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Community Engagement in the Indigenous Education Discourse: Unravelling Policy Lessons from *Lumad's* Alternative School in Mindanao, Philippines

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Abstract

Indigenous people (IP) education has confronted inequality, cultural discrimination, and misrepresentation of indigenous knowledge that has furthered the systemic oppression of these marginalized sectors. However, the case of *Lumad* alternative schools in Mindanao, Philippines, offers a unique approach by utilizing community engagement in IP education that embodies collective and participatory principles in fostering community voices in addressing critical problems. Utilizing a case study, we have considered key informant interviews using an unstructured guide question with four purposively selected informants from the alternative schools. Also, the study used secondary data from academic journals, news articles, government publications, and non-government reports and briefs. Narrative analysis for interviews and thematic analysis for secondary sources were instrumental in data analysis. We have argued that the community engagement element of the *Lumad* alternative schools is essential to community-led IP education that is responsive towards innovatively addressing problems and in the preservation of IP culture. It is presented that the cultural discrimination, inequalities, and oppression that undermines a genuine IP education can be traced back to the Philippines' colonial and imperial past that significantly contributes to the enduring challenges that these alternative schools still face. Further, the study delineates policy gaps that state and non-state actors attached to IP education and *Lumad* alternative schools may consider.

Keywords

Community engagement, Culture, development, Education, Indigenous people

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Introduction

In the 21st century, it is relevant, or rather imperative, to question: how do education systems in developing countries respond to its immediate and crucial needs, specifically of the underrepresented and marginalized, such as ethnic groups and indigenous people? Crucial to this inquiry are issues surrounding education inequality that affect learners' ability to access knowledge, insensitivities towards cultural diversities, and the political systems and regimes that greatly affect education delivery. The 2010 Gini index, or the measure of income distribution across populations where one of the elements is the measure of education inequality, indicates that the world education inequality falls at the rate of 29.6 (van Leeuwen & Li, 2014). In Asia alone, it is worth noting that the education inequality index in East Asia falls at the rate of 24.4, and in South-Southeast Asia falls at a rate of 44.2, that is recorded in 2010 (van Leeuwen & Li, 2014). Besides, the struggle on the continuing insensitivities toward cultural diversities is undeniably enduring globally, where Plata (2011, p. 52) highlights that "the imbalance between student-teacher cultural demographics creates conditions that are not conducive to developing and maintaining a culturally sensitive school environment or implementing culturally relevant instruction." Also, continuing complexities and changes in political regimes contribute to securing accessible education, especially for the grassroots and marginalized sectors. For example, Tanasaldy's (2012) work on political change and ethnic politics of the Dayaks in Indonesia is a substantive illustrative case where indigenous groups are disenfranchised from attaining quality education for a better future.

Considerably, the Philippines is a unique case as much as ethnic and indigenous politics are concerned, much more if the indigenous education is delineated explicitly in the discourse of indigenous politics. As an overview, the Philippines was the first in Asia to pass the Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA) in 1997, which caters to protecting indigenous rights, preserving culture, and securing its continuity, especially in education. However, Cornelio and de Castro (2015) have argued that it is very alarming that IP youth's enrollment in the country has been compromised. They have noted the decreasing enrollment of IP children in elementary and high school to only 1.2 million out of 5.1 million IPs under 18 years old listed in the most recent statistics (Calunsod, 2013 & IIMA and VIDES International, 2011, as cited in Cornelio & de Castro, 2015). Among other concerns are the discriminations faced by these IP youth regarding cultural insensitivity of either the learning environment or the existing educational approaches and lessons set by the nationally instituted education curriculum. Adonis (2010) is also concerned that the formal education suggested by an established social norm does not respond to IP learners' immediate and unique needs. Further, IP schools and communities have been vulnerable to being caught in the conflict between the military and insurgents in the countryside, leading to fleeing their lands and seeking refuge in neighboring towns free from civil-military encounters.

A United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) report on the "State of World's Indigenous People" acknowledged that indigenous communities have been susceptible to losing their control over their lands and natural resources. This is because,

> *"their territories have frequently been expropriated to accommodate state-sponsored development and corporate projects whose implementation led, in many cases, to wide-scale violations of their collective rights, disregarding the recognition of those rights by pre-existing national laws and policies, or under international legal instruments"*
>
> *(UN-DESA, 2017, pp. 78-79).*

What is so alarming here is that IPs are not only losing their ancestral lands but also the culture embedded and attached to their ancestral domain. The IPs staged protests and resistance against this marginalization; however, "this was often met with military responses, which has led to further loss of control over their lands and serious human rights violations" (UN-DESA, 2017, p. 79). Even more, state forces have critiqued the indigenous education that the IP children are receiving, arguing that it has become part of the "alleged insurgent agenda" of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) that infiltrated these indigenous communities (GPCEA, 2018, p. 204; Lopez, 2020). A report from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre or IDMC (2011) on the "Internal Displacement in the Philippines" has reiterated that even the IP schools were intruded on and occupied by military forces that have led to violence in schools and communities, leaving children traumatized.

