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Decolonizing Pedagogy: Integrating Indigenous Knowledge and Philippine Historical Narratives in Higher Education Curricula

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Abstract

This qualitative multi-site study examined how indigenous knowledge systems and Philippine historical narratives are integrated into higher education curricula across six institutions in Northern Luzon. Anchored in Decolonial Theory and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, the study explored faculty and student perceptions, current practices, and emerging strategies that align with decolonization goals. Findings revealed that while there is strong support for the inclusion of culturally rooted content, its integration remains inconsistent and often dependent on individual faculty initiatives. Participants identified key challenges such as lack of institutional frameworks, training, and authentic resources. Nevertheless, they proposed innovative pedagogical strategies, including community immersion, storytelling, interdisciplinary design, and co-creation with cultural elders, that foster inclusive, identity-affirming, and historically grounded education. The study concludes that decolonizing higher education requires a systemic reimagining of curriculum design, teaching practices, and epistemic authority, shifting from Eurocentric models to localized, culturally respectful frameworks.

Keywords: Culturally responsive teaching, Curriculum development, Decolonizing pedagogy, Indigenous knowledge systems, Philippine higher education

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Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing movement in academic communities to re-examine and deconstruct colonial legacies embedded in formal education critically. In the Philippine context, higher education curricula have long reflected dominant Western frameworks, often at the expense of local narratives, indigenous knowledge systems, and culturally rooted pedagogies. This has contributed to the marginalization of indigenous epistemologies and the underrepresentation of historical truths told from the Filipino perspective. As institutions of higher learning play a critical role in shaping national consciousness, the call for decolonizing pedagogy has become both urgent and necessary.

For centuries, colonial encounters shaped Philippine education, first under Spanish and then American rule. These colonial powers imposed foreign languages, epistemologies, and historical perspectives that have had lasting impacts on how knowledge is produced, validated, and transmitted in Philippine schools. Despite efforts to indigenize the curriculum after independence, the structure of higher education remains largely Westernized in content and approach. As a result, the contributions of indigenous peoples, local heroes, and precolonial systems of knowledge continue to be overlooked or superficially acknowledged in academic discourse.

The global discourse on decolonizing education underscores the imperative to dismantle Eurocentric knowledge systems and make space for indigenous epistemologies within formal learning environments (Smith, 2021). In countries with colonial histories like the Philippines, scholars have long emphasized the need for an education system rooted in the Filipino people's culture, history, and lived experiences (Constantino, 2015; Canlas & Villanueva, 2024). Integrating indigenous knowledge (IK) into the curriculum affirms cultural identity and promotes sustainable development, as indigenous practices are often embedded in ecological stewardship and community resilience (Battiste, 2017).

In the Philippine setting, indigenous knowledge remains largely peripheral in mainstream higher education despite policy-level frameworks such as the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997 and the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (K to 12). According to Colicol (2024), curriculum designers and educators often lack training or resources to effectively include local knowledge systems, which leads to superficial or tokenistic representations. Similarly, Cansino et al. (2022) found that while indigenous content is sometimes included in general education courses, it is often presented from an outsider's perspective, lacking depth and contextual sensitivity.

Efforts to decolonize the curriculum also intersect with the need to revisit Philippine historical narratives. As Claudio (2013) argues, national historiography has been shaped by colonial and neocolonial ideologies that obscure the contributions of local heroes, resistance movements, and indigenous governance structures. Curriculum frameworks that continue to privilege Western models of progress and development marginalize alternative ways of knowing and being. In response, pedagogical innovations such as cultural mapping, storywork, and community-based learning have emerged as effective tools for integrating local histories and indigenous values into the academic experience (Sto. Domingo, 2015).

This study, conducted by scholars from Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University – Mid La Union Campus (San Fernando City, La Union), Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University – Bacnotan Campus (La Union), Philippine Normal University – North Luzon (Alicia, Isabela), Ifugao State University (Lamut, Ifugao), Pangasinan State University – San Carlos Campus (San Carlos City, Pangasinan), and the University of Baguio (Baguio City), aims to explore and advance the integration of indigenous knowledge systems and Philippine historical narratives in higher education curricula. By understanding the current practices, institutional perceptions, and potential frameworks for curriculum transformation, this research contributes to the national effort of cultural reclamation and educational inclusivity.

The urgency of decolonizing education has been highlighted by scholars, educators, and indigenous communities advocating for culturally responsive pedagogy. Integrating indigenous knowledge and local histories into the curriculum is not merely a symbolic act but a pedagogical imperative promoting inclusivity, national identity, and epistemic justice. In Northern Luzon, where diverse ethnolinguistic groups reside, including the Iloco, Ifugao, Ibaloi, and Pangasinense communities, a wealth of indigenous knowledge and historical accounts remains untapped in formal education. This study builds on the regional context of the participating institutions to critically examine current curriculum practices and co-develop strategies for meaningful integration of these rich, localized epistemologies.

