru shared experiences in an intense and meaningful context. This interaction strengthens mutual trust and enhances the quality of relationships between individuals in the community. Thus, Caci becomes a space that expands social networks and strengthens the connections among community members.

### **Symbolic Knowledge Elements**

Research findings indicate that the symbolic elements in Caci play an important role in shaping the structure and meaning of the performance. Each attribute, such as panggal and towe songke, is used consistently according to the rules that apply in the tradition. These elements not only serve as physical equipment but also carry meanings that are collectively understood by the community. The use of these symbols reinforces cultural identity in every performance.

Furthermore, it was found that understanding of these symbols is obtained thru direct involvement in cultural activities. The participants learned the function and meaning of each element thru repeated practical experiences in the context of performances. This process allows for the formation of symbolic knowledge that is embedded in the daily lives of the community. Thus, symbolic elements become an integral part of the cultural learning process that occurs naturally.

### **Discussion**

Research findings indicate that Caci functions as an informal education system that shapes character thru structured cultural practices, particularly in aspects of discipline, courage, and social responsibility. The learning

process that occurs thru observation, imitation, and active participation shows that knowledge is not formally transferred, but built thru direct involvement in the socio-cultural context. This aligns with the view that social learning occurs thru observation and interaction within communities of practice, where individuals learn from real experiences in their social environment (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Lave, 1991). Thus, this finding strengthens the position of Caci as an experiential learning space that thrives within the traditions of the Manggarai community.

Furthermore, the disciplinary aspects found in this study indicate that the regularity in the preparation and execution of Caci is not only technical but also serves as a means of internalizing cultural values. Involvement in the preparation process of equipment and adherence to ritual rules shapes consistent behavioral patterns among participants. This finding is supported by previous research that shows that the structure of rituals in traditional cultures can form disciplined habits thru the repetition of symbolic activities and collective practices (Bertinetto, 2025). Thus, discipline in Caci does not stand alone, but is integrated into a cultural value system that is passed down thru generations.

In terms of courage and emotional regulation, the research results show that dancers develop the ability to manage fear and pain thru direct involvement in performances. This condition shows that intense physical experiences serve as a means of developing psychological resilience and self-control. These findings are consistent with research showing that involvement in traditional performing

arts can enhance emotional resilience and self-control in challenging situations (Aninda & Sihombing, 2022). Thus, Caci serves as an emotional training space that shapes the psychological stability of participants thru authentic cultural experiences.

Findings on collaboration and kinesthetic synchronization indicate that the Caci performance relies on close cooperation between the dancers and the accompanying music. The alignment of movement with the rhythm of the music creates a collective harmony formed thru practice and shared experiences. This is supported by research showing that traditional performances based on music and movement can strengthen social cohesion and group coordination thru integrated bodily experiences (Manafe et al., 2025; Narikbayeva et al., 2025; Suyitno et al., 2023). Thus, synchronization in Caci is not only esthetic but also reflects a social construct that strengthens interpersonal relationships.

In terms of empathy and conflict resolution, the research findings indicate that post-performance interactions serve as a mechanism for restoring social relationships. Although there is physical contact in the arena, social relations are maintained thru a peaceful process involving traditional leaders and participants. These findings are consistent with research that shows that customary institutions play an important role in maintaining social harmony thru mediation mechanisms and relationship restoration rituals (Andar et al., 2023). Thus, Caci not only becomes an arena for physical competition but also a space for social reconciliation structured within the local culture.

Furthermore, the research findings also indicate that Caci serves as

a medium for intergenerational knowledge transfer thru direct practice in a social context. The younger generation learns thru observation and active participation with more experienced dancers, making the learning process occur naturally and sustainably. These findings are supported by the concept of situational learning, which emphasizes that knowledge is formed thru participation in a community of practice (Lave, 1991). Thus, Caci becomes an important mechanism in preserving the continuity of cultural knowledge while also shaping the social identity of the younger generation.

## CONCLUSION

This research concludes that the Caci dance of the Manggarai community functions as a culture-based informal education system, where the ritual process serves as the main learning medium encompassing preparation, performance, and reconciliation in an integrated manner. Thru this process, participants learn discipline, emotional control, cooperation, and moral values thru direct involvement in cultural practices and guidance from traditional leaders. Caci also emphasizes the importance of intergenerational knowledge transfer and participatory learning that integrates physical, social, and emotional aspects holistically. Thus, Caci serves as a living educational space that strengthens the character, cultural identity, and social harmony of the Manggarai community while also supporting the preservation of local wisdom.

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