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Challenges in Implementing a Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in Indigenous Formal Education

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Abstract

This study explored the challenges in implementing Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) among Lumad learners in Pangantucan, Bukidnon. Using a qualitative, narrative approach, data were collected through semi-structured, in-person interviews with five purposively selected teachers who have taught Lumad learners for at least three years and who are familiar with Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs). These teachers are also Lumads themselves belonging to the Manobo, Talaandig, and Umayamnon communities. Thematic analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke's six-phase model to identify recurring patterns and themes in the narratives. The researcher, a member of the Higaonon community but who was born and raised in a highly urbanized setting, also practices reflexivity in the analysis of the data. The research examined the implementation of CSP through its key components: dynamic use of community languages, incorporation of local knowledge and practices, student and community agency, historical context in content and instruction, the ability to address internalized oppression, and effective integration of these elements into the curriculum. Findings revealed structural challenges, including limited school and faculty support, insufficient training, lack of Lumad representation in policymaking, a rigid national curriculum, and scarce historical documentation. Content-related challenges also emerged, such as the difficulty in addressing the traumatic history of the Lumad, the sacredness and technical nature of IKSPs, and language barriers. Furthermore, the teachers' cultural backgrounds and the effects of modernization on students' cultural self-esteem added to the complexity of implementing CSP. Despite these obstacles, teachers demonstrated agency by adapting and embedding CSP into their classrooms. The study emphasizes the need for institutional support to foster a pedagogy that honors Indigenous cultures, languages, and identities, ultimately promoting both academic success and cultural sustainability.

Indigenization Statement

I, the researcher, identify as a Higaonon Lumad, with my roots tracing back to the Higaonons of Pangayawan, my ancestor, Apo Limbobongan, was the head of the Manculintas family. I was born and raised in the Cagayan de Oro City but had found ways to reconnect to my heritage through conversations with my elders, with other Lumads, and through cultural studies and research. While I am a Lumad by ancestry, I do not claim to encapsulate the Lumad experience because I only hold the stories of my family, as I have been away from my heritage. I have spent years reconnecting to my community, understanding their way of life, and surfacing Lumad

concerns. As a Lumad reconnecting with my roots and as a basic education teacher, I conducted this exploratory study with the aim to identify challenges in implementing a Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy into basic education for Lumad learners in Mindanao.

Introduction

Filipinos had distinct cultures, practices, and governance systems long before Spanish colonization. Although formal education in pre-colonial Philippines is not well documented, knowledge was transmitted through customs and family roles (Low et al., 2021; McKenna, 1998). With colonization, education became an "instrument of colonial policy," reflecting colonial ideologies through teacher training, policies, and curricula designed to enforce obedience (Shultz, 2012; Zeng & Li, 2023).

While there have been attempts to Filipinize the curriculum through contextualization of foreign policies and incorporation of Filipino names in textbooks, deeper examination is needed regarding how inclusively Filipino formal education truly is. Indigenous peoples (IPs), particularly Lumads- 'Lumad' being a Binisaya term meaning "native" or "Indigenous," with their Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs), continue to face discrimination and commercialization within this framework. Instead of empowering Lumad learners, formal education often marginalizes them (Episcopal Commission on Indigenous Peoples [ECIP], 2007).

The Episcopal Commission on Indigenous Peoples (ECIP, 2007) reported that Lumads face discrimination in public schools, often segregated in classrooms and labeled as slow learners by peers and teachers. School requirements, such as uniforms and shoes, are culturally alien or financially burdensome, while curricula often dismiss their worldviews as inferior to dominant knowledge systems (Shizha, 2013). Discussions of Lumad culture are typically superficial, focusing on artifacts rather than belief systems, which foster alienation from their identities.

Mainstream education also fragments intergenerational ties, encourages migration to cities, and conditions some returnees to exploit ancestral domains, all of which erode the spirit of Lumad cultural communities (ECIP, 2007).