While there is a growing body of literature advocating for decolonized education in the Philippines, there remains a limited number of empirical studies that specifically examine the integration of indigenous knowledge systems and Philippine historical narratives within higher education curricula, especially outside Metro Manila. Most previous research has focused on basic education or broad policy recommendations, with insufficient attention given to the curricular content, institutional implementation, and perceptions among faculty and students at the tertiary level.

Furthermore, existing efforts to localize the curriculum are often fragmented, lacking cohesive frameworks or sustained institutional support. There is also limited data on how educators in regional and state universities navigate the integration of local knowledge in their courses—both in terms of pedagogical practices and structural challenges. This study addresses these gaps by conducting a multi-institutional inquiry across Northern Luzon, offering grounded insights and practical recommendations for transforming Philippine higher education in line with decolonization goals.

The study intends to answer the following specific research questions:

1. To examine the extent to which indigenous knowledge systems and local historical narratives are currently integrated into the curricula of selected higher education institutions in the Philippines.
2. To explore faculty and student perceptions regarding the relevance, challenges, and impact of integrating decolonized content in teaching and learning practices within higher education.
3. To develop pedagogical strategies and curriculum frameworks that promote inclusive, culturally responsive, and historically grounded education aligned with decolonization goals.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design to explore the integration of indigenous knowledge systems and Philippine historical narratives in higher education curricula. The research was conducted across six higher education institutions in Northern Luzon: Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University – Mid La Union Campus (San Fernando City, La Union), Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University – Bacnotan Campus (La Union), Philippine Normal University – North Luzon (Alicia, Isabela), Ifugao State University (Lamut, Ifugao), Pangasinan State University – San Carlos Campus (San Carlos City, Pangasinan), and the University of Baguio (Baguio City). These institutions were purposefully selected due to their proximity to indigenous communities and their involvement in cultural and curricular development initiatives.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document analysis of existing curricula, syllabi, and institutional frameworks. Key participants included curriculum developers, faculty members from general education and education-related programs, cultural coordinators, and indigenous knowledge holders affiliated with the universities. A

total of 30 participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure their involvement in or exposure to curriculum planning and cultural integration initiatives.

The interviews and FGDs were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis. Emerging themes were identified and categorized according to the three research objectives: current integration practices, perceptions and challenges, and proposed pedagogical frameworks. Curriculum documents were reviewed to validate participant responses and identify gaps or best practices in decolonized content delivery. Triangulation of data sources was employed to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of findings.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research. Informed consent was secured from all participants, confidentiality was maintained, and data was stored securely. Institutional approval was also obtained from the research ethics boards of the participating universities. Data analysis and interpretation reflected sensitivity to academic integrity and cultural respect, particularly in dealing with indigenous knowledge and community perspectives.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on two interrelated theoretical lenses: Decolonial Theory and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. These frameworks provided the conceptual grounding to examine the historical, epistemological, and pedagogical dimensions of curriculum development in higher education institutions in the Philippine context.

As advanced by scholars such as Walter D. Mignolo (2007) and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021), Decolonial Theory challenges the dominance of Western epistemologies and calls for the recentering of local and indigenous ways of knowing. This Theory emphasizes the need to expose and dismantle colonial structures within educational systems that have historically privileged Eurocentric narratives, often marginalizing indigenous voices and cultural knowledge. In this study, the Decolonial Theory served as a critical lens to interrogate how higher education curricula in the Philippines either perpetuate or resist colonial knowledge hierarchies and how indigenous knowledge systems and Philippine historical narratives can reclaim space in formal education.

Complementing this is Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), a framework developed by Geneva Gay (2010), which promotes the integration of students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and values into the teaching-learning process. CRP recognizes that meaningful learning occurs when education validates and reflects learners' identities, histories, and lived realities. In the Philippine setting, this involves honoring indigenous communities' contributions, integrating local history, and using

pedagogical approaches rooted in Filipino culture and community engagement. CRP provided the foundation for assessing faculty practices and institutional efforts to make curricula more inclusive, relevant, and affirming of cultural diversity.

Together, these theories underscored the transformative potential of decolonizing pedagogy in higher education. They guided the formulation of research questions, the design of data collection tools, and the analysis of findings—ensuring that the study not only critiqued existing practices but also proposed sustainable, culturally grounded alternatives for curriculum reform.