As presented in the facts-based reports above, the systemic issues of oppression and marginalization against IPs are crucial considerations in delineating that these vulnerabilities are interlinked and interrelated along with political, socio-cultural, and economic lines. Moreover, these contestations affect IP alternative schools and public education, the IP community vs. state and non-state power relations, and the culture of oppression and violence in the IP community context. These points lead the study to inquire curiously, what is it in the IP education that has been the target of military and paramilitary forces to stop and prevent from thriving? Furthermore, what critical-political, historical, and cultural lessons can we learn from the developments and dynamics of the current mainstream Philippine education system that was globally patterned and formally instituted by the government? Why does it continue undermining IP alternative schools and curriculums if not disregarded and discredited? All these points boil down to keenly examining the IP education discourse with a historical, socio-political, and critical lens to understand how the system works for (or against) vulnerable sectors of Philippine society.

Literature Review

IP education has been the focus of scholars and practitioners globally and has dedicated much attention to understanding further the dynamics, issues, and challenges IP education is facing. For example, Wotherspoon (2015) found that the shift of focus from formal to informal education made recognizing IP knowledge possible. As a precursor, this IP knowledge was previously devalued during a series of colonial experiences in the Philippines. These events tended to redress the native Filipino thinking and images to establish an "othered culture"[1] that adheres to the norms of Western colonizers. Undeniably, scholars have also widely explored the IP education case in the Philippines. Fiagoy (2000) asserted that adult education must be contextualized, culturally appropriate, and authentically based on IP knowledge leading to their socio-economic advantage, cultural preservation, and environmental development. At the start of the century, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines-Episcopal Commission on Indigenous People or CBCP-ECIP (2002) had already encapsulated a comprehensive understanding of IP education in the country by pointing out some of the major issues like the concerns over formalized schools being a venue of discrimination, schooling as an experience of non-being and disenfranchisement from indigenous identity, and academic discussions of IP culture in schools being limited to surface culture. The CBCP-ECIP's (2002, pp. 118) study also highlighted that policies of the mainstream school system resulted in:

> *"(a) the alienation of indigenous youth from their communities, heritage, culture, and history; (b) broken intergenerational ties; (c) demise of community reflection processes; (d) graduates or schooled youth leaving the community or abusing the ancestral domain; (e) continued marginalization of communities; and (f) dying spirit of the tribe"*
>
> *(CBCP-ECIP, 2002, pp. 118).*

More specifically, Cornelio and de Castro's (2015) work comprehensively explored IP education in the Philippines. They have uncovered various trajectories and integrated the idea of "global citizenship education," where they understood it as "an attempt to expose IP learners to the global presence and issues of indigenous communities" and suggested examining the readiness of the stakeholders for such a change (Cornelio & de Castro, 2015, p. 175).

CBCP-ECIP's (2002) work has pointed out that the interventions towards addressing challenges faced by IPs in the mainstream educational system were rationally

[1] The "othered culture" is a way by which innate indigenous identity, knowledge, and culture of the natives are being demonized and derided as something inferior and uncivilized.

suggested; however, they have fallen short in elucidating the real political and systemic issues in IP Education. Also, Cornelio and de Castro (2015) presented in their study that turning IP learners into globalized individuals is an alarming prospect for the IPs and their community's "development" as much as continuity of culture is concerned. It can be noted that previous studies have not touched on how community engagement is becoming an essential factor towards genuine and authentic IP education. Moreover, the ideas offered in the community engagement paradigm have become crucial to communities attempting to decolonize education and preserve their indigenous culture, values, and knowledge. As defined by Johnston (2010) in Smith et al. (2017), community engagement is principled with information sharing, consultation, and participation. The United Nations (2005) in Smith et al. (2017) even emphasized that it is a two-way process involving aspirations, concerns, needs, and values of citizens and communities in all levels and all sectors involved in policy planning, development, decision-making, service delivery, and assessment; and by which all stakeholders in power such as state, businesses, and civil societies involves the citizens and communities in these processes. We operationalize the idea of community engagement in the context of indigenous education as a process (of inclusive participation, policy planning and development, decision making, and implementation of initiatives) to elevate indigenous traditions, culture, and local knowledge and therefore capacitate a genuine IP education responsive to a community's immediate needs and cultural preservations. On a critical note, the current political regime in the Philippines has incessantly targeted IP communities and schools in an attempt to transform and formalize their education. Hence, this study endeavors to rethink what is it in the community-led IP education has become a heated topic in the eyes of state forces.

It is also relevant to involve the critical thoughts on development administration and public affairs, which can be connected and articulated in the IP education discourse and, at the same time, linked to the community engagement component that the study would wish to unveil from the *Lumad* alternative school's case. Firstly, Amartya Sen's (2014) theory on "development as freedom" has been a critical point and guide of discourse as to how development can be viewed and administered not just as a process that feeds economic means and aspirations but also as an aim that is inclusive to all walks of humanity, especially of those who are voiceless, marginalized, and oppressed. Secondly, this is relevant to what Paulo Freire (2018) contended to the traditional forms of pedagogy into a more inclusive and sector-oriented "pedagogy of the oppressed" by establishing education as a process of freedom. The thoughts from Freire (2018) are important as a guide and lens to the indigenous education discourse and the community engagement component. Finally, while the whole IP education and community engagement discourse are relevant to critical development theory, it cannot be dismissed that the interest is also relevant to public affairs.

The new public administration and new public management can be presented as a crucial lens to consider the thought that the public service, policymaking, and decision making are critical mandates of the state towards pursuing people-oriented actions while protecting the rights and interests of the disenfranchised and vulnerable sectors (Dunleavy & Hood, 1994; Frederickson, 1980; Funck & Karlsson, 2020).