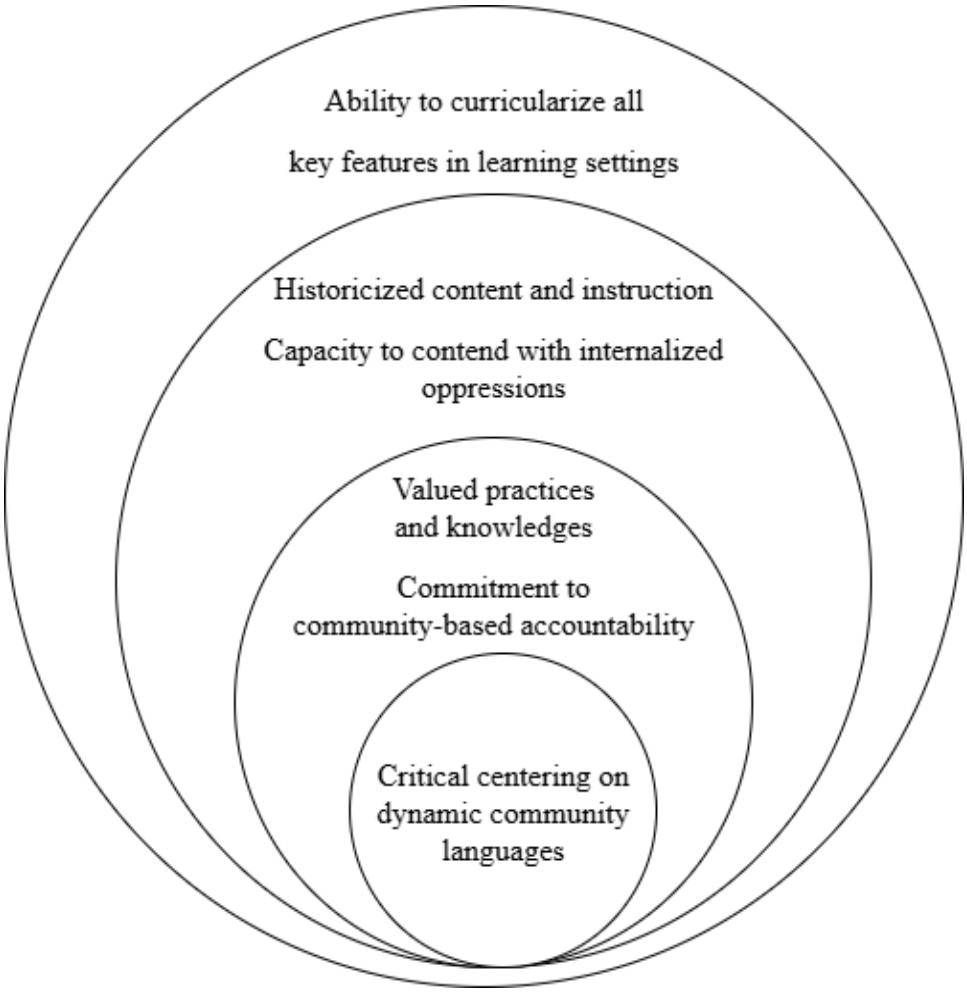
The Evangelische Entwicklungsdienst (EED) Philippine Partners Task Force for Indigenous Peoples Rights reported that one in three Indigenous children drops out of primary school, with only 27% accessing secondary education, 11% completing it, and just 2% graduating from college (Tamayo & Demetillo, 2009). Access is further undermined by violence from state and rebel forces, which has closed 178 Lumad schools since 2016, affecting about 5,500 students (Cariño, 2021). The pandemic deepened these inequities as remote learning excluded many Indigenous children without electricity or internet. Beyond limited access, Lumads also face the erosion of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs), which embody sacred and practical knowledge of governance, agriculture, and culture (Bruchac, 2014; Berkes, 2017; Whyte, 2018; Macusi et al., 2023). Embedded in rituals, songs, stories, and symbols, IKSPs transmit moral and empirical wisdom, with elders serving as knowledge keepers and interpreters of environmental change (Battiste, 2013).

Although some studies have integrated Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs) into Science and Mathematics curricula in Mindanao, these remain limited. A re-examination of how IKSPs are incorporated into formal education is needed, particularly in relation to teachers' attitudes toward Lumad learners, to foster broader discussions on decolonization theories that advocate not only curriculum reform but also innovative teaching strategies that empower Lumad students through culturally relevant forms of education. This study adds to research on IKSPs by emphasizing teacher agency and political representation, framing decolonization as both curricular and political in reshaping power relations in education.

As Dyck (2005) observes, curriculum change also transforms how knowledge is communicated and developed.

This study is examined using Paris' (2012) 'Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy,' an approach that maintains and promotes students' cultural identities while fostering academic achievement, recognizing culture as dynamic and diverse, and centering students' communities and identities. The interactions among the key components of the study are represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Key Components of a Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy



Research Objective

This exploratory research aims to identify challenges in implementing a Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy into basic education for Lumad learners in Mindanao using Paris' (2012) Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy as a framework for investigation.

Related Literature

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP), introduced by Paris (2012), extends multicultural and culturally responsive education by sustaining, rather than merely recognizing, the languages, literacies, and cultural practices of diverse communities. Unlike earlier approaches that promoted assimilation, CSP emphasizes pluralism, equity, and the celebration of evolving cultural identities in schools.

A key feature of CSP is the critical centering on dynamic community languages, which views language as a living and changing force rather than a static relic (Amery, 2009; Alim et al., 2020). Another is valued practices and knowledges, which sustains cultural practices that advance equity while challenging those that perpetuate marginalization (Alim et al., 2020). CSP also underscores student and community agency, requiring accountability rooted in respect, reciprocity, and dialogue with families and communities (McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017). Through historicized content and instruction, learning is connected to the past and present of cultural communities (Paris & Alim, 2017). Further, CSP promotes the capacity to contend with internalized oppressions, addressing false beliefs about cultural and linguistic deficiency imposed by dominant systems (Paris & Alim, 2017). To achieve this, CSP principles must be curricularized, integrated into teaching with input from students and community leaders (Paris &

Alim, 2017). Ultimately, CSP seeks to sustain cultural diversity in classrooms, enabling youth to resist discriminatory narratives and negative stereotypes (Sterkens et al., 2017).

Indigenous Education in Mindanao

In Mindanao, Indigenous education is closely tied to Lumad resistance to ongoing militarization, a process complicit in the dispossession of their ancestral domains (Sy, 2022b). Militarization in Mindanao has profoundly disrupted Indigenous education, as state and paramilitary forces target Lumad schools to weaken community resistance to extractive industries (Alamon, 2017, as cited in Sy, 2022b). The harassment against Lumads has exacerbated to the extent that they are forced to leave their homes, with students continuing their education in *Bakwit* schools (*Bakwit*, a term used to refer to 'evacuation' coined here for 'makeshift') (Casaldo, 2020). Lumads who choose to stay in their homes are faced with high living costs, systemic discrimination, and continued military harassment, compelling many students to leave school (Belisario, 2019). These assaults are not incidental but structural, reflecting how militarization operates as a mechanism of land dispossession, denying Lumad youth both formal learning opportunities and the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous knowledge (Yambao et al., 2022). Education thus becomes a contested terrain, where schooling is weaponized either to assimilate and displace, or to sustain cultural survival and political resistance.

