

## **Integrating Indigenous Learners' Narratives in Learning Resources (LRs) for Contemporary Issues**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Indigenous students generally remain underrepresented in the Grade 10 Araling Panlipunan learning resources, particularly in the discussion of Contemporary Issues that reflects a lack of inclusive and culturally responsive educational materials. The study explored the narratives of Indigenous students studying in Grade 10 Araling Panlipunan at Nueva Vizcaya General Comprehensive High School (NVGCHS). The researchers employed a descriptive analysis approach to explore Indigenous students' narratives on environment and economy, peace and politics, human rights and gender, and education, civics, and citizenship, using recorded interviews transcribed for pattern identification and contextual interpretation. The majority of the Indigenous students faced significant barriers to education such as natural disasters, socio-economic challenges, discrimination, and political marginalization that lead to absenteeism, academic setbacks, and limited participation in school and community activities. A contextualized learning resources for Araling Panlipunan 10 were designed to reflect their lived experiences, cultural identities, and social realities, ensuring inclusive, relevant, and responsive content that affirms their resilience and addresses systemic inequities. The use of the results of the study and the learning resources will contribute to a better understanding of the experiences of Indigenous peoples in broader and wider avenues.

*Keywords:* civic, culture, education, environmental, human rights

### **INTRODUCTION**

Indigenous peoples (IPs) are members of a group whose ancestors have inhabited the same territory since the beginning of time (Dwivedi, 2022). Pérez-Brito and Belghith, (2024) further defines IPs as distinct social and cultural groups that share an ancestral link to the lands and natural resources that they either live on, are displaced from, or both. In addition, Sarivaara et al. (2013) stated that IPs differ significantly from mainstream society in terms of their unique languages, customs, and social and political structures.

According to Republic Act No. 8371 also known as Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997, IPs are groups of individuals or uniform societies that are distinguished by their own and other people's attributions, who have persistently inhabited as a community inside a communally designated and bounded area. As stated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), IPs and individuals are equal to all other peoples and have the right to live without discrimination.

Despite the national and international framework declaration created by the government to recognize their unique cultural heritage, protect and promote the rights of IP, there are still challenges that they continue to face. In the Philippines, school dropouts are highest in Mindanao, where about 23 percent of children aged 15 to 19 years are out of school, compared to 16 percent in Luzon. School dropout rates are 2 to 5 percentage points higher for IP boys than girls in all regions in Mindanao and Luzon, except SOCCSKSARGEN and MIMAROPA. These data on school dropouts are just a few of the many stories about the IPs.

The Grade 10 Araling Panlipunan Learning Resources (LRs) on Contemporary Issues (Kontemporaryong Isyu) in the K to 12 Curriculum Araling Panlipunan Gabay Pangkurikulum

(2016) covers a variety of topics, such as issues on environmental and economic, political and peace, human rights and gender, and education and civic and citizenship. Although these topics can have different specific contents, there is no discussion or inclusion of IPs in the learning competency, content standard, or performance standard. The learning resource materials currently accessible do not particularly address IPs as a separate topic. While the topics aim to be inclusive, they do not specifically highlight IPs. This means that there are limited resources available for teaching about IPs' issues and concerns.

Hence, the primary objective of this study was to look into the contemporary issues experienced and observed by the IP students and the lack of, or none thereof, inclusion of IP lessons in Grade 10 Araling Panlipunan learning resources on Contemporary Issues. Based on the findings, contextualized learning resources that integrate and support their unique challenges, experiences, and stories were developed.

IPs face various educational obstacles rooted in environmental and economic challenges. In Malaysia's Pahang State, Indigenous students struggle with poor hygiene, low self-esteem, lack of environmental awareness, and study difficulties due to inadequate environmental education (Rahman et al., 2018). In Eastern India, livelihood issues force tribes to choose between education and basic needs (Guchhait & Sengupta, 2022). Malaysia also faces financial barriers and poor infrastructure that deepen poverty (Saifullah et al., 2021). The Kalanguya ICCs in the Philippines deal with low income, poor water access, and environmental threats, though they manage natural resources well (Duria et al., 2023). Mamanwa students in Southern Leyte lack resources and support, yet pursue education to uplift their community (Casinillo, 2023).