With all these considerations, we will try to present and argue in this paper that community engagement is an essential element toward an effective community-oriented IP education aligned with the preservation of local culture and traditions. To support this, we also argue that the current educational system in the Philippines (as brought by colonization, imperialism, and "westernization") has propagated cultural discrimination, by which community engagement can become pivotal in shifting the tides towards a grassroots and IP-oriented education based on community knowledge and IP culture. At the same time, we will present the political regime's inclination towards suppressing indigenous traditions and displacing indigenous communities. These inclinations have already become part of the Philippines's history of political oppression and marginalization of vulnerable and underrepresented sectors in the country, which this study sought to provide substantive rethinking as much as state policies are concerned. Supplementarily, we argue that the culture of oppression by political elites, as attached to land grabbing, has been part and parcel of IPs' continuing struggle, thus affecting how IP education is being delivered and determined by formal and mainstreamed structures. Further, we will present that the principles of community engagement embodying collective and participatory action is imperative in the IP education discourse towards understanding and proposing sustainable initiatives in addressing the needs and concerns of indigenous communities and the larger society.

Research Question and Objectives

This study sought to critically analyze and articulate how community engagement creates an avenue for and becomes a crucial component of an IP education responsive to community problems? Further, the study would like to answer the significant question of how can IP education advocate the need to preserve indigenous culture, practices, and traditions? The study aims:

1. to trace the history of the Philippine education system from early Filipino societies up to contemporary times while at the same time critically underscoring the influences of various forms of cultural discrimination and education formalization;
2. to analyze the potentials of the community engagement paradigm towards ensuring a genuine IP education that is responsive to the IP community's problems, needs, and cultural preservation;

3. and to identify the challenges that IP communities have faced in the quest for advancing an authentic and genuine IP education system and, at the same time, to provide insight into policy gaps that IP communities, state, and non-state actors to consider for a more cohesive, inclusive, and responsive public policy.

Methodology

In conducting the study and illustrating the arguments, we have considered a case study method (Yin, 2011) by analyzing and presenting the case of *Lumad* alternative schools in Mindanao, a region composed of groups of islands in the Southern Philippines (see Figure 1). *Lumad* means native, indigenous, or homegrown, and is a collective term referring to the IP groups in the Southern part of the Philippines (e.g., *Higaonon*, *B'laan*, *Mandaya*, *Banwaon*, *Manobo*, *T'boli*, *Tiruary*, *Mansaka*, *Tagapakaolo*, *Manguangan*, *Dibabawon*, and *Subanen*) (La Viña, 2015).

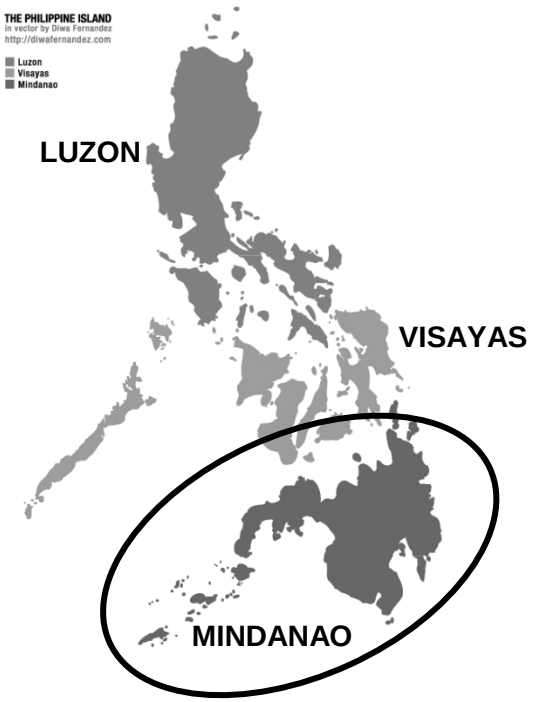

Figure 1 The Philippine Map (Vector): Islands that are categorized broadly under three main geographical divisions: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao

Source: (Fernandez-Velez, n.d.)

Four informants were purposively selected for a key informant interview (KII) using an unstructured guide (Faifua, 2014; Marshall, 1996) to provide crucial information to

understand the case substantively. The narrative analysis will become the main method of understanding the data from KIIs since participants have told their stories as much as the *Lumad* alternative schools and community engagement are intertwined in their experiences as both locals and community organizers. KIIs were ethically conducted by securing key informants' approval and willingness to participate and ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. Secondary data came from published articles, government/non-government reports, and reputable news agencies. Themes were drawn, which will be presented in the findings and discussion. As much as the case in focus is concerned, the findings will provide substantive information towards the main argument of this paper. Due to situational constraints brought by political tensions in the research site and the current COVID-19 situation[2], the study was limited to interviewing only the community organizers of *Lumad* alternative schools, which could have been better presented if the narratives and stories of the IP learners were also considered.

Findings and Discussion

There is a need for scholars of education and indigenous culture to highlight the current situation of IP education, specifically in the context of developing countries where most IP groups are situated and have survived political persecution, disenfranchisement, and marginalization. We already have introduced and levered our argument as much as IP education and community engagement are concerned. This section and the next parts of the paper aim to provide further information and support our arguments by reiterating our findings. First, we will point out in the history of the Philippine education system (from the early Filipino societies up to the contemporary times) what cultural discriminations can be traced in the "formalized" form of education along with factors debatably influence those. Then, we will highlight how community engagement has become a pivotal element in ensuring genuine IP education, responsiveness to the crucial needs of IP communities, and advancing the plight of indigenous culture preservation. We will also highlight the enduring challenges posed by oppressive political regimes and the systemic marginalization towards IP education in the Philippines. Towards the end of the discussion, we will identify policy gaps that can be articulated as opportunities for state and non-state actors to consider.