The Alternative Learning Center for Agricultural and Livelihood Development (ALCADEV) exemplifies how education can be reimagined as a site of resistance. Founded in 2004, its curriculum integrates IKSPs with agroecology and a nationalist, pro-people, scientific pedagogy, linking food security and environmental stewardship with political agency (Sy, 2022b). Because it cultivates critical consciousness and collective defense of ancestral land,

ALCADEV and similar Lumad schools have been subjected to closures and violent attacks (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2020). In response, displaced communities created *Bakwit* schools, mobile learning sanctuaries that extend Lumad education in urban and church spaces while amplifying struggles for land and self-determination (Sy, 2022a; Yambao et al., 2022). Together, ALCADEV and *Bakwit* schools demonstrate how Indigenous education in Mindanao is inseparable from broader struggles against militarization, situating the classroom as both a pedagogical and political ground. The Lumad school movement underscores that educational justice is inseparable from the defense of land, culture, and self-determination (Sy, 2022a), something that formal education is structured to restrain in defense of neoliberal capitalism and imperialism in education (Casaldo, 2020).

Methods

Study Design, Population, and Setting

This qualitative research was conducted in Pangantucan, Bukidnon, an area where Lumad populations are predominantly located. Bukidnon is home to seven recognized Indigenous Cultural Communities: The Talaandig, Higa-onon, Bukidnon, Umayamnon, Matigsalug, Manobo, and Tigwahanon, which collectively represent approximately 24% of the province's population (Reyes et al., 2017). As a primarily agricultural region, land in Bukidnon is both valuable and highly contested (Cairns, 2015). The Lumad communities have long struggled with issues surrounding their ancestral domains, leading to marginalization as they are often displaced from their traditional lands (Jerusalem, 2022; Lilley, 2022; Peña, 2022).

The setting of this study is a Filipino Catholic Jesuit Mission community high school in Pangantucan, Bukidnon. The school offers junior high school and senior high school level instruction to Indigenous and Non-Indigenous students. It is an agricultural school which focuses

on teaching and applying agricultural knowledge to help local communities. This is done through subjects related to farming, the environment, and practical skill development (Ardales, 2011).

Five teachers of Lumad students were interviewed. While the researcher communicated that teachers who are invited to be interviewed do not necessarily have to be Lumad themselves, only Lumad teachers were familiar with Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs) and were willing to be interviewed. One has been teaching for four years and finished a bachelor's degree in agriculture. She mentioned that her mother is Cebuano and her father is *Talaandig*. Aside from being a teacher, she also serves as the school's librarian. Another teacher finished a Bachelor of Education degree majoring in Filipino and is an Umayamnon from Cabanglasan. He is also the adviser of Lumad Club called Anamag Youth which engages with Lumad students, empowering them. Another teacher took up a bachelor's degree in agriculture and have Bol-anon and Manobo parents. She mentions that she teaches because she has siblings in the school and hopes to guide students like herself. Next is a Manobo teacher who has been teaching in the school for six years and, although he did not finish a bachelor's in education degree, holds a Bachelor of Arts in Theology. The last teacher has been teaching for four years and holds a bachelor's degree in agriculture. His mother is a Manobo, and his father, a *Talaandig*.

Study Tools, Variables, and Data Collection

The research began by setting clear objectives and creating a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended, unbiased questions based on the study's goals. A school in Bukidnon was selected, and permission was sought from the school president and principal. With the principal's help, participants were chosen through purposive sampling based on set criteria, and an interview schedule was arranged.

On the interview day, I introduced myself and explained the rationale and purpose of the study. While the main target of the study was teachers of Lumad students, those who agreed to participate were teachers who were Lumad themselves. This is likely since Lumad teachers are the only ones in school who are knowledgeable about cultural sustainability, as they practice these in the classroom. Informed consent was obtained from the teachers, and a guide was followed, but the discussion stayed flexible to explore relevant insights. The teachers found it easier to converse with me after I shared that I am from a Lumad community and that my intention was to surface Lumad concerns. With participants' permission, interviews were audio-recorded and kept conversational to help them speak freely.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and organized by themes linked to the research questions. A translated document was sent back to the respondents for checking. A coding framework was developed, and the data was manually coded to identify key themes. These themes were then analyzed to connect findings and form a detailed report, supported by participant quotes to answer the research questions.

Limitations of the Study and Ethical Considerations

Research material was collected, stored, and prepared for publication with the utmost attention to confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity. All data generated during the study has been securely stored, in either paper or in electronic format, and will remain safeguarded for 10 years following the conclusion of the project. The study's documentation remains confidential, and the unprocessed data, which includes the names and details of teacher-participants as well as the video and audio recordings, is only accessible to the researcher.

Although teacher-respondents' participation in this study did not directly benefit them, the results could contribute to a greater understanding of the difficulties faced by Lumad learners

in formal education. Participation had no impact on teacher evaluation of any kind, and the raw data from the study was not shared with the school. The decision to participate was entirely voluntary, with no penalties or loss of benefits associated with declining. Those who consented were free to withdraw at any point during the research process.

While no formal ethical approval was required for this study, as it was considered an exploratory interview, I obtained consent from the participants and exercised additional caution in disclosing the results of the study. While the study does not directly involve nor disclose Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs), these are mentioned, before reporting, I confirmed the accuracy of the data with the respondents and consulted with several scholars.