Results and Discussion

The study identified key areas through rigorous thematic analysis where indigenous knowledge systems and local historical narratives are either integrated or remain marginalized within the current curricular and pedagogical structures. Each theme is illustrated with verbatim accounts from participants, labeled as Informants 1 to 30, to ensure transparency, professionalism, and fidelity to participant voices. The integration of these results is further examined in light of recent literature to contextualize findings within broader discourses on decolonial education and culturally responsive pedagogy.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Local Historical Narratives

The integration of indigenous knowledge systems and local historical narratives into the curricula of selected higher education institutions in the Philippines presents a diverse and evolving picture. In some universities, notable progress has been made through the inclusion of courses that highlight cultural heritage, community traditions, and locally grounded perspectives. These efforts provide students with a deeper connection to their roots and a broader understanding of Filipino identity. However, the results also indicate that such initiatives remain uneven across institutions. In many cases, indigenous and local content is treated as supplementary rather than central to the academic experience. This points to a pressing need for more intentional and sustained efforts to embed culturally responsive education within the core of higher learning.

Curriculum Integration: Fragmented but Growing

Document analysis and interviews with faculty members revealed that Indigenous content is present but fragmented, often introduced only as supplementary material within general education courses like *The Contemporary World*, *Readings in Philippine History*, or *Understanding the Self*. Informants noted

that such inclusion is typically at the discretion of individual faculty members and lacks structural coherence.

For instance, Informant 4 (Faculty, Ifugao State University) explained:

“The Hudhud epic is part of UNESCO’s intangible heritage, and we use it to teach values and identity. But the challenge is aligning it with learning competencies set by CHED.”

Ifugao State University integrates modules on the Hudhud chants, rice terrace agricultural systems, and mortuary practices of the Ifugao into their social science offerings. In contrast, Informant 7 (Faculty, Pangasinan State University) described the use of Antong Falls and Pangasinan epics in literature classes, though emphasizing these are often brief inclusions.

However, integration remains minimal in other institutions, particularly in La Union. Informant 2 (Curriculum Developer, DMMMSU–MLUC) noted:

“We have minimal inclusion of indigenous content... There’s no standard template or requirement, so it’s mostly up to individual faculty members.”

These findings highlight a curricular landscape where indigenous knowledge systems and local histories are inconsistently embedded, reflecting what Mignolo (2007) calls the “coloniality of knowledge”, a condition wherein colonial epistemologies persistently shape what is deemed valid academic content.

These patterns confirm prior scholarship that curriculum localization in Philippine higher education remains largely symbolic and teacher-driven. Colicol (2024) identified similar inconsistencies in teacher education programs, attributing the gap to limited curricular mandates and lack of training. Likewise, Cansino et al. (2022) emphasized that while indigenous content appears in course outlines, it is rarely positioned as core knowledge, reflecting a tokenistic approach.

Comparatively, studies in other Southeast Asian contexts—such as Cansino’s et al. (2022) work on Cordilleran HEIs—reveal that curricular integration is more successful when there is institutional support and partnership with cultural communities.

Curriculum development must shift from peripheral insertions to core design logic to foster true decolonization. A cultural audit of syllabi and collaborative frameworks with indigenous knowledge holders could lay the groundwork for sustainable integration.

Faculty Perceptions: Enthusiastic but Unsupported

Across all six institutions, faculty participants voiced strong support for the integration of indigenous knowledge systems and Philippine historical narratives. However, this enthusiasm was tempered by systemic challenges, primarily the absence of institutional guidance, training, and resource access.

Informant 9 (Faculty, Philippine Normal University–North Luzon) shared:

“I want my students to learn about revolutionary leaders from Isabel, not just Rizal. But textbooks are Manila-centric. We have to look for primary sources ourselves.”

Informant 14 (Faculty, University of Baguio) emphasized:

“I encourage students to collect folktales from their hometowns. That becomes our class text. But this is more of a passion project than a school requirement.”

Other informants reported similar experiences—motivated educators often resort to self-sourced materials, localized modules, and informal collaborations to bring culturally responsive content into their classrooms. However, such efforts remain sporadic and heavily dependent on individual initiative.

Informant 10 (Faculty, Ifugao State University) remarked:

“We need workshops and training from CHED or experts. We want to do more, but we’re not equipped.”

These accounts underscore the institutional disconnect between the broader calls for decolonization and the everyday realities of teaching.

This gap between educator motivation and institutional support echoes findings by Battiste (2017), who argued that faculty are often “frontline agents of change” yet remain unsupported by policy-level frameworks. Similarly, Canlas and Villanueva (2024) found that while Filipino educators recognize the importance of cultural integration, their efforts are rarely sustained or structurally endorsed.

The lack of institutional scaffolding highlights the lingering coloniality of pedagogical design. Mignolo (2007) explains this as the persistence of Eurocentric hierarchies in knowledge validation—systems that silence or undervalue localized expertise.

In Southeast Asian parallels, Pham et al. (2023) observed that successful curriculum decolonization in Vietnam involved formal state-university-community partnerships, suggesting that institutional alignment is critical. Philippine HEIs,

therefore, must establish clear mandates, resource-sharing protocols, and localized professional development tracks to empower faculty in this transformation.

Indigenous Participation: Limited but Desired

Most participating institutions reported minimal formal engagement with local cultural elders and knowledge holders despite their geographic proximity to indigenous communities. Faculty members acknowledged that structural and ethical barriers impede sustained collaboration while interest exists.