[2] The COVID-19 Situation refers to a Global Health Pandemic caused by a virus that is rapidly spreading across the globe. The World Health Organization (2022) referred that the "coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus where most people infected with the virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. However, some will become seriously ill and require medical attention."

Philippine Education System and Cultural Discrimination

The Philippines has a long history of colonialism and imperialism, spanning from the 1500s until the early 1900s. These events shaped the nation's identity and the current educational system (e.g., Anderson, 2006; Justice, 2009; Madigan, 1959; Martin, 2002; Rodríguez, 2014).

In the early Filipino societies of sultanates and barangays, the indigenous communities had already established their unique education system based on local and indigenous knowledge, traditions, and practical skills as ways crucial towards subsistence and sustainable living (Constantino & Constantino, 1975a, 1975b). There was a high regard for Babaylans, or women leaders who served as teachers, but with the coming of the Spanish colonizers to the Philippines, religion was introduced and paved the way for the emergence of highly patriarchal societies. When the colonial type of education was integrated, it changed how Filipinos viewed their religion, traditional practices, and education. The *reduccion* system in the Spanish colonial era marked a tight grip of control of the colonizers over the movements of the Filipinos, which strengthened the integration of Christianity towards what they believed as the transition of the "pagan" early Filipinos to becoming "civilized" members of the society. The *reduccion* policy or the encapsulation of large populations to discrete and laid down categories was just one of the Spaniards' efforts to make colonial administration easier (Hirtz, 1980). It also served as the beginning of the militarization of the indigenous communities. During that time, *reduccion* also subjugated and converted natives to Christians through the colonizers' violent police power. This has led to the othering of IPs since not everyone agreed with the teachings of Christianity (Russell, 2004). It has also led to a rift between mainstream Christians and indigenous groups. As to the delivery of education during this time, the Spaniards developed and assigned subjects based on social classes, ethnic groups, and linguistic affiliations. This altered early Filipinos' identity (ADB, 2002). The "othered culture" has mainstreamed how native Filipinos, specifically the IPs, are being discriminated against and ostracized because they do not live according to western standards. These discriminations concerning the education system are even heightened in the context of American imperialism in the Philippines, thus, intensifying the "othered culture" and alienatingly estranging formal education from the IPs' experience.

With the coming of the American colonizers to the Philippines, education became part of the "white man's culture" and further undervalued the indigenous cultures due to the introduction of formal education (Spindler, 1974). The American colonizers called the introduction of formal education the "white man's burden" or what they believed was their responsibility to civilize and improve what they referred to as "backward" culture and societies (Dentler, 2011; Jordan, 1974). Constantino (1970) recounts that the American colonizers used education to subjugate the country and made early Filipinos think and act like "little

brown Americans." Studies conducted after Constantino have also outlined how highly "westernized" the Philippine education was. This imperialist agenda of Americans advanced what already was established by the Spaniards as the "othered culture," wherein IP identity and culture were being disenfranchised from formal education as set by the dominant forces in the state. In a way, indigenous cultures were identified as different (or often as inferior) from the hegemonic knowledge imposed by the imperialist. Alas, the becoming of formal education from both the dominant colonial and imperial structures in the Philippines has led to lasting effects that contemporary Philippine society and its education system continue to suffer.

The "othered culture" that colonial and imperial powers bred have developed unique forms of cultural discrimination impinged on society's norms and standards. The forms of cultural discrimination are prevalent in contemporary society, more specifically, how education is delivered. For example, the superimposition of westerners' whiteness or light skin complexion has been integrated into the Philippines' concept of beauty and social acceptance and is highly attached to civilization in general. The westerners' aesthetics, physicality, and culture came to represent in the native mind the definition of being human, which made them adopt and emulate (Pagulayan, 2016). In the context of education, news reports presented how basic education is flawed with discriminatory statements toward innate Filipino qualities and the IPs (Madarang, 2018; Magsambol, 2021). Studies have traced the origins of these discriminations (Rondilla, 2012; Thompson & McDonald, 2016) and further highlighted how disenfranchised and undervalued the IP culture is in the formal education system. These discriminations have been ongoing for a long time, pointing to formal education being forced among the indigenous peoples, where the IP learners are made to understand that their culture is inferior to the lowlanders. There were misuse and abuse of cultural practices and the dying indigenous knowledge systems, and the overall impact of mainstream education can be summarized as the alienation of indigenous youth from their communities, heritage, culture, and history (CBCP-ECIP, 2002).