I also recognize that the narrow participant pool may limit the richness and representativeness of the findings, and it is quite small for drawing broad conclusions about CSP implementation in Lumad contexts. Studies in the future may supplement these findings with more participants and partnerships with Lumad teachers and communities.

Data Analysis

To gain deeper insight into how participants construct meaning through personal stories, I employed Narrative Analysis and utilized Braun and Clarke's (2013) method of thematic analysis to identify key themes. I practiced reflexivity through peer debriefing and self-reflection on my research positionality throughout the conduct of the study to enrich the discussion and to surface possible personal assumptions and biases. As the interviews were conducted in *Binisaya*, I translated the responses into English. These translations were subsequently reviewed by another translator and validated by the participants themselves to ensure accuracy.

Presentation of Data and Analysis

Six overarching themes were apparent in the interviews, answering how teachers integrate Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs) in their teaching to transform the formal education of Lumad learners. These are classified under: Critical centering on dynamic community languages, Valued practices and knowledges, Student and community agency and input, Historicized content and instruction, Capacity to contend with internalized oppressions, and Ability to curricularize all the key features in learning settings. Table 1 shows the themes and their respective subthemes.

Table 1: Themes and Subthemes

Themes	**Subthemes**
Critical centering on dynamic community languages	Unfamiliarity with Language
Valued practices and knowledges	Teacher Identity and Preparedness
Student and community agency and input	Lumad representation in the government
Historicized content and instruction	Underlying Violence in History Lack of Historical Documents
Capacity to contend with internalized oppressions	Lumad Students' Self-Esteem Appreciation of Culture Struggles of Modernization
Ability to curricularize all the above in learning settings	Rigidity of the Curriculum Continuity of Practice

Critical Centering on Dynamic Community Languages

Alim, Paris, and Wong (2020) stress the importance of incorporating Indigenous languages and cultures into the curriculum to support culturally sustaining pedagogy. They advocate for using language as a flexible tool for authentic expression and community engagement, though challenges remain in classroom implementation.

Unfamiliarity with Language

The heterogeneity of Lumad learners affects what language can be used in instruction as well as what specific beliefs and cultures are to be considered. The Philippines is a home to 186 languages, wherein 184 are living and 2 are extinct. Of the living languages, 175 are Indigenous and 9 are non-Indigenous (Fennig et al., 2021). In Bukidnon alone, there are 77 distinct languages and dialects (Bonifacio et al., 2021).

"In our experience, we deepen our learnings from IPs because we are mixed with different personalities of IP students here" (TR1, 7). Learners' culture and linguistic differences impact both their learning and the ways IKSPs are incorporated, as students are more likely to participate actively in social and interactive activities and to feel part of the class when they have better cultural connections and effective communication (Csillik, 2019). In such cases, when students' language and culture differ, teachers struggle to determine which cultures to highlight and which languages to use.

Concerns persist over teachers' language knowledge and fluency, as their diverse cultural backgrounds influence how they use and engage with language.

> Here in [school name], I don't have much direct interaction with the students, although there are some who talk to me, but what I can say is just basic, I really couldn't speak to them fluently. It's very shallow, like my involvement is surface level. (TR2, 10-11)

> There really is a language barrier because although I could understand them a bit, I'm not fluent [in their language]. (TR4, 15)

These statements point to teachers' unfamiliarity of the language that their students use, which, as pointed out by Casas et al. (2020), as cited by Bonifacio et al. (2021), could stem from intermarriages, disinterest, prejudice, and language convergence. There is also the possibility of more dominant languages such as Cebuano or Boholano, variations of Binisaya, Filipino, and English being used more than Indigenous languages such as Binukid or Inukit. Similar findings are reported by Bastida, Saysi and Batuctoc (2023) and Pejaner and Mistades (2020), who investigated language use of various cultural communities such as the Manobo, Higaonon, Banwaon, and Talaandig of Agusan del Sur. Teachers often resort to Cebuano or Binisaya, as these are more widely used.

In addition to challenges arising from cultural differences between students and teachers, there is also a scarcity of materials available for teaching Indigenous and mother-tongue languages (Angelino & Matronillo, 2020; Bastida et al., 2022; Milligan, 2009; Parba, 2018). Addressing this gap is one of the goals of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), which, unfortunately, has encountered similar concerns as above.

Younger Lumad learners often show disinterest in Indigenous languages due to factors like family beliefs that these languages hinder literacy (Bastida et al., 2022; Bonifacio et al., 2021), low self-esteem, fear of judgment, and the influence of technology and modern culture (Robiego et al., 2022), which are an effect of "internal" colonialism (Tikly, 2001), as Lumads are discriminated against and marginalized by their fellow Filipinos.

Scholars also stress the need for teachers to understand local languages and cultures while supporting cultural communities' efforts to preserve them (Cleary & Peacock, 1998; McCarty, 1993). Strategies include promoting intergenerational language transmission (Robiego

et al., 2022), funding Indigenous learning materials (Angelino & Matronillo, 2020), and fostering collaborative revitalization efforts (Bonifacio et al., 2021). Ultimately, the evidence suggests that strengthening language documentation and immersion, along with sustained engagement from both teachers and learners, can help ease these challenges and maintain the dynamic use of Indigenous languages.

Valued Practices and Knowledges

A Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy acknowledges the practices and knowledges of cultural communities that forward equity and cultural justice and becomes a way for learners to also examine how they themselves contribute to ideologies and practices that marginalize their fellow community members (Alim et al., 2020).

