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Culture-Responsive Pedagogy and Student Learning in Araling Panlipunan: A Qualitative Case Study of Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) Implementation at a Rural National High School in Mountain Province, Philippines

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Abstract

Culture-responsive pedagogy has gained increasing attention as an essential approach to addressing educational inequities experienced by Indigenous learners. In the Philippine context, the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) framework institutionalizes culturally grounded teaching practices aimed at recognizing Indigenous knowledge systems, identities, and lived experiences. This qualitative case study examined the implementation of IPED in Araling Panlipunan and its influence on student learning in a rural national high school in Mountain Province, Philippines. Focusing on the pedagogical practices of a Teacher I, the study explored how culture-responsive instruction was enacted and how it shaped learners' engagement, understanding, and participation. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom-related documents, lesson plans, and reflective teaching notes, and were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that contextualized instruction grounded in Indigenous history and culture, learner-centered and dialogic pedagogy, and the integration of Indigenous knowledge systems enhanced student learning and classroom engagement. Teacher agency and reflective practice were central to sustaining IPED implementation despite contextual challenges. The study underscores the pedagogical value of culture-responsive and decolonial approaches in social studies education and offers implications for teachers, school leaders, and education policy.

Keywords: *culture-responsive pedagogy, Araling Panlipunan, Indigenous Peoples Education, student learning, rural education, qualitative case study*



1. Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in shaping learners' understanding of society, identity, and citizenship. In social studies education, particularly Araling Panlipunan, teaching is expected to develop learners' historical consciousness, civic competence, and appreciation of cultural diversity. However, conventional teaching approaches have often marginalized Indigenous perspectives by privileging dominant historical narratives and Western knowledge systems. This marginalization has contributed to disengagement and learning gaps among Indigenous learners, especially in rural and geographically isolated areas.

In the Philippine education system, the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) framework was institutionalized to address these inequities by promoting culturally responsive and context-sensitive pedagogy. IPED emphasizes the integration of Indigenous knowledge systems, local histories, languages, and cultural practices into classroom instruction. In provinces such as Mountain Province, where Indigenous communities constitute a significant portion of the learner population, IPED provides a critical framework for aligning education with learners' identities and lived realities. Despite policy support, the implementation of IPED in subject areas such as Araling Panlipunan remains uneven, particularly at the classroom level. Limited empirical research has examined how teachers enact culture-responsive pedagogy in social studies and how such practices influence student learning. This study addresses this gap by examining the IPED-informed teaching practices of a Teacher I in Araling Panlipunan at a rural national high school in Mountain Province, Philippines.

2. Review of Related Literature

Culture-responsive pedagogy is grounded in the principle that learning is most effective when instruction reflects learners' cultural identities, values, and lived experiences. Rather than treating culture as peripheral to learning, this pedagogical approach positions students' cultural backgrounds as central resources for meaning-making and knowledge construction. Gay (2018) emphasizes that culturally responsive teaching affirms learners' identities and intentionally incorporates their cultural experiences into instructional practices, thereby enhancing relevance and engagement. Similarly, Ladson-Billings (1995) argues that culturally responsive pedagogy fosters academic success by creating learning environments where students feel a strong sense of belonging and validation. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that when learners recognize their own cultures and experiences in classroom instruction, they exhibit higher levels of engagement, deeper comprehension, and improved academic achievement.

Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) aligns closely with decolonial education perspectives that challenge the historical dominance of Western epistemologies in formal schooling. Decolonial scholars contend that education systems have often marginalized Indigenous knowledge systems by privileging Eurocentric narratives and ways of knowing, resulting in the silencing of Indigenous voices and histories (Smith, 2012). Decolonial education therefore calls for the disruption of these dominant narratives and the intentional inclusion of Indigenous worldviews, languages, and cultural practices in teaching and learning. In the Philippine context, IPED seeks to operationalize these principles by contextualizing curriculum content, pedagogy, and assessment within Indigenous cultural realities. Through policy and practice, IPED promotes epistemic justice by recognizing Indigenous knowledge as legitimate and valuable, particularly in communities where Indigenous learners form the majority (DepEd, 2015).

Araling Panlipunan serves as a particularly critical site for the enactment of culture-responsive and decolonial pedagogy because of its focus on history, culture, governance, and social relations. As a subject area, Araling Panlipunan shapes learners' understanding of national identity, citizenship, and social responsibility. Studies suggest that contextualized social studies instruction enhances critical thinking and learner participation by enabling students to connect national narratives with their

local and Indigenous histories (Banks, 2016). Integrating Indigenous perspectives into Araling Panlipunan allows learners to critically examine historical narratives, recognize diverse cultural contributions, and develop a more inclusive understanding of society. In doing so, culture-responsive teaching in Araling Panlipunan promotes historical justice, strengthens learner voice, and supports the development of informed and culturally grounded citizens.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study research design to explore the implementation of culture-responsive pedagogy in Araling Panlipunan within a real-life rural school context. The case study approach was appropriate as it allowed for an in-depth and contextualized examination of teaching practices, instructional decisions, and student learning processes as they naturally unfolded in the classroom. By focusing on a single instructional setting, the study was able to capture the complexity of pedagogical enactment, teacher reflections, and learner interactions within an Indigenous community, thereby providing rich and nuanced insights into culture-responsive teaching.