For the longest time, the IPs have considered the mainstream schools as venues of discrimination. Their experiences of othering and disenfranchisement from lowlanders' groups are becoming their norm, and the discussions in schools about their identity and indigeneity were limited to surface culture. CBCP-ECIP (2008) outlined that in cases where the culture of indigenous peoples is included in the discussion, there is a tendency to highlight artifacts and practices (songs, clothes, etc.) and that the understanding of such is limited to surface-level conceptions of IPs culture, being, and identity. The indigenous culture is surfacely associated and understood through unique symbols and things attached to IP's culture; however, less from being introduced as a people with sets of values and belief systems. Perhaps, this problematic understanding of IP as people and IP culture as a

process is misled, and IP identities are reduced to merely blood affiliation instead of including the cultural heritage and history of the community. Also, the alienation was evident in their difficulty in learning, loss of respect for culture and heritage, low self-esteem and a sense of shame, loss of indigenous identity, and the tendency to focus on individual success at the expense of their community. This form of alienation was also brought about by the fact that aside from the cost of transportation, food, and lodging that they needed to take care of in the lowlands, many IP children had to suffer and endure cultural discrimination. They were discouraged by the derogatory remarks and treatment from the lowlanders, who considered them part of an inferior class (Trinidad, 2012). These aspects of marginalization have led IP learners to underperform in school, as exemplified in the United Nations Development Program Human Development Index report, which found that in the provinces of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, a 57% literacy rate compared to the national level at 98% (Arquiza, 2006).

Hence, this "othered culture" being a colonial and imperialist influence and product in the Philippines has led to cultural discrimination against IPs, especially in the delivery of formal education as instituted in the curriculums imposed by the existing mandates in the country. It is also important to highlight that while these structures and systems continue to prevail, this marginalization against the IPs is left unremedied. In the next few decades, the chance for ongoing alienation as a product of the colonialist and imperialist structure will continue to prevail. However, what is unique to illustrate here is the initiatives of IP communities and community organizers to integrate community engagement in a unique and home-grown education curriculum tailored to the needs of IP learners and toward fulfilling the aim of preserving and celebrating IP culture.

Community Engagement and the Lumad Alternative Schools: The ALCADEV's Case

While it has been streamlined that the current stream of formal education in the Philippine context embodies a system and structure discriminatory to IP culture and traditions, it is important also to emphasize that IP communities and community organizers have molded remedies to these concerns by establishing *Lumad* alternative schools to satisfy the immediate needs of IP learners. This aims for an education sensitive to culture, practical to IP's way of life, and community-centered that aligns with social or community cohesion ideals. What is central to this interest is how community engagement plays a critical element in how education is delivered in this creative concept that IP communities and community organizers came up with.

Since the Philippines patterned its formal education from a western system resulting from the "westernization" efforts of the US imperial mission, this has brought many distressing issues regarding the preservation of indigenous culture. Specifically, studying one's culture through formal education has created a problem among the IPs since this

undermined the value of identity and somehow dismissed the culture to mere local cultural symbols like costumes and dances. Notably, Ocampo et al. (2021) have cited that this gap of undermining indigenous values and the lack of sympathetic and affirmative policy directives in the country results from the long-standing discrimination brought by colonial and imperial influences. Perhaps, the too imposing and discriminating western tradition led to the degeneration of unique cultural heritage and local knowledge (Coloma, 2006). Hence, these led to the exclusion of a deeper take on indigenous culture to be integrated into the formal education system and its further development in contemporary times. On a salient note, it is essential to emphasize unique cultural heritage in the formal education systems. Likewise, it is imperative and relevant to point out that integrating community engagement elements in IP education ensures that these learners are receptive to their indigenous identity, culture, and traditions.

To address the long history of alienation and cultural discrimination in the formal education, efforts from Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) surfaced. *Lumad* alternative schools are NGO-led initiatives established to counter the effects of formal education on IP students. Several *Lumad* alternative schools were established in the Mindanao region; however, the Alternative Learning Center for Agriculture and Livelihood Development (ALCADEV) has been spread all over various provinces to cater to the needs of IP communities. We problematize then what have been the unique aspects of these *Lumad* alternative schools, specifically in the case of ALCADEV, which has become an essential element in genuinely responding to the needs and demands of IPs in their education. Here, we wish to emphasize the community engagement element as significant to *Lumad* education.

Established on July 19, 2004, ALCADEV was designed as an alternative learning system for secondary education learning for indigent IP students (including tribes of *Manobo*, *Higaonanon*, *Banwaon*, *Talaandig*, and *Mamanwa*) in the poverty-stricken communities in the Caraga Region of Mindanao (Surigao del Norte and Sur, and Agusan del Norte and Sur) where access to basic education is difficult or non-existent. In ALCADEV's (2020, para. 7) vision, "through education, develop the indigenous people into effective leaders and productive members of their community and country who can improve their socio-economic status and enhance their culture to competently deal with complex situations in the future." The ALCADEV's (2020, para. 8) mission is to "provide a system of relevant knowledge, skills, and values to develop the indigenous youth to be self-reliant, self -sufficient, analytical and creative in seeking ways to improve the quality of life of their families, their indigenous communities and the country." With these guiding principles, ALCADEV (2020, para. 9-11) aims:

1. To promote an alternative learning system for secondary education that enhances their intellectual capacity and growth and reinforces their collective pride and identity as indigenous peoples capable of actively shaping the country's future.
2. To provide various knowledge and skills on alternative farming, i.e., scientific, innovative, systematic, and sustainable, and to integrate these into various areas of livelihood development.
3. To conduct relevant educational activities among parents and members of indigenous communities to contribute to their self-organization and cultural identity.

What is interesting in the case of *Lumad* education, especially in the case of ALCADEV, is that their curriculum includes agriculture, science and technology, home economics, and history as the major subjects aimed at improving the economic conditions of the indigenous peoples' community. They also have minor subjects, which include Math, English, Filipino, and Values Education. The ALCADEV is considered an alternative school because its curriculum focuses on leadership skills and agriculture, unlike the typical secondary academic curriculum that is formally instituted to respond to the western norm in education (Trinidad, 2012).