Teacher Identity and Preparedness

The Cultural Compatibility theory suggests that education is more effective when students' cultural norms align with those of the school (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). As carriers of these norms, teachers' identities and cultural backgrounds are crucial in fostering culturally sustaining environments as they recognize students' ways of knowing and being (Fryberg et al., 2014). However, many teachers report that limited knowledge of their own culture, including of IKSPs, and even the sacredness of IKSPs, hinders their ability to effectively integrate it in the classroom.

> Even I, as a Lumad myself, sometimes get surprised that things are the way they are. I don't understand why they're here, how can we teach students when we ourselves are not familiar with IP practices? (TR3, 42-43)

> Because we look at the culture, the tribe looks at the culture as a dynamic, sacred belief. That's why it's difficult, because even if it is lived out, the passing of it, the transcending

> of it to others is difficult. We cannot incorporate something that we do not fully embrace. (TR2, 48-50)
>
> This is a very difficult question because what is asked is, if you aren't an elder, you are not allowed to teach these to students- it's not allowed if you have less knowledge about these things. You also weren't given authority. This is why (IKSPs) are difficult to incorporate. (TR1, 43-44).

Teachers admitted to being unfamiliar with aspects of their own culture, making it difficult to pass on. This aligns with the study by Bastida, Saysi, and Batuctoc (2021), who found that even Indigenous teachers often lack exposure to key aspects of their history and culture, hindering their ability to integrate IKSPs in the classroom. This is a product of decades of cultural erasure, as colonialism degraded, and continues to degrade, Indigenous languages, cultures, and customs, which continue to leave deep traces until present (Carr & Thésée, 2012). Battiste (2002) also mentions how different members of Indigenous communities possess varying levels of knowledge in what they know, not just because of their contributions to the community—not only between ordinary people and those regarded as authority figures such as elders or babaylans, but also because the Indigenous knowledge system are dynamic, continually shifting as new insights and interpretations come to light.

While the task of integrating IKSPs is difficult, it is also necessary. Especially since when schools disregard the integration of Indigenous cultures in curricular materials, Indigenous students are deprived of their cultural pride and personal identities (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008).

Sacredness of IKSPs

The non-transmission of IKSPs to younger generations, particularly for young learners stems from several reasons, one of which as teachers have mentioned, the sacredness of IKSPs. "There are also things that children can't say that only elders can do and say... Those practices are not taught by datus…. These things have proper places, events, or people involved" (TR1, 60-64).

Some cultural communities would even understandably feel strongly against publicizing sacred knowledge and photographing sacred objects (Gone, 2017). However, if IKSPs are not taught to younger generations, these may go extinct (Walshe, 2016). As pointed out by another teacher-interviewee:

> If we don't learn it now, when should we learn it? The death of an elder or datu is like losing millions of pages from the library because they have wisdom. How will they pass it on to us if we think that we are not fit to learn it? (TR4, 65-67)

There are possible approaches to the 'passing-on' of IKSPs that would not undermine their importance and sacredness. Smylie et al. (2014) have suggested that for these IKSPs to survive, there is a need to move towards theories and practices that embrace diverse understandings of knowledge and that recognize, respect, and build pre-existing knowledge systems. The challenge for Indigenous educators, teachers of Indigenous students, and educational institutions is to recognize and respect the creative tensions between institutional knowledge systems and Indigenous knowledge systems, as these tensions foster deeper understanding and productive partnerships (Wilder et al., 2016). However, there are also different challenges posed, such as the transmission of IKSPs to educators themselves. One of the teachers interviewed also mentioned how they themselves are unaware of the cultural significance of their own practices, knowledges and traditions.

> [The IKSPs] I know are just the basics, those which are observable. There are rituals- why do we have these practices, or why do we have these systems. But what is lacking is the 'why', because sometimes I have students who tell me, "Ma'am we can't do that because something might happen to us." My knowledge is really lacking. I know that practices like these exist- the things we do in our culture, but the why- and the explanation why we are doing this is lacking. (TR5, 35-39).

Like language, IKSPs are declining due to factors like intermarriage, relocation, modernization, and formal education, which can erode family and community ties (Magni, 2017). The loss of the knowledge of IKSPs is something that I have experienced as well.

Growing up in a highly urbanized city, I only catch glimpses of my community's traditions and practices through my grandmother's re-telling and eventually through my own research work, which makes IKSPs very detached from our current reality. Possible solutions lie in schools recognizing multiple knowledge systems, Indigenous youth remaining connected to their families and communities to support and sustain IKSPs, and through providing better contexts and environments for both educators and learners to thrive.

Student and Community Agency and Input

The community is vital in sustaining culture through accountability and ongoing dialogue about educational values (Lee & McCarty, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2017). Studies show the strength of community input via consultations, elder involvement, and Indigenous student-led programs (Bastida et al., 2023; Bawagan, 2010). While government representation offers a key way for community participation in education, it remains a complex challenge for Indigenous groups.

Lumad Representation in the Government

Teacher-interviewees raised concerns about Lumad representation in the government, particularly at the local levels. Representation is important as it provides Lumads with the opportunity to participate in mainstream politics which allows the inclusion of Lumads concerns in the legislative agenda, and legislative deliberations. This can result in the possible enactment of laws responding to their economic marginalization and consequently improving the Indigenous communities' quality of life (Dolo et al., 2024).