Informant 12 (Cultural Affairs Coordinator, Pangasinan State University) explained:

"We have elders willing to share their knowledge, but we don't have the protocols to invite them formally. There's concern about cultural appropriation or misrepresentation."

The absence of institutional frameworks such as Memoranda of Agreement (MOAs), community protocols, or clear consultation processes prevents indigenous voices' meaningful and ethical inclusion. Faculty members lamented the lack of official channels to reach out to communities without unintentionally breaching cultural codes or undermining traditional custodianship.

Informant 17 (Faculty, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University – Bacnotan) stated:

"We're cautious. We don't want to extract knowledge. There must be mutual respect and formal consent."

Nonetheless, many participants expressed optimism. Proposed future strategies included inviting elders as co-teachers or lecturers, embedding community immersion as part of fieldwork, and developing indigenous-led digital archives.

Informant 20 (Administrator, Ifugao State University) added:

"We're exploring partnerships with barangay councils to institutionalize the presence of elders in our general education classes."

These insights reveal a desire for ethical, reciprocal collaboration, yet institutional inertia continues to delay systematic implementation.

The limited but desired participation of indigenous knowledge holders reflects broader global trends in the decolonization of education. As Smith (2021) argues, the ethical co-production of knowledge must go beyond inclusion—it must respect indigenous sovereignty and modes of knowledge transmission. When academia fails

to provide such space, it risks epistemic violence through appropriation or tokenization.

In the Philippine context, Cansino et al. (2022) caution that without proper community engagement mechanisms, efforts to localize curricula often reproduce colonial extraction. These concerns were echoed in Southeast Asian literature as well: Roson and Talib (2019), studying Malaysian universities, emphasized the importance of cultural consent protocols and community advisory boards to avoid extractive research practices.

From a Decolonial Theory lens, indigenous peoples must be recognized not as passive “resources” for academic enrichment, but as epistemic authorities who can directly shape pedagogy and curriculum. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Gay, 2010) further affirms that authenticity in instruction requires firsthand, lived narratives—not mediated or sanitized representations.

Thus, the institutionalization of indigenous participation—through formalized advisory councils, inclusive hiring policies, and co-curricular integration—must be prioritized if Philippine HEIs move beyond symbolic inclusion.

Institutional Perspective: Decolonization Not Yet Policy

Institutional leadership across the six higher education institutions acknowledged the relevance of decolonizing the curriculum but admitted that concrete policies, strategic frameworks, or implementation guidelines remain absent. While recognized rhetorically, decolonization has yet to be translated into institutional mandates.

Informant 23 (Administrator, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University in La Union) shared:

“We follow CHED guidelines, but decolonizing education has not been discussed at the board level. We need a strong push from faculty and researchers.”

While CHED’s Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) framework technically allows for flexibility and contextualization, administrators noted that its implementation often leans toward standardized rubrics rather than localization.

Informant 25 (Curriculum Chair, Pangasinan State University) explained:

“There’s room in the OBE structure to innovate, but indigenous content remains optional, not expected without policy direction.”

This institutional ambiguity creates an uneven landscape. Some programs have moved toward decolonized approaches due to individual initiative, while others continue to rely exclusively on national frameworks with minimal cultural adaptation.

Informant 27 (Dean, Ifugao State University) emphasized:

“Unless CHED or our Board explicitly requires it, most faculty won’t risk altering syllabi. There’s fear of being ‘non-compliant’.”

Across institutions, participants echoed the need for a top-down commitment to support bottom-up innovation. Decolonial efforts remain isolated, underfunded, and structurally vulnerable without policy codification.

This policy-level inertia aligns with the findings of Canlas and Villanueva (2024), who noted that the absence of curricular mandates has led to fragmented and inconsistent attempts at localizing Philippine tertiary education. Even where support exists at the faculty level, institutional reticence prevents scaling up innovations.

Decolonial theorists like Mignolo (2007) and Smith (2021) argue that without structural realignment, postcolonial societies risk re-inscribing colonial logic into education under the guise of reform. In other words, flexible frameworks like OBE can unintentionally perpetuate epistemic exclusion if not explicitly directed toward inclusive curricular goals.

In Southeast Asia, universities in Indonesia and Malaysia have begun to develop formal curricular pathways grounded in local cultures (Jamiran et al., 2024), driven by national policies recognizing cultural heritage’s pedagogical value. The Philippines, by contrast, still lacks a cohesive national policy that mandates decolonization in higher education despite constitutional guarantees and cultural rights under the IPRA Law.

From a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy standpoint, systemic integration requires that institutions not only allow but actively facilitate the inclusion of indigenous narratives and values through institutional development plans, curriculum committees, and teacher training initiatives.