Figure 2 Teachers Holding Classes in a ALCADEV Classroom in Surigao del Sur, Mindanao.
Source: Ayroso (2019).

ALCADEV students understand community development by learning about Filipino minorities, learning their rights, having discourses and exchanges in the community, and understanding the plight of neighboring countries and their indigenous sectors. Community engagement, as an approach to community development, has taught and led them to focus more on what realities are happening on the ground and what opportunities can transform into strengths and possible solutions to their community's basic concerns. Students are also taught the basic technical skills from TESDA, encouraging them to utilize indigenous materials. In essence, the utilization of these materials can be linked to the *Lumad*'s or indigenous people's practice of conserving nature, self-sufficiency, and sustainability (for

example, in agricultural production and craftsmanship, among others). These ideals are innate and linked to their culture and traditions. Specifically, ALCADEV has facilitated the Food Security Project, which taught sustainable and organic farming to *Lumad* students (Ellao, 2017), backed by traditional practices found in their customs and traditions. Relevant to this is the IP community's resistance to modernized tools and technologies, which Ellao (2017) argues that the way of life of the IPs is primarily based on their traditions and customs as much as agricultural and livelihood practices are concerned. Ultimately, the Food Security Project has led to more productive and sustainable farming practices that have sustainably provided for their consumption needs and the development of new sources of livelihood for IP communities.

Having their lifestyle attached significantly to their community life and environment, *Lumad* communities have developed and integrated a conservationist outlook in defense of ecological balance, protection of habitats, preservation of species, and biological communities guided by an aboriginal understanding that different units of life co-exist. One of the measures they undertook was facilitating and organizing the use of resources with supervision from community elders. Ellao (2017, para. 27) emphasized that it is innate and natural for *Lumads* "to be against mining because it would destroy not only their land and livelihood but also their lives, identity, and culture." Mulder and Coppolillo (2005) have even reiterated that this conservationist attitude among IPs is innate and inalienable. Much respect to these living traditions should be given as much as how education is delivered to IP communities.

On the one hand, it can be observed that the characteristics distinct to *Lumad* communities have developed the ability to preserve and conserve nature and the environment to sustain their needs. They have developed sustainable management practices in taking care of immediate environments, leading to the evident equilibrium between humans and nature. The *Lumad* Alternative Schools have utilized the community engagement aspect and conservationist practices innate to *Lumad* communities as a tool to meet halfway in learning and build a good and sustainable livelihood source. Community engagement's participatory and grassroots-oriented nature have facilitated ways to reiterate sensitive traditions and practices in the way of life of *Lumads* that should be critically considered in the curriculum and teaching, as well as toward innovative experience-based learning for the *Lumad* students. These findings have led to contemplation that these conservatism traditions go hand in hand with the community engagement aspect of *Lumad* education, which facilitated learning and community building responsive to the *Lumad*'s immediate needs and the community's economic well-being. More so, this also heeds the thought that the concept of community development, as inspired by Amartya Sen (2014), should be based and

responsive to what is imagined and conceptualized by grassroots efforts and not a development imposed by hegemonic and oppressive structures.

To the *Lumad* students, formal education is a strange institution that does not answer their needs—considering that the indigenous groups in general, and the *Lumad* communities in particular, have their own specific needs to address their sufficient living conditions based on local knowledge, culture, and traditions. This has been lacking in the formal education system, which is predominantly focused on being at par with modernization aligned to the utopian ideals of the developed world. It is bizarre for *Lumad* learners how this established formal education taught culture because it lacks a grounded foundation based on native and grassroots-oriented experience attached to the indigenous culture and local knowledge. This standard way of learning confuses them regarding their indigenous identity since this existing formal education uncomfortably pushes them to adhere to what existing hegemonic systems and societal norms suggest resulting in unlearning their culture and becoming "civilized." The imposing education system has left *Lumad* learners confused between what they already know and what is being taught (Spindler, 1974). Friere (2018) is critical of this idea, underscoring that education—the pedagogy, structures, and the overall dynamics—should be treated as a practice of freedom that has an emancipatory potential on the one hand and is responsive to critical problems on the other which supplements what is meant by Spindler (1974) as the valuation of indigenous culture in the formation of a genuine education for the IPs.

Oppressive Regimes, Systemic Marginalization: Challenges to Lumad Education

In general, the plight of *Lumad* communities has been challenged by structural and systemic oppression and marginalization by society and the state. Much more when these alternative educations have been delivered to communities, *Lumad* alternative schools and children have faced more and more attacks from state forces and oppressive groups by allegedly tagging these alternative schools as breeding grounds of insurgents and communist ideologies. However, the previous discussion, which focused on the case and purpose of the ALCADEV, identified the true mission and objective of establishing *Lumad* schools in the region. This section will elucidate the enduring challenges, problems, and threats to alternative schools, how they impact the delivery of a genuine IP education through community engagement, and what is happening on the ground. These realities on the IP's daily experiences add to existing impediments and marginalization to *Lumad* communities in general and the *Lumad* education in particular.