> These activities or these things we have IPMS (Indigenous Peoples and Minorities Section), and the barangay. So, supposedly, according to IPRA (Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act) law, there are intended programs that they are supposed to oversee or provide. So IPMS as a barangay representative, they're supposed to make programs that would cater to their culture as they are the representatives. But what's difficult is that it is

> often mixed with politics. Whoever the mayor is, who knows someone who is Lumad, even if the person has little knowledge [of the culture], he/she is the one that is placed in that position. That's the gap or problem there. It's a big problem because we have a national budget as he/she is the representative of the NCIP (National Commission on Indigenous People.) (TR4, 68-73).

There has been a longstanding struggle for representation for Lumads in the government as these are mired by personal and vested interests with issues on blurred ethnic distinctions/ethnic identity disputes and politico-ethnic conflicts (Gera, 2016). While more and more Indigenous people have mainstreamed their presence in local government, some communities still feel marginalized and underrepresented (Jayma, 2018).

While the IPRA law mandates an IP representative for every local government unit (Jayma, 2018), these representatives are usually chosen by those in authority more than the community itself. This then brings into discussion the politics of Indigenous representation. Paredes (2019) for instance, discusses in detail the political struggle of the 'cultural *datus*' and 'government *datus*' and how representation, or rather, misrepresentation, has brought about more harm for the Indigenous community through continued land grabbing, destruction of ancestral domains, and even the acquisition of financial grants by opportunistic *datus*. In education, this may mean less programs and policies that benefit Indigenous learners and less support for community-led initiatives. Non-representation, however, also is counterproductive as non-Indigenous public administrators may overlook issues important to Indigenous people due to a lack of cultural competency. This can lead to Indigenous communities feeling ignored, fostering mistrust in the political system (Wilkins, 2015).

There is no single solution to the problem of political representation, however, when genuine representation does happen, this encourages more Indigenous members of the community to engage in mainstream politics, such as voting and policy consultations. Despite external influences, the community values and strives to preserve its traditional political

institutions. Thus, the way moving forward is to educate mainstream society about the Indigenous people's political culture can promote respect for cultural diversity and ease IP integration into local politics (Jayma, 2018). Especially since a critical aspect of working with Indigenous communities is including those communities in every stage of initiatives as true partners and collaborators (Farnel et al., 2018).

Historicized Content and Instruction

An understanding of different racial, ethnic, and linguistic communities' histories is essential to sustaining language and valuable practices as these are only possible if they are connected to the past and the present of cultural communities (Paris & Alim, 2017).

Underlying Violence in History

The history of Indigenous peoples in the Philippines is deeply tied to ongoing land grabbing, which has long harmed their communities. Although the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) protects them through free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC), often this remains theoretical as the exploitation of ancestral lands often continues legally via deceit, misrepresentation, or violence (Daytec-Yañgot, 2012). As one teacher-respondent mentions, in a discussion with her students:

> [I would tell my students] if our grandparents knew basic calculation a long time ago, then maybe they wouldn't have traded our lands for cans of sardines. They tell me, 'Yes ma'am, even my grandfather traded our land for fighter wine. (TR5, 8-11)

Many stories of 'trading' lands are like this. Lumads are at a disadvantage as they undersell their lands, trading them for the most basic of things, only to realize their real value too late. My great-great-grandfather has also encountered a similar arrangement. Their lands were barren due to famine, and, as he was head of the community, he had to trade in his land to feed

his *barangay.* As there was no harvest, the land was forfeited to a shrewd businessman, which led to financial and familial stains which cost him his community, as well as his wife and children. Casaldo (2020) also mentions a similar instance where Lumads were deceived into consenting to sell their lands to those who have vested interest when a photo was taken of Lumads raising their hands to a question asked by a representative of the municipal office, and then that photo was used as evidence that they had consented to selling their ancestral domains. For Indigenous communities, the protection of their ancestral domains goes beyond the preservation of the land and its natural riches, they are also fighting to maintain the Indigenous way of life, which is frequently closely connected to the land (Drbohlav & Hejkrlik, 2017).

The educational system has been criticized for being an instrument of the state to promote the political and economic interests of the dominant society while silencing marginalized voices (Busher, 2006; Kuokkanen, 2007; Styres, 2008). This silencing encompasses concerns including, but not limited to, the loss of ancestral domains, the muting of community voices, and the erosion of cultural knowledge. Seeing education as a 'way out,' Lumads are led to become more complicit to formal schooling, which has repeatedly been shown to alienate them. How then is formal education going to approach the discussion of the conflict rooted in the exploitation of ancestral domains when the government itself is complicit? This is a particularly difficult question to answer, and one that requires a transdisciplinary and multisectoral approach. Sy (2022) suggests the continued critical challenging of conventional education, one that the ALCADEV models through critical place-based pedagogy. Casaldo (2020) draws from Vygotsky in the call to 'rehumanize education' which requires transcending standardized approaches to acknowledge and accommodate the diverse strengths and limitations informed by students' cultural and historical contexts, viewed with respect to the socioeconomics, politics,

and functions of education. It is also important to emphasize Lumad teachers' agentic power both as educators and as Lumads. This places them in a unique position as Lumads who demonstrate resilience in sustaining culture, memory, and claims to ancestral land, asserting themselves as historical agents rather than passive subjects (Yambao et al., 2022) and as teachers who can foreground and contextualize these realities in their lessons.

Lack of Historical Documents

There is also a dearth of historical documents on Lumad history. With much of their stories and histories being passed down orally (Mahuika, 2019), the Spanish colonization led to the destruction of cultural materials and attempted erasure of Indigenous people's history (Nadeau, 2020). Fortunately, there is a resurgence of movements to document and disseminate Indigenous communities' stories and histories in the Philippines by scholars and even by Indigenous people themselves (Bamba et al., 2021; Daytec-Yañgot, 2025). However, these are yet to reach classrooms and the curriculum. Although the Philippines has an Integrated History Law that mandates the teaching of Indigenous peoples (IPs) history in both basic and higher education in the country passed in 2016, this is yet to implemented (Senate of the Philippines, 2018).