Faculty and Student Perception Regarding the Relevance, Challenges, and Impact of Integrating Decolonized Content in Teaching and Learning Practices within Higher Education

The perceptions of faculty and students regarding the integration of decolonized content into teaching and learning practices in higher education reveal a shared recognition of its significance. Many view this shift as a meaningful step toward reclaiming cultural identity, fostering critical thinking, and making education more

inclusive and contextually relevant. However, the responses also bring to light several challenges, including limited institutional support, lack of resources, and uncertainty about how to effectively implement decolonized approaches across disciplines. While some educators and learners have embraced these changes with optimism, others express concerns about navigating unfamiliar content and balancing it with standardized academic requirements. These insights reflect a transition landscape that is grappling with the complexities of transforming curricula while striving to create a more equitable and reflective educational environment.

Cultural Relevance and Affirmation of Identity

Faculty and students across all institutions emphasized that including indigenous knowledge systems and local historical narratives affirms cultural identity and fosters a stronger connection to the learning process. When curricula reflected learners' sociocultural contexts, participants reported increased engagement, critical reflection, and pride in their heritage.

Informant 5 (Student, Ifugao State University) shared:

"When our local stories are used in class, it feels like our identity is being honored. It makes learning more personal and powerful."

Informant 13 (Faculty, Philippine Normal University–North Luzon) stated:

"Teaching precolonial governance or local heroes challenges the colonial mindset. It's an awakening for our learners."

These experiences demonstrate that culturally embedded content has transformative potential, especially when rooted in students' lived experiences and intergenerational narratives. When education centers indigenous perspectives, students shift from passive recipients of colonial knowledge to active co-constructors of meaning.

This finding echoes Geneva Gay's (2010) principles of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, which assert that culturally aligned instruction enhances student performance, motivation, and identity formation. Similarly, Battiste (2017) underscores that cultural relevance in pedagogy restores the learner's sense of agency, especially for indigenous and historically marginalized groups.

From a decolonial standpoint, this resonates with Mignolo's (2007) concept of epistemic delinking—breaking away from the imposed superiority of Western epistemologies and revalidating local worldviews. Students' emotional and

intellectual investment in community narratives fosters both academic empowerment and civic consciousness.

In Southeast Asia, parallel findings were observed by Pearnpitak et al. (2024) in Thailand, where localized curriculum models dramatically increased student participation and historical consciousness. Philippine HEIs can achieve similar outcomes by systematically embedding indigenous knowledge across disciplines, reinforcing that cultural heritage is not peripheral but pedagogically central.

Pedagogical and Structural Challenges in Implementation

While faculty and students acknowledged the value of integrating decolonized content, they also expressed concern over their institutions' persistent structural and pedagogical barriers. Many faculty members described the process of localizing content as labor-intensive and unsupported, with little access to training or materials.

Informant 15 (Instructor, Pangasinan State University) stated:

"We have to develop our own materials. There's no institutional resource for local narratives. Everything is centralized."

Informant 6 (Student, DMMMSU–Mid La Union Campus) noted:

"Some subjects touch on indigenous issues, but others skip them. It depends on the professor."

This inconsistency reflects the overreliance on individual faculty initiatives and the absence of systematized curriculum support. Teachers often create context-relevant modules out of personal commitment rather than institutional obligation. The dependence on Manila-published textbooks, limited community access, and centralized accreditation systems all contribute to the marginalization of local knowledge.

Informant 19 (Faculty, University of Baguio) observed:

"Even if we want to revise our syllabus, we're always cautious. Some think it's not academic enough if it's not in English or from a Western source."

These concerns align with the structural critique posed by Decolonial Theory. Walter Mignolo (2007) and Smith (2021) describe this dilemma as the "coloniality of power," where institutions maintain the hegemony of Western frameworks despite the presence of local alternatives. The marginalization of non-Western content persists not by active censorship but through systemic disincentives, lack of resources, and institutional rigidity.

From a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy lens, Gay (2010) emphasizes that pedagogical inclusivity cannot rely on goodwill alone—it requires systemic change. Teachers must be equipped with freedom and institutional mechanisms: access to training, repositories of localized resources, and recognition of indigenous modes of instruction.

In related contexts, Cabigon and Santos (2022) highlighted that Philippine state universities often lack policy guidance and financial support for curriculum decolonization, leaving educators to navigate uncharted territory without institutional backing. The findings reiterate that unless policy-level reforms are made, the burden of decolonizing the curriculum will continue to fall disproportionately on individual educators, risking burnout, inconsistency, and fragmentation.

Ethical Concerns and the Need for Community Collaboration

Faculty participants expressed deep concern about the ethical responsibilities involved in teaching indigenous content, particularly in the absence of direct consultation with communities. Many feared unintentionally misrepresenting rituals, stories, or beliefs and called for more culturally grounded collaboration methods.

Informant 14 (Literature Professor, University of Baguio) reflected:

“We can’t romanticize or simplify indigenous rituals just to fill a syllabus. These are sacred traditions.”