The militarization of *Lumad* communities and their schools was one of the major hurdles faced by non-government organizations in establishing alternative schools in Mindanao. Several accounts have been recorded that these militarization agendas of state forces have impeded the *Lumad* education and, worst, have tagged these schools, its

learners, and educators as allegedly part of the insurgent and terrorist forces while using the unique type of learning and teaching as justifications to these accusations. Reported events of military infiltrations in these communities have been recorded as early as 2009 up to the present. Diño and Sta. Cruz (2020) recounted the military presence in schools and communities that have led to the displacement of *Lumads*, following the same argument and justification for military infiltration. More so, these state-sponsored militarization acts have led to blatant acts of harassment and even killings of *Lumad* students, community leaders and elders, volunteer teachers, among others, who have defended not just the *Lumad* schools but the indigenous peoples' communities and their ancestral domain (Alamon, 2017; Alconaba, 2015; Ayroso, 2014; Bolledo, 2021; Gamil, 2015; Minority Rights Group International, 2016; Pagaduan-Araullo, 2015; Umil, 2021). These oppressive acts against *Lumads* can be traced as early as before and during Aquino's presidency, up to the present-day Duterte regime.

Figure 3 A paramilitary group destroys a *Lumad* School building (*Left*), and military troops enter the school grounds in Surigao del Sur, Mindanao (*Right*).

Source: Save our Schools Network in Diño and Sta. Cruz (2020)

As mentioned previously, the militarization of *Lumad* schools is not new and existed under previous administrations. What is pivotal in discussing this reality is the thought that these oppressive and intimidating gestures of harassment by military and other state forces have been products of an elite and othered culture that has long been embedded in Philippine political culture. On the other hand, what is noted in the case of *Lumad* schools is the initiative to integrate the community's indigenous cultural beliefs, values, traditions, and practices through community engagement to impart knowledge and sharing. However, the state has taken these unique initiatives toward a genuine IP education badly because of the allegations that these schools have turned into a breeding ground of student-rebels against the state (de Santos, 2018; Lingao, 2017). Community engagement, as a process of learning and practice, has been genuinely achieved in the case of *Lumad* schools since the community of learners was provided an avenue to reflect and understand their marginalization. Therefore, they will be able to think of ways to solve the problems they

identified based on their distinct cultures, traditions, and practices while having creative communities of learners producing innovative ideas.

Alas, these communities, specifically the *Lumad* schools, have been victims of the endemic cultural genocide that targeted the displacement of IPs from their ancestral lands. Short (2010) noted that cultural genocide happens when the indigenous culture, traditions, and practices are being forcibly undermined and disrupted as a result of a dominating hegemonic system that directs the status quo. The prevalence of cultural genocide has various causing factors. Nevertheless, what is worth highlighting, in this case, is the role of dominating political regimes and the political elites who backed up an "aggressive development" initiative that has resulted in land grabbing and the displacement of IPs from their communities (Delgado-Pfeifer, 2019; Imbong, 2021; Nawal & Salaverria, 2018). As noted earlier, numerous killings of IPs are attached to their resistance against and in protecting their ancestral lands from the land-grabbing of powerful elites and those people in authority. Even the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (2015) has reiterated that the struggle of *Lumads* for their alternative schools and the killings that surround their plight can be viewed as attached to the greater exploitation of mining industries, for example, from the mineral-rich IP ancestral lands.

Hence, community engagement as a process and approach in the delivery of *Lumad* education have become an icon of threat to these oppressive structures. The liberative ideas innate to the approach pursues the emancipation of the oppressed from their marginalization. In this sense, community engagement has been an effective strategy to rationalize the process of learning and practice that is responsive to the needs of IP communities. We can further present that with community engagement, we are providing an avenue for the communities to take control of the process of decision making and to rethink sustainable and innovative measures much feasible in addressing their concerns.

Insights from Policy Gaps: Situating Community Engagement in a Grassroots-oriented Indigenous Education in the Philippines

While the previous discussion has substantially discussed community engagement as both strategy and a process to immerse IP learners in their social and political realities and understand their marginalization, it is equally crucial to highlight insights from policy gaps as recommendations for this case for various actors to contemplate. Taking off from the critical points raised in the public affairs literature (Dunleavy & Hood, 1994; Frederickson, 1980; Funck & Karlsson, 2020), the progressive assertion that public affairs and public service should always promote the welfare of the people, the marginalized sectors, and the vulnerable is a paramount consideration (Sacramento, 2020). This discussion will highlight three crucial points as policy opportunities embarking from a progressive and critical public

affairs lens. It will mainly focus on some implementing state and non-state actors to safeguard IP alternative schools and the community engagement element as crucial towards an emancipatory education for the *Lumads* while reiterating the significance of preserving indigenous knowledge inherent to their culture.

Firstly, the cultural discrimination of ethnic minorities has been endemic and has become part and parcel of the country's social, cultural, and political norms. One opportunity to consider is for educational institutions, both basic and higher, to reconsider reviewing the curriculums and materials used, especially by establishing a careful and mindful review of culturally discriminating narratives, pictures, situations, and scenarios, among others, illustrated in their instruction. As much as the curriculum and accreditation for IP alternative schools are concerned, it is suggested that both the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) should acknowledge that IP communities, their processes of learning, and as well as the contextual realities that they are in, need a unique approach and attention. The practical aspect that community engagements impart in the curriculum, instruction, and learning in *Lumad* alternative schools are reasonable practices relevant to the cultural preservation of these IP communities. Hence, policy opportunities that greatly impact the micro-level can better help the plight of IP education and alternative schools by safeguarding the legitimation of community engagement-led learning that positively impacts the IP community's immediate needs.