Capacity to Contend with Internalized Oppressions

Internalized oppression arises when society, including schools, label certain identities and behaviors as flawed, causing affected individuals to absorb these biases (Liebow, 2016). Overcoming this requires strong skills and mental resilience (Paris & Alim, 2017), but younger Lumad learners often face internal and external barriers to developing them.

Lumad Students' Self-Esteem

Low self-esteem is common in Lumad learners as they have previously experienced discrimination inside or outside of school, which greatly affects their extent of participation, academic performance, and even personal aspirations (Alcueres, 2020; Rogayan, 2019). In this case, schools become a venue for discrimination (ECIP, 2007).

> In my experience, there are difficulties in teaching Lumads because during classes, I unconsciously compare them to non-IPs because non-IPs are the ones who speak up in the classroom, (Lumad learners) have a world of their own, they like to keep to themselves. I'm sure they've gone through instances of discrimination so that's how they feel about themselves. (TR3, 20-23)

> It's difficult because when non-IPs approach them, they're the ones who shy away. Even when there are groups in the classroom, they ask if they could stay among themselves. (TR5, 32-34)

Lumad learners often tend to be shy and less likely to participate, sometimes remaining quiet due to low self-esteem. This has also led some Lumad learners to exclude themselves from group activities, choosing instead to stay among peers they culturally identify with.

On the other hand, silence does not necessarily indicate a lack of interest or self-esteem. Teachers often mistake silence for disengagement, yet Indigenous students may be silent for a variety of reasons. According to Castagno and Brayboy (2008), in many Indigenous communities, listening and observing are deeply valued practices and students may carry these behaviors into the classroom even when schools emphasize different expectations. When schools adopt culturally sustaining pedagogy for Indigenous youth—recognizing and valuing their ways of knowing, such as silence as a form of engagement—students tend to develop stronger self-esteem, a healthier sense of identity, greater self-direction, and increased political awareness.

They also show more respect for tribal elders, contribute positively to their communities, engage more in the classroom, and perform better academically (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008).

Appreciation of Culture

Aside from external factors of discrimination, teachers also mention that there is also a possibility that non-appreciation of culture begins at home. As one teacher mentions:

> For me, what I noticed in the IP community and event in our context is [the lack] of appreciation of the culture. That is the massive difficulty that I can see. Because they don't appreciate the culture, even in their own households, when they go outside of their homes, they carry that [non-appreciation] because some of them experienced discrimination. (TR4, 34-35)

Some parents pass down the idea of shame in their identity or the break from tradition due to modernization. As parents model these beliefs and behaviors, their children may also choose not identify as Lumad.

> …If I say now "Who here are Manobo or Umayamnon?" If there are ten of them who are there, it would be a good thing if even two raised their hands. Because they don't understand their [own identity] being Umayamnon or Talaandig... (DD, 37-39)

> It depends on the person; it depends on their engagement [in learning IKSPs]. For others it's interesting for them, then others are not. Example, you mention that these are things that IP did in the past, others like it a lot and ask a lot of questions. Then others are not interested because they feel ashamed that you're talking about it in front of the whole class (TR1, 55-59)

> Parents are key in passing cultural beliefs and pride to their children (Martin, 2017).

Since school values may conflict with cultural traditions, parents and community members help learners bridge these differences, ensuring students feel supported in their education (Ishimaru, 2019). Appreciation begins at home, is nurtured by the community, and is strengthened and valued in school.

Struggles of Modernization

There are many ways that Indigenous communities are affected by modernization—may it be socially, economically and culturally. One of the ways that Lumad learners lose interest in their own IKSPs is through heavy engagement with technology, which the teacher-respondents mention in the interview:

> The practices that we have don't understand as much because maybe they weren't explained very well to them. Plus, these younger IPs are so engaged with their cellphones. There are times when they forget our culture before, what we used to do, even our elders. (TR3, 39-41)

Traditional knowledge systems are being increasingly overlooked and undervalued, as they are gradually replaced by Western education models, mainstream media, and digital technologies (Hoefsloot et al., 2022). Younger Lumads appear to be experiencing a culture crisis (Eduardo & Gabriel, 2021; Pawilen, 2021), which poses a threat because when young people become disconnected from their culture, they may construct alternative versions of culture that often incorporate negative aspects of both personal and community life (Davis, 2020). Salazar (1999) described this as 'cultural schizophrenia,' a Filipino consciousness as that of 'acculturated natives' who have become Westernized both in action and thought, ultimately rejecting their heritage.

Ability to Curricularize all of the above in Learning Settings

For educational communities to effectively implement CSP, curriculum planning and development account for all of its key components and integrate, or curricularize, the aspects that students, community members, and local leaders seek to preserve within the educational experience (Paris & Alim, 2017). However, Curricularizing remains difficult without proper structure and support.