Informant 8 (Student, DMMMSU–Bacnotan Campus) added:

“It’s more meaningful when we learn from elders or firsthand sources, not just classroom discussions.”

These responses underscore the need for participatory models that prioritize the agency and consent of indigenous communities. While educators strive for inclusivity, they remain aware that there is a risk of tokenism or cultural appropriation without formal frameworks for collaboration.

Informant 22 (Faculty, Philippine Normal University–North Luzon) shared:

“There must be reciprocity. We can’t just extract knowledge. We need to co-create it.”

Some institutions have initiated tentative partnerships with barangay councils or community elders, but these remain informal and inconsistent. Faculty members advocated for more formalized relationships, such as Indigenous Advisory Councils or MOUs with cultural organizations, to guide the ethical integration of content.

This tension between intent and practice illustrates a core concern of Decolonial Theory: the risk of replicating colonial modes of knowledge extraction under the guise of inclusion (Smith, 2021). True decolonization requires epistemic justice—not merely the insertion of indigenous content, but the recognition of indigenous people as co-authors of knowledge.

Gay (2010) stresses in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy that authenticity, validation, and lived experience are indispensable components of meaningful learning. Educators must reference indigenous cultures and center indigenous participation in teaching and curriculum design.

Catama et al. (2024) documented a similar phenomenon in Cordillera institutions, where student immersion and elder lectures produced stronger learning outcomes than textbook-only instruction. In comparative literature, Rahman and Yunus (2021) emphasized that Malaysian universities institutionalized respect for indigenous epistemologies by involving traditional leaders in educational councils.

To avoid perpetuating extractive relationships, Philippine HEIs must build ethical infrastructures that ensure cultural accuracy, consultation, and co-ownership. These structures must be designed for academic compliance, mutual respect, and long-term partnership.

Transformative Impact on Critical Thinking and Social Awareness

Faculty and students across all six institutions consistently highlighted the transformative potential of integrating decolonized content in shaping critical consciousness, historical rethinking, and civic awareness. Exposure to indigenous worldviews, precolonial achievements, and community-based resistance movements allowed students to question dominant colonial narratives and recognize indigenous agency.

Informant 16 (Student, University of Baguio) shared:

“I used to think our history started with colonization. Now I know we had thriving societies, strong women leaders, and native science.”

Informant 11 (General Education Faculty, DMMMSU–Mid La Union Campus) noted:

“Students become more reflective, more analytical. They question what they’ve always been told, and that’s a good thing.”

Faculty participants observed that such paradigm shifts were both academic and deeply affective and ideological. When students encountered localized

epistemologies—particularly those grounded in family, land, and oral traditions—they began to challenge Eurocentric historiography and reassert their own cultural identities in intellectual discourse.

Informant 28 (Faculty, Ifugao State University) reflected:

“Decolonized content sparks curiosity. It becomes a starting point for asking big questions—about injustice, identity, and power.”

This finding aligns strongly with Mignolo’s (2007) concept of delinking, where learners detach from Western epistemological dominance and begin reconstructing identity through local knowledge systems. Such cognitive shifts represent the core outcome of a truly decolonized education—students move from passive recipients of colonial logic to active cultural agents.

Gay (2010) reinforces that culturally responsive teaching is not merely about inclusion, but about activating critical thinking through identity-affirming education. In affirming their community’s stories, students experience what Battiste (2017) describes as “cognitive justice”, validating their ancestral heritage as legitimate knowledge.

In the Philippine setting, Constantino (2015) warned against the long-term effects of colonial education in suppressing indigenous agencies. This study finds that when local narratives are revived in the classroom, students correct historical distortions and develop a stronger sense of social accountability and cultural pride.

Regionally, Sto. Domingo (2015) documented similar student transformations in community-based historical learning models, where narrative recovery empowered learners to engage more critically with contemporary social issues.

Therefore, the integration of decolonized content is not simply a pedagogical preference. It is a transformative act that repositions education as a means of cultural survival, resistance, and rehumanization.

Pedagogical Strategies and Curriculum Frameworks

An analysis of pedagogical strategies and curriculum frameworks across selected higher education institutions reveals a growing shift toward more student-centered and context-responsive approaches. Many programs have begun to adopt active learning methods, such as project-based learning, collaborative tasks, and community-engaged instruction, reflecting a move away from traditional lecture-based models. Curriculum frameworks are increasingly aligned with 21st-century competencies, integrating critical thinking, communication skills, and cultural relevance. However, the results also indicate gaps in coherence and implementation,

with some curricula lacking clear alignment between intended outcomes, teaching methods, and assessment practices. These findings highlight the ongoing efforts—and challenges—in reimagining pedagogy and curriculum to better serve diverse learners and evolving societal needs.