Secondly, these civil society organizations at the meso-level behind the alternative schools' initiatives have constantly lobbied and provided help to indigenous communities. Regardless, there is always a need to advance advocacies and lobbying in various non-state and state platforms to establish a more inclusive and sustained approach to IP education. The third sector has always been the backbone and a vigilant entity to socio-political and cultural issues in society; thus, strengthening and ensuring the active existence of this sphere maintains checks and balances in the state's actions. Ideally, civil societies should establish and maintain a strengthened link between them and people's organizations oriented toward the grassroots' realities, experiences, and plight.

Lastly, at the macro-level, the national government, such as the congress and the executive branch, particularly the National Commission for Indigenous People (NCIP), needs to revisit the existing IPRA Law of 1997 and identify gaps that have long been lamented by various groups implementing agencies helping IP communities on the ground. Moreover, the IPRA law and its provisions lack the emphasis on IP communities in establishing a sensitive and inclusive curriculum of their culture. Also, certain provisions in IPRA must reflect and mandate that educational institutions portray the IP community's culture sensitively and inclusively. Thus, if not explicitly emphasized, community engagement should be included in the IPRA Law and other pertinent policies deemed appropriate to protect and

preserve the IP culture in general. However, what has been significantly noted in the execution of IPRA law in the Philippines and the implementation of other critical laws, in general, is that agencies concerned in the enforcement and implementation lack the political will that could have sustained the objective and aims of these laws. Relevant to the assertion of a religious implementation of IPRA law is what Capistrano (2012, p. 459) stressed,

> *"…development of indigenous communities lies in recognition of their rights in their ancestral domain and the preservation of their culture, tradition, system, practices and their natural resource; …that is highly related to the absence of legal recognition of their right, for example, to ownership and control of their ancestral domain."*

Ideally, the faithful and effective implementation of the IPRA law, among other policies concerning IP communities and education, while being safeguarded by the state and its watchdogs or civil societies can therefore assure that these laws and policies achieve their primary purpose and objectives—that is to address the concerns of the marginalized and vulnerable sectors of the society.

Conclusion

IP education in the Philippines has been a debated and critical topic that extends beyond education to include political, social, and cultural aspects as well. This study has operationalized the idea of community engagement in the context of indigenous education as the process that includes inclusive participation, decision-making, and implementation of initiatives responsive to the community's immediate needs. Community engagement is crucial to the preservation of IP culture. The first part of the paper discussed the cultural and political history of the Philippines that specifically delineates the aspect of cultural discrimination (embedded in an education system at that time) against native Filipinos and the IPs. It also reiterated the institution of "formal education" and the development of the "othered culture" that has become the cornerstone of today's cultural discrimination and inequalities against the IPs. Secondly, the study utilized the case of ALCADEV by explicitly analyzing the *Lumad* alternative school's initiatives and the concept of community engagement that is considered pivotal to substantially addressing *Lumad* communities' needs. The community engagement element is then delineated as an essential component of IP education and addresses cultural discrimination. Thirdly, the paper discussed the endemic militarization of alternative schools due to the systemic oppression of state forces, those people in authority, and political elites against IPs. Here, the paper established that the challenge of militarization is not only attached to allegations that these schools are breeding grounds for brain-washing agendas of enemies of the state. Rather, it has traced its roots to

the systemic marginalization of IPs, the long history of land grabbing, cultural genocide, struggle, and resistance of IPs in protecting their ancestral domains, among others. Hence, the state has feared the influence of the community engagement approach and process in an IP education, which it thinks can further trigger mass movements on IP's defense. Lastly, the discussion highlighted possible policy opportunities that state and non-state actors may consider towards uplifting community engagement and the current status of IP education in the country.

In this paper, we have established our argument based on what can be strongly implied from the case presented that community engagement as both a theory and practice is an element towards a more inclusive, sensitive, and progressive type of education. This is especially a sound consideration for IP communities as an element of alternative schools that will eventually facilitate the community's clear understanding of their marginalization. At the same time, IP communities will become more capable of thinking of innovative solutions based on their living culture, traditions, and practices responsive to their critical needs and concerns. The community engagement element in IP education is further argued to provide an avenue toward transforming inequalities and cultural discriminations embedded in the current formal structures of basic and higher education. This can be attained by establishing a more grassroots-oriented education that fully understands cultural diversities, IPs living traditions, and their resistance and struggles for their rights. Lastly, the study has settled on the argument that community engagement in IP education is a potential element to establish a more collective and participatory decision making for the community, which is crucial for safeguarding the preservation of the indigenous culture and for the protection of their rights and welfare over their ancestral lands.

The very idea that different cultures have different needs, as cultural relativism suggests, should serve as a guide to better understand that, in *Lumad*'s case, there is this unique kind of education and ways of learning that will genuinely work for them. Moreover, the IP's role in the history of resistance and the preservation of the Filipino culture and identity should be given value and emphasis in both formal and informal education. Representativeness of IPs in curriculum design, policymaking, and planning should be safeguarded to prevent cultural misappropriation in various aspects of socio-cultural and political affairs. Hence, the better way to understand the *Lumad* culture is to know them more and understand their way of living from their perspective, hear them out, and not just tolerate but also accept them. Only through our genuine and unbiased understanding of who they are can we finally start the course of breaking down the walls of ignorance and marginalization that have oppressed and denied them of their human rights for the longest time.

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