Moreover, the peace and political narratives of Indigenous students are also closely tied to their educational experiences and the systemic challenges they encounter. Ko et al. (2022) emphasized collective agency and community involvement in addressing exclusion and oppression of American Indian students. Radcliffe and Webb (2015) revealed how Mapuche students in Chile navigate racial and class inequalities, balancing Chilean and Mapuche identities. Sy (2022) showed that Lumad schools serve not only as educational institutions but also as platforms for cultural preservation and resistance. Quilala (2020) raised concerns about Lumad marginalization in the Bangsamoro region after peace talks. Finally, Ocampo et al. (2021) stressed the need for inclusive policy development in IP education within the K to 12 curriculum, advocating for contextualized and empowering education strategies.

In addition to these issues, Indigenous students' human rights and gender perspectives highlight the need to address their unique educational challenges through culturally sensitive education that affirms their diverse identities. Robertson (2018) revealed that Indigenous female students often suffer abuse due to both identity and gender, with long-term impacts. Lontoc (2020) and Camaya and Tamayo (2018) highlighted how Aeta and Kalanguya women show resilience by engaging in modern livelihoods while maintaining traditional roles, stressing the need for government and NGO support. Lastly, Simporios (2024) called for reforming biased laws like the Mining Act of 1995, enacting the People's Mining Bill, and establishing mechanisms for Indigenous empowerment, rights protection, and long-term development in the Philippines.

Presently, the establishment and upkeep of a high-quality educational system is a global goal (Sahinoglu, 2022). However, IPs still experience prejudice and stereotypes that portray them as uneducated and uncivilized because of their distinctive customs, beliefs, and ways of life. (Andrada et al., 2020). In the Philippines, this facet of IPs' educational demands has not been met by the education system. Challenges arise from lessons whose social and cultural contexts are vastly different from the realities of Indigenous communities. This mismatch leads to cognitive dissonance and personal tensions, resulting in conflicts within families and communities, as children's identities and ways of life are rejected or seen as outdated in the classroom (Victor & Yano, 2015). Lastly, Casas and Quiambao's (2023) mentioned that

Indigenous students in Arakan, Cotabato face academic difficulties, which affect their performance in school.

This study determined the narrative experiences encountered by indigenous students who studied Grade 10 Araling Panlipunan at Nueva Vizcaya General Comprehensive High School (NVGCHS) during the first quarter of school year 2024–2025. Specifically, this study surfaced and described the narratives of the respondents in terms of environmental and economic, peace and politics, human rights and gender, and education, civics, and citizenship. As an output, this study also aimed to craft contextualized learning resources for Araling Panlipunan 10.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The research utilized a qualitative approach to describe the narratives of Indigenous students. This study employed face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. The method used to describe the challenges and the gaps between their learning experiences in education was narrative design. Specifically, a personal narrative design was applied to unravel the personal experiences and observations of Indigenous students in the areas of environment and economics, peace and politics, human rights and gender, and education, civics, and citizenship.

This study was conducted at Nueva Vizcaya General Comprehensive High School (NVGCHS) in Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya. It is considered a large school where both non-Indigenous and Indigenous people are enrolled. The diversity of the students enrolled in Nueva Vizcaya General Comprehensive High School was one of the reasons why the study was conducted in this area. According to the school's Administrative Aid VI, most of the IP students at NVGCHS are composed of northern ethnic groups such as Gaddang, Tuwali, Ayangan, Kalanguya, among others. These students come from Indigenous Cultural Communities (ICCs) and were able to share varied stories about contemporary issues.

The respondents for this research were the Grade 10 students enrolled at Nueva Vizcaya General Comprehensive High School who studied Araling Panlipunan in Kontemporaryong Isyu. This study focused solely on the Gaddang, Tuwali, Kalanguya, and Ayangan Indigenous Cultural Communities (ICCs) as these are recognized as the major ICCs represented in the Nueva Vizcaya General Comprehensive High School (NVGCHS) student population as verbalized by the school's Administrative Aid VI. This study chose Grade 10 Araling Panlipunan students because it was a critical stage for learning contemporary issues that helped students develop critical thinking skills and real-world problem-solving abilities. A random sampling technique was utilized through the fishbowl method. A list of IP students was obtained, and from this, the respondents were selected. This ensured that each respondent had an equal probability of being selected. Twenty respondents were selected, which was a reasonable estimate to reach saturation in describing the narratives of IP students. The researchers engaged with the parents of the learners for guidance by providing an informed consent form during the respondents' free time at school, which was retrieved a day after distribution. They were given 2–3 days to read the consent form and decide. Signed forms could be returned either in person during a follow-up meeting or through a secure online method if necessary.