Community-Engaged and Place-Based Pedagogy

Faculty and student responses consistently emphasized the transformative potential of integrating decolonized content in fostering critical thinking and historical consciousness. When exposed to precolonial achievements, indigenous governance systems, and resistance movements, students began questioning colonial narratives and recognizing their communities as active agents in history.

Informant 16 (Student, University of Baguio) reflected:

"I used to think our history started with colonization. Now I know we had thriving societies, strong women leaders, and native science."

Informant 11 (General Education Faculty, DMMMSU–Mid La Union Campus) noted:

"Students become more reflective, more analytical. They question what they've always been told, and that's a good thing."

Faculty members observed a shift in classroom dynamics, students engaged more critically with texts, challenged dominant historiographies, and sought to understand current issues through culturally grounded perspectives.

Informant 28 (Faculty, Ifugao State University) added:

"Decolonized content sparks curiosity. It becomes a starting point for asking big questions—about injustice, identity, and power."

This shift illustrates that integrating local histories and indigenous knowledge systems improves content relevance and fundamentally alters how students approach learning, identity, and civic engagement.

This transformation supports Mignolo's (2007) notion of delinking—the intellectual process by which learners detach from Eurocentric epistemologies and begin to reclaim localized knowledge systems. It also aligns with Freirean critical pedagogy, which views education as a tool for consciousness-raising and social action.

Gay (2010) reinforces that Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is not merely about representation but about developing students' capacity to critique, reflect, and

participate meaningfully in society. When education is embedded in learners' cultural contexts, it becomes a mechanism for empowerment.

In the Philippine context, Constantino's (2015) classic critique of the miseducation of the Filipino remains relevant. As this study shows, students' exposure to counter-narratives—such as pre-colonial systems, local heroes, and indigenous science—cultivates a stronger sense of civic responsibility and historical truth.

Internationally, research by Sto. Domingo (2015) demonstrates that community-based, culturally informed curricula result in more engaged and socially conscious students across Southeast Asia. The study's findings parallel these results, highlighting the potential of a decolonized curriculum to affirm identity and produce reflective, justice-oriented citizens.

These practices affirm Culturally Responsive Pedagogy's call to root learning in the sociocultural worlds of learners (Gay, 2010). Place-based education repositions the community as a legitimate and valuable site of knowledge production.

Decolonial Theory reinforces this shift by calling for the relocation of epistemic authority, from colonizing institutions to community-based, experiential knowledge (Smith, 2021). As Battiste (2017) notes, indigenous ways of knowing are relational and land-embedded; thus, teaching must reflect that ontology.

Parallel frameworks in Southeast Asia have adopted similar place-based learning strategies. For example, Harjatanaya (2025) documented how Indonesian universities utilize traditional ecological practices in curriculum design, improving student engagement and sustainability literacy.

Philippine HEIs, especially in rural or indigenous-adjacent areas, are well-positioned to lead in place-based innovation—but only if such practices are formalized through curriculum development, resource allocation, and community consent.

Integrative Curriculum Design across Disciplines

Participants emphasized the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge systems and local histories across disciplines—not isolating them into separate electives or siloed subjects. Many faculty proposed interdisciplinary curriculum designs that connect cultural knowledge with general education, science, business, and technical courses.

Informant 24 (General Education Coordinator, Pangasinan State University) explained:

"In our GE courses, we can integrate indigenous practices into research, ethics, and even entrepreneurship. These aren't cultural silos—they have practical application."

Informant 18 (Faculty, University of Baguio) shared:

"Our students wrote research papers on their local epic heroes and presented them using oral tradition. That's critical thinking, creativity, and cultural revival in one."

Integrative curriculum design reflects the tenets of both Decolonial Theory and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Mignolo (2007) critiques rigid disciplinary boundaries as colonial constructs that exclude indigenous epistemologies, which are inherently holistic, relational, and context-bound. Embedding indigenous content across academic domains disrupts this exclusion.

Gay (2010) likewise argues that culturally responsive curricula must reflect the complexity of learners' cultural worlds—not isolate them into decorative segments. The use of local myths in philosophy classes, indigenous engineering models in science subjects, or ancestral trade systems in economics demonstrates this principle in action.

In comparative Southeast Asian literature, Lingam (2022) observed that integrated indigenous modules improved student comprehension and interdisciplinary skills in Indonesian and Malaysian teacher education programs. Their findings support this study's claim that integration—rather than token inclusion—is key to sustainability and academic legitimacy.

Philippine HEIs must support interdisciplinary collaboration in syllabus design, encourage alternative learning outcomes (e.g., community projects, multimodal presentations), and institutionalize support for faculty-led curriculum innovation rooted in local knowledge.

Dialogical and Participatory Teaching Methods

Faculty participants advocated a pedagogical shift from lecture-centric, content-heavy models toward dialogical, reflective, and community-grounded learning strategies. Many emphasized that indigenous knowledge systems are transmitted through text and oral traditions, rituals, storytelling, and communal engagement.