Rigidity of the Curriculum

The structure of lesson plans, the Lesson Exemplar (LE) and the Detailed Lesson Plan (DLP) allows little room for IKSP integration as teachers are more focused on achieving the content standards provided. One teacher mentions this:

> So, for me, my experience in teaching is really based on the [school's] mission, as apostolate to IP is indicated, it has to be implemented in learning activities themselves. So, these learning activities, for example LE as that's what we use here, we indicate that because the LE is generalized, IPs are not special here [in LE], and you can't say that all of your students are IPs, so it's just placed as one. (TR1, 10-11)

The teacher noted that, as a private school, they have more flexibility to include cultural content, aligned with their mission as an 'apostolate to IPs.' However, since Lumad and non-Lumad students share classrooms, teachers must balance cultural inclusion carefully. Activities and lessons which integrate culture largely depend on the teacher, as LEs and DLPs contain few cultural elements and rarely target local communities. Another teacher supports this concern,

> For me, since I have experience in teaching, on my part I find it difficult to incorporate IP (IKSPs)- but there are really lessons which have a culture component so I can manage to insert it. but for the lessons, they're quite shallow. (TR3, 12-13)

Though there are attempts to integrate culture, these discussions are often not explored in depth, as they are not a priority compared to other content standards and expected competencies. It is important to note, however, that while incorporating IKSPs in lessons remains challenging, social issues serve as a foundation for discussions in Lumad classrooms. As Casaldo (2020) observes, social issues are not just integrated in Lumad community schools; they are at the heart of classroom discussions.

Nonetheless, these statements echo the concern that cultural minorities still have lessened opportunities in formal education (Tamayo & Demetillo, 2009). The objectives of education often reflect colonial ideologies, evident in the structure of lessons and the classroom experience (Zeng

& Li, 2023). While the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) program exists under the Department of Education, its implementation is limited to special institutions in areas with a large population of Lumad learners. In the mainstream, however, Philippines' cultural communities are still given less opportunities—from the lack of building a shared cultural consciousness as part of the curriculum, to their respective histories not being discussed in classrooms, to policies that treat attendance to cultural activities as truancy.

Continuity of Practice

Lastly, curricularization will not be made possible if there is no continuity of practice. Curricularization occurs only when practices are sustained through proper documentation, continued implementation, and ongoing innovations. The difficulties include Indigenous teachers leaving their communities to work in cities (Ng'asike, 2019), teacher attrition, particularly emigration abroad due to the unstable economy (Braid, 2024), and Indigenous students leaving schools that implement CSP to learn in a more mainstream classroom. Collectively, these challenges affect the 'passing on' of knowledge to younger IPs. The responses show that the implementation of CSP is largely dependent on teachers' agency—their will and work to implement activities. If teacher attrition is high in schools serving Indigenous populations in dire need of CSP, these practices are likely to be discontinued, particularly when there is no support from administrators.

Addressing these difficulties requires shared responsibility. Madden (2015) identifies four pedagogical pathways that can bridge cultural differences: learning from Indigenous traditional teaching models, pedagogy for decolonizing, Indigenous and anti-racist education, and Indigenous and place-based education. Teachers must engage in ongoing learning and unlearning to model experiences, knowledge, and relationships rooted in these pathways. Yet

this effort should not fall solely on teachers but be supported by the wider educational community. Bishop and Durksen (2020) emphasize that effective engagement with Indigenous students requires teachers to embody respect through motivation and self-awareness, connect through critical understanding of positionality, and reflect by examining how knowledge is formed and shared. These traits, combined with institutional and community support, ensure that CSP practices can be sustained and meaningfully passed on to future generations.

Conclusion

Challenges in implementing CSP can be structural in nature, such as the lack of school support systems for students, inadequate training and support for faculty, limited Lumad representation in government, the lack of historical documents, the rigidity of the curriculum, and the discontinuity of practice. They can also stem from the sensitive and technical nature of the content itself, for instance, the difficulty tackling the underlying violence in the history of Lumads, the unfamiliarity of the language, the limited Knowledge of IKSPs, and the sacredness of IKSPs. Lastly, contextual factors also play a major role, including challenges related to teachers' diverse cultural background, Lumad students' self-esteem and appreciation of culture, and their struggles with modernization.

The study recognizes the agentic nature of teachers, who plan, develop, and implement CSP in their classrooms despite their personal and professional challenges. With institutional support, their efforts can foster a pedagogy that maintains and promotes students' cultural identities while fostering academic achievement, recognizes culture as dynamic and diverse, and centers the curriculum around students' communities and identities. It is important to note, however, that while the use of CSP in the schools enables culture to be sustained, these efforts remain limited if Lumad learners' immediate context and environment remain unchanged. For

instance, the state's militarization of Lumad communities fundamentally contradicts the goal of CSP, the efforts toward CSP remain exceptional rather than tied to broader systemic reform or Indigenous self-determination.

To ensure inclusive and empowering education for Lumad learners, schools and communities must work together in honoring Indigenous culture while strengthening access to quality learning, which leads to the following recommendations. The Department of Education is enjoined to strengthen the delivery of formal education to Lumad learners by adopting culturally sustaining pedagogy or similar approaches that value and affirm Indigenous ways of knowing. This can be achieved through regular curriculum reviews and teacher training programs designed to integrate Indigenous perspectives into teaching and learning. At the same time, local governments, together with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), are called to play a more active role as liaisons between schools and Indigenous communities to ensure that policies and practices are responsive to the cultural contexts of Lumad learners. Equally important is the collaboration with Lumad elders and community leaders in co-creating curriculum content, allowing Indigenous knowledge systems and practices to be preserved, respected, and meaningfully included in education. For education to be truly inclusive, it must embrace and uphold the cultural identity of Indigenous learners. Policymakers, educators, and communities must act decisively and collectively to guarantee that Lumad children are not only given access to education but are also empowered by it. After all, for Lumad learners to achieve academic success, institutions—not just schools but also government systems—must value and support Indigenous knowledge, languages, cultures, communities, and connections with elders and education (Willett, 2001).

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