The researchers created the semi-structured interview, which was content-validated before data gathering by a panel of examiners. The interview was divided into four sets of questions to identify the Indigenous students' experiences or observations related to the contemporary issues discussed in Grade 10 Araling Panlipunan. The first part covered economic and environmental narratives; the second part focused on peace and political narratives; the third part discussed human rights and gender narratives; and the fourth part explored education, civic, and citizenship narratives. The respondents' participation in the study remained anonymous through the use of code names to preserve their privacy and

confidentiality of the collected data. To ensure the anonymity of the respondents while authentically representing their voices, the names used in this study were changed to fictitious ones reflective of their respective ethnolinguistic groups—Gaddang, Tuwali, Ayangan, and Kalanguya.

In compliance with the ethical requirements for conducting research involving Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples (ICCs/IPs), the researchers sought permission and guidance from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). The NCIP reviewed the research proposal manuscript and issued a certification allowing the researchers to proceed with the data gathering because it does not fall under the scope and coverage of indigenous knowledge system and practices in relation to NCIP Administrative Order No. 01, series of 2012 known as “The Indigenous Knowledge System and Practices (IKSPs) and Customary Laws (CLs) Research and Documentation Guidelines 2012.”

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Section 1. Narratives of Indigenous Students**

#### **1.1 Environmental and Economic Narratives**

Natural disasters such as typhoons, landslides, flooding, and poor waste management are common environmental issues in their communities, leading to disrupted access to water, electricity, and safe roads. These disruptions not only endanger lives but also affect students' health and school attendance. Farming, often the primary livelihood of Indigenous families, suffers during extreme weather events, causing financial strain due to crop loss and declining prices. As a result, many students face difficulties affording school expenses, transportation, or even basic needs like food, while some lack consistent parental support. These hardships sometimes result in emotional stress, lower academic performance, and even mental health concerns. Despite these barriers, the responses show the resilience and perseverance of Indigenous learners. Many remain committed to their studies, even when facing hunger, unstable home situations, or emotional struggles.

An analysis of the respondents' experiences reveals patterns that mirror the findings of Irene and Abadiano (2017), who emphasized that indigenous communities are especially vulnerable to natural disasters such as landslides and typhoons. These environmental hazards not only disrupt daily life but also significantly hinder educational continuity due to the destruction of crops, damage to infrastructure, and forced displacement. Several respondents in the study echoed this reality—describing how storms destroyed farmlands, triggered landslides, and limited mobility due to poor road conditions—ultimately affecting their families' income and stability.

Similarly, Guchhait and Sengupta (2022) highlighted how Indigenous groups in India's Chota Nagpur Plateau, who rely heavily on subsistence agriculture and forest resources, face a constant dilemma between securing food and sending their children to school. This struggle forces families to prioritize survival, which often leads to frequent school absences, poor academic performance, and long-term educational setbacks. This is paralleled by the respondents' testimonies, particularly those who shared how failed crops and landslides affected their fathers' ability to provide for them, and how financial strain led to unstable access to school allowances and basic needs.

The students' narratives reveal how interlinked environmental and socio-economic factors like natural calamities, poverty and limited family support shape their access to education. These challenges expose the systemic vulnerabilities that indigenous learners face.

These findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive, context-sensitive educational programs and community-based interventions that address both environmental resilience and economic support. A holistic approach—one that recognizes the interconnected nature of environmental, financial, and educational barriers—is critical to ensuring equitable access to learning opportunities for Indigenous students.