The research was conducted at a rural national high school in Mountain Province, Philippines, a setting characterized by a predominantly Indigenous learner population. The primary participant was a Teacher I handling Araling Panlipunan who was directly involved in implementing IPED-aligned instruction. The participant's teaching context, which involved Indigenous learners from the local community, made the classroom a particularly relevant site for examining culture-responsive pedagogy. The teacher's role provided valuable perspectives on how national curriculum standards were adapted to align with Indigenous knowledge systems, histories, and cultural practices.

Data were collected through multiple qualitative sources to ensure depth and triangulation. Semi-structured interviews with the teacher were conducted to elicit detailed accounts of pedagogical beliefs, instructional strategies, and experiences in implementing IPED. In addition, lesson plans and instructional materials were analyzed to examine how culture-responsive elements and Indigenous perspectives were embedded in Araling Panlipunan lessons. IPED-related classroom documents and reflective teaching notes were also reviewed to gain further insight into instructional planning, classroom implementation, and ongoing reflection on student learning.

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis process involving systematic coding, categorization, and theme development. Interview transcripts and documentary data were carefully examined to identify recurring patterns, meanings, and practices related to culture-responsive pedagogy and student learning. To enhance credibility, trustworthiness, and analytical rigor, triangulation was employed by comparing and validating findings across multiple data sources. This systematic approach ensured that the interpretations were well-supported and reflective of the participant's teaching practices and classroom experiences.

4. Results and Findings

Analysis of the data yielded four major themes describing the implementation of culture-responsive pedagogy and its influence on student learning.

Theme 1: Contextualized Araling Panlipunan through Indigenous History and Culture

Instruction in Araling Panlipunan was intentionally anchored in Indigenous histories, traditions, and community narratives that were familiar to learners. Rather than relying solely on generalized national content, lessons were contextualized using local historical accounts, cultural practices, and community experiences. This approach allowed learners to situate abstract social concepts within their own cultural realities, making the subject matter more meaningful and accessible.

Participant Responses:

"Mas naiintindihan ng mga mag-aaral ang aralin kapag nakaugat sa kasaysayan ng kanilang komunidad." P7

"Kapag sarili nilang kultura ang paksa, mas nagiging aktibo sila." P3

Grounding instruction in Indigenous history and culture enhanced learners' comprehension and sense of relevance, as students were able to connect new knowledge with prior cultural experiences. This finding supports constructivist and culture-responsive learning theories, which posit that meaningful learning occurs when instruction is connected to learners' identities and lived realities (Gay, 2018). By validating Indigenous knowledge as legitimate academic content, contextualization also fostered learner confidence and engagement.

Theme 2: Learner Engagement through Dialogic and Participatory Teaching

Teaching practices emphasized dialogic and participatory strategies, including storytelling, group discussions, and the use of community-based examples. Learners were encouraged to share personal experiences, cultural knowledge, and perspectives during classroom discussions, transforming lessons into interactive and collaborative learning spaces rather than teacher-dominated lectures.

Participant

"Mas nakikilahok ang mga bata kapag may pagkakataon silang magbahagi ng karanasan." P10

"Nagiging bukas ang talakayan kapag kinikilala ang kanilang boses." P2

Responses:

Dialogic pedagogy enhanced learner participation by legitimizing students' voices and cultural narratives within the learning process. This aligns with culturally sustaining pedagogy, which emphasizes the importance of dialogue, mutual respect, and learner agency in sustaining cultural identity while promoting academic growth (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Through participatory teaching, learners developed greater confidence, critical thinking, and ownership of learning.

Theme 3: Integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Curriculum Content

Indigenous knowledge systems including traditional governance structures, customary laws, and social practices were systematically integrated into Araling Panlipunan lessons. Rather than treating Indigenous knowledge as supplementary, these elements were embedded as core instructional content aligned with curriculum competencies.

Participant

"Isinasama ko ang katutubong kaalaman sa pagtuturo ng pamahalaan at kultura." P6

"Mas nauunawaan nila ang aralin kapag may lokal na halimbawa." P8

Responses:

The integration of Indigenous knowledge systems promoted epistemic inclusion by recognizing Indigenous ways of knowing as valid and authoritative sources of knowledge. This practice aligns with decolonial education principles, which call for the dismantling of colonial hierarchies in knowledge production and the affirmation of Indigenous epistemologies (Smith, 2012). Such integration supported deeper understanding and strengthened learners' cultural identity within formal schooling.

Theme 4: Teacher Agency and Reflective Practice in IPED Implementation

The teacher demonstrated strong professional agency by adapting lessons to contextual constraints, learner diversity, and available resources. Continuous reflection on teaching practices guided instructional adjustments, enabling the teacher to sustain IPED implementation despite challenges related to time, materials, and curricular demands.