### **1.2 Peace and Political Narratives**

The experiences of the students about peace and politics are shaped by both resilience and exclusion. While they generally feel safe in their communities due to local efforts like barangay patrols, this sense of security is fragile and often threatened by issues such as alcohol-related violence, unresolved disputes, and the use of traditional justice systems in place of formal ones. Politically, they feel neglected and marginalized, with many recounting unfair treatment, limited access to government support, and a lack of voice in decision-making processes, especially when leaders do not belong to the same cultural background. In school settings, the challenges are even more personal and painful. Many students face bullying and discrimination tied to their appearance, traditions, and language. These negative experiences foster a sense of alienation and hinder their confidence.

An analysis of the respondents' experiences based on the narratives they shared reveals a broader pattern of systemic challenges faced by Indigenous communities in the Philippines. These challenges include discrimination, marginalization, and limited access to culturally responsive education. The students' accounts of bullying, stereotyping, and exclusion in school settings align with findings from various studies. A related study by Balaba (2023) revealed that Indigenous learners in the Caraga Region found that multicultural education positively impacted Indigenous students by strengthening their cultural self-acceptance, improving communication skills, and fostering respect for cultural differences.

Furthermore, the sense of political marginalization and lack of support from authorities, as expressed by the students, mirrors the experiences of the Lumad communities in Mindanao. A study focusing on Lumad alternative schools presents these institutions as models of community-engaged, participatory education that amplify Indigenous voices and address local issues. These schools not only preserve IP culture but also offer innovative responses to educational and social challenges. The study argues that many problems facing IP education stem from the Philippines' colonial and imperial past, which continues to influence the present-day struggles of Indigenous communities. It also identifies policy gaps and offers recommendations for both state and non-state stakeholders to strengthen support for Indigenous-led education (Magdadaro & Sacramento, 2022).

The indigenous students' responses in the safety, local security efforts, and community-level illustrate that peace and political experiences vary greatly across Indigenous settings. However, these realities are rarely reflected in existing learning materials, revealing a significant gap between what is taught in textbooks and the actual conditions of the Indigenous learners.

### **1.3 Human Rights and Gender Narratives**

Indigenous students frequently experience discrimination rooted in cultural identity, language, gender, and physical appearance—forms of marginalization that persist both overtly and subtly in academic spaces. In essence, the findings expose how institutional and peer-level insensitivities diminish Indigenous learners' confidence and participation, at times leading to academic disengagement or mental health crises, as evidenced by reports of school absenteeism, withdrawal, and suicidal ideation. While peer support and personal resilience do emerge as protective factors, they are not systemic solutions.

The testimonies from the experiences of the respondents reflect these broader patterns at the micro level: language-based mockery, ethnic stereotyping, gender discrimination, and emotional strain tied to familial tensions contribute to a hostile learning environment. This is echoed in Johnston's (2023) exploration of Indigenous students in higher education, where fostering success is deeply linked to recognizing students' unique cultural identities and lived experiences. This also supports the idea of Firdausy et al. (2024) which underscored the risk of cultural alienation and identity erosion among Indonesian Indigenous children due to a mainstream educational model that fails to respect local values and languages. The respondents' narratives vividly illustrate how exclusion often stems from ignorance or rejection of cultural difference—paralleling Firdausy's warning about educational models that erase Indigenous identity. However, both the experiences of the Indigenous students and research studies mentioned highlight similar points of resilience: community support, cultural pride, and recognition of academic ability can mediate alienation and foster belonging. Thus, these studies together reveal that the inclusion—or exclusion—of Indigenous learners is not merely a matter of curriculum but of deep socio-cultural affirmation, systemic reform, and human rights-based educational practice.

The indigenous learners' accounts of bullying, discrimination, and internalized insecurity powerfully highlight the ongoing struggles against ethnic and gender-based prejudice. Despite the relevance of these issues to human rights education, current learning resources tend to generalize these themes, overlooking the intersectional experiences of indigenous students.

#### **1.4 Education, and Civic and Citizenship Narratives**

Although education is offered free of charge, many Indigenous parents still face significant challenges in meeting the educational needs of their children (Arbiol et al., 2020). Financial constraints—particularly the inability to afford transportation—continue to hinder access to education. The lack of transportation options not only demotivates students from attending school but also mirrors the struggles their parents experienced during their own schooling. This difficulty is compounded by cultural and social factors that Indigenous learners continue to face today. Supan and Mendoza (2023) further emphasize that discrimination remains a persistent issue within schools, leading to feelings of exclusion and becoming a significant factor behind school dropouts among Indigenous students. The lived experiences of the respondents strongly affirm these findings. Many students expressed how cultural stereotyping and internalized fear discourage them from fully participating in school activities. These fears affect students' self-esteem and school involvement, echoing the social barriers discussed by Supan and Mendoza. The narratives of these Indigenous students powerfully reflect and illustrate how poverty, discrimination, emotional distress, and structural inequities collectively affect Indigenous learners' educational experiences.

Indigenous learners' experiences with limited access to quality education, coupled with their passive or discouraged participation in civic activities, reflect deeper systemic inequalities that go unacknowledged in learning resources. Their voices provide a critical lens for examining educational equity and participatory citizenship.

#### **Section 2. Contextualized Learning Resources**

The contextualized learning resources in Araling Panlipunan 10 are thoughtfully aligned with the quarterly themes of the modules: Environment and Economy (1st Quarter), Peace and Politics (2nd Quarter), Human Rights and Gender (3rd Quarter), and Education, Civics, and Citizenship (4th Quarter). These learning resources are grounded in the lived experiences of Indigenous students, who often feel excluded from a curriculum that overlooks their cultural identities and narratives. By incorporating Indigenous perspectives and contextualized examples into each theme, the learning resources aim to foster a more inclusive, relevant, and

empowering educational experience. These efforts to validate and amplify Indigenous voices in the discussion of contemporary issues.

### **Conclusion**

While not all Indigenous students experience the same difficulties, many face significant barriers to education, including the disruptive effects of natural disasters and socio-economic challenges. These issues often lead to absenteeism, academic setbacks, and limited participation in school activities. Moreover, the shared experiences of political marginalization, economic exclusion, and discrimination, although not general, highlight the enduring impact of systemic inequities on many Indigenous learners. Taken together, these challenges not only affect their academic progress but also their overall well-being and community engagement. Although discrimination and bullying do not affect all Indigenous students equally, those who do experience them often suffer adverse effects on their psychological health and academic performance. Despite these hardships, many display remarkable resilience and determination in navigating these systemic barriers. Similarly, while not every Indigenous student encounters cultural stereotyping or financial limitations, those who do continue to assert their presence by participating in school and civic activities, even amid persistent exclusion and unequal access to support.

The proposed contextualized learning resources for Araling Panlipunan 10 reflect the lived experiences, cultural identities, and social contexts of Indigenous students. The content in these learning resources is inclusive, relevant, and responsive to their unique needs and perspectives.

### **Recommendations**

In light of the findings of the study, the following recommendations are crafted that are geared towards the provision of a contextualized learning resources in Araling Panlipunan 10:

1. The use of semi structured interviews and participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools, qualitative and participatory methods are encouraged to surface Indigenous students' narratives:
  - a. The use of timeline mapping and seasonal calendars—to gather in-depth contextual data on how natural disasters and economic hardships disrupt the educational experiences of Indigenous students.
  - a. The involvement of both students and cultural bearers from Indigenous communities in narrative inquiry and focused group discussions to better understand issues of political and social exclusion.
  - b. Consider adopting culturally sensitive and trauma-informed approaches when collecting data, especially in contexts involving vulnerable populations.
  - c. The use of a mixed-methods approach, integrating language surveys, participant observation, and classroom discourse analysis, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.
2. It is recommended that Araling Panlipunan teachers review, validate and use the contextualized learning resources that authentically integrate Indigenous perspectives, ensuring that these materials reflect the lived experiences, cultural values, and epistemologies of Indigenous communities.

3. It is recommended that future researchers consider:

- a. The involvement of the Indigenous Students' Organization of the school in the process of integrating students' narratives and perspectives to support more authentic representation in learning materials.
- a. Collaboration with community culture bearers, local stakeholders, and division office to contribute to the ongoing refinement and validation of contextualized educational materials, helping ensure cultural accuracy and relevance in the lessons provided to Grade 10 students.

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