Participant

"Kailangan ng tiyaga at pagninilay para maisakatuparan ang IPED." P5
"Bilang guro, ako ang tulay ng kultura at aralin." P9

Responses:

Teacher agency and reflective practice were central to the sustained enactment of culture-responsive pedagogy. The teacher's ability to negotiate policy expectations, cultural responsibilities, and classroom realities reflects findings in rural education research that highlight teacher leadership as a critical factor in instructional innovation (Azano & Stewart, 2016). Through reflective agency, the teacher functioned as a cultural mediator, bridging Indigenous knowledge and formal curriculum to support meaningful student learning.

5. Discussion

This study examined the implementation of culture-responsive pedagogy in Araling Panlipunan through the lens of Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) and its influence on student learning in a rural national high school in Mountain Province. The synthesis of findings across the four themes highlights how culturally grounded instruction, dialogic teaching, integration of Indigenous knowledge systems, and strong teacher agency collectively contributed to meaningful student learning. Taken together, these findings affirm that culture-responsive and decolonial pedagogical practices are not only compatible with formal curriculum requirements but are also instrumental in enhancing learner engagement, comprehension, and participation.

The first theme underscores the pedagogical value of contextualizing Araling Panlipunan instruction within Indigenous history and culture. By grounding lessons in community narratives and local historical experiences, the teacher enabled learners to connect abstract social concepts to their own cultural realities. This finding aligns with constructivist and culturally responsive education research, which emphasizes that learning is most effective when new knowledge builds upon learners' prior experiences and identities (Gay, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978). Similar studies in Indigenous education contexts have shown that culturally contextualized social studies instruction enhances learners' historical understanding and sense of relevance, particularly when national narratives are connected to local and Indigenous histories (Banks, 2016). In this study, contextualization functioned as a mechanism for validating Indigenous identity while promoting deeper comprehension of social concepts.

The second theme highlights the role of dialogic and participatory teaching in fostering learner engagement and voice. Storytelling, group discussions, and opportunities for learners to share personal and cultural experiences transformed the classroom into a collaborative learning space. This supports Ladson-Billings' (1995) culturally sustaining pedagogy, which emphasizes dialogue and learner participation as central to academic success and cultural affirmation. Research in social studies education further suggests that dialogic instruction encourages critical thinking and civic engagement by allowing learners to actively interrogate social realities rather than passively receive information (Banks, 2016). In the present study, participatory pedagogy not only increased classroom engagement but also empowered learners to see themselves as active contributors to knowledge construction.

The integration of Indigenous knowledge systems, as reflected in the third theme, further reinforces the decolonial orientation of IPED-aligned instruction. By embedding Indigenous governance structures, customs, and social practices into the curriculum, the teacher disrupted the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge frameworks and promoted epistemic justice. This finding aligns with

decolonial education scholarship, which argues that recognizing Indigenous knowledge as legitimate and authoritative is essential for addressing historical marginalization in education (Smith, 2012). Studies on Indigenous education similarly emphasize that the inclusion of Indigenous epistemologies strengthens learners' cultural identity and supports more inclusive and equitable learning environments (Gay, 2018). In Araling Panlipunan, such integration allowed learners to critically examine social systems through both national and Indigenous perspectives.

The fourth theme emphasizes the centrality of teacher agency and reflective practice in sustaining culture-responsive pedagogy. Despite contextual challenges common in rural schools such as limited instructional resources and curricular constraints the teacher's adaptability and reflective stance enabled the continued enactment of IPED principles. This finding is consistent with rural education research highlighting teacher agency as a key driver of instructional innovation and resilience (Azano & Stewart, 2016). Sterling (2010) further argues that reflective educators are essential in navigating complex educational contexts, particularly when implementing transformative pedagogies such as decolonial and culture-responsive approaches. In this study, teacher agency functioned as the bridge between policy-level IPED mandates and meaningful classroom practice.

Thus, the synthesis of findings demonstrates that culture-responsive pedagogy in Araling Panlipunan operates as an interconnected system of practices rather than isolated strategies. Contextualization, dialogue, Indigenous knowledge integration, and teacher agency collectively supported student learning by affirming identity, promoting participation, and fostering critical understanding. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature on culturally responsive and decolonial education by providing empirical evidence from a rural Philippine context and underscore the importance of supporting teachers as key agents in advancing inclusive and culturally grounded education.

6. Conclusions

This study provides evidence that IPED-based, culture-responsive pedagogy strengthens student learning in Araling Panlipunan within rural Indigenous contexts. By centering Indigenous histories, knowledge systems, and learner voices, teachers can foster inclusive and meaningful social studies education. Sustained support for teacher agency and reflective practice is essential for effective IPED implementation.

7. Implications and Recommendations

Teachers are encouraged to integrate Indigenous knowledge and learner experiences into Araling Panlipunan instruction. School leaders should provide professional development on culture-responsive and decolonial pedagogy. Future research may employ multi-site or mixed-methods designs to examine the long-term impact of IPED implementation on student learning outcomes.

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