Informant 9 (Faculty, Philippine Normal University–North Luzon) reflected:

"We need to go back to kwentuhan, to panagdadap-ay in the Cordillera. These are not just cultural forms—they're pedagogies in themselves."

Informant 7 (Student, DMMMSU–Bacnotan Campus) shared:

"I remembered more from the elders who spoke in our forum than from two chapters of a textbook."

Educators observed that such participatory methods increased retention, stimulated critical reflection, and fostered student empowerment. Dialogical formats—such as circles, open storytelling, and communal analysis—mirror traditional forms of collective wisdom transmission in indigenous communities.

Informant 30 (Faculty, Ifugao State University) stated:

“When we allow students to reflect, speak in their native language, and connect knowledge to family memory, they feel seen. That’s when learning happens.”

This approach is a core tenet of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Gay (2010) contends that dialogic and participatory models foster inclusive classrooms, particularly for learners from oral and communal cultures. These models validate the legitimacy of non-Western pedagogies and foster co-ownership of knowledge.

In parallel, the Decolonial Theory (Smith, 2021; Mignolo, 2007) asserts that the classroom must move from colonial monologue to epistemic plurality. Knowledge should not be delivered but negotiated—built through relationships, context, and reciprocity. When students become co-authors of learning, education transforms from control to collaboration.

In regional literature, Catama et al. (2024) document how Cordilleran universities have used dap-ay (indigenous dialogue circles) as reflective tools in teacher education. This resonates with participatory learning practices observed in Maori, Aeta, and Dayak education, which center on storytelling as both content and method.

Philippine higher education must embrace these dialogical strategies as legitimate pedagogical methodologies—not as supplements to formal education but as epistemologically valid alternatives reflecting indigenous knowledge’s communal, dynamic nature.

Strategies and Framework Recommendations

Drawing from the thematic findings across multiple institutions, this study proposes a set of pedagogical and curricular strategies that align with the principles of Decolonial Theory and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. These recommendations address both the philosophical shift and practical transformation needed to advance inclusive, historically grounded, and culturally affirming education in Philippine higher education institutions.

Proposed Pedagogical Strategies

1. Community-Immersion Projects: Design student fieldwork embedded in indigenous communities for oral history collection, cultural mapping, and lived experience documentation. These activities serve as instructional tools and participatory processes that co-produce knowledge with cultural bearers.
2. Story-work and Oral Traditions: Position storytelling, *kwentuhan*, and native epics as legitimate modes of instruction. These approaches should be treated not as cultural sidebars but as epistemologically valid frameworks for inquiry, ethics, and reflection.
3. Dialogical Learning Formats: Replace rigid recitation or lecture-based methods with dialogic circles, reflective conversations, and community forums that mirror indigenous pedagogies.
4. Multimodal Student Outputs: Expand beyond written exams to include chants, rituals, oral presentations, creative performance, and visual storytelling—forms that reflect cultural knowledge systems.

Proposed Curriculum Framework Elements

1. Interdisciplinary Integration: Indigenous content must not be relegated to isolated courses. Embed local histories, ecological practices, and cultural narratives across all disciplines—from humanities to STEM.
2. Cultural Audit of Existing Courses: Conduct institutional reviews of current syllabi to identify colonial biases and areas for cultural localization. This audit serves as a foundation for curricular re-design.
3. Institutionalized Indigenous Advisory Councils: Formalize the role of cultural elders in curriculum planning, review, and teaching. Their presence ensures that content is accurate, ethical, and co-owned.
4. Localized Learning Outcomes: Redefine course objectives to reflect both academic competencies and indigenous knowledge systems, such as land-based ethics, ancestral governance models, or intergenerational knowledge transmission.

From a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy perspective, these strategies shift learning from abstract theory to lived relevance. They empower students by affirming their cultural identity, fostering critical consciousness, and making education relational and reflective.

From a Decolonial Theory standpoint, the strategies dismantle colonial hierarchies of knowledge and reassert the legitimacy of indigenous ways of knowing.

They reclaim epistemic space, resisting Western epistemological domination by recentring localized frameworks.

As Smith (2021) argues, true decolonization is not about content substitution but epistemic restructuring. These strategies serve as a blueprint for that restructuring, calling institutions to move from performative inclusion to structural transformation.

Conclusion

This multi-site study affirms the urgent imperative of decolonizing higher education in the Philippines by meaningfully integrating indigenous knowledge systems and local historical narratives into curricular and pedagogical practice. Drawing on the lived experiences of faculty and students across six institutions in Northern Luzon, the findings reveal a widespread recognition of the importance of culturally responsive education and the persistent structural and epistemic barriers that hinder its full realization.

While efforts to incorporate indigenous content have begun, isolated modules, community engagement, and teacher-driven initiatives remain uneven, fragmented, and largely unsupported by institutional or national policy. Faculty commitment alone cannot sustain decolonization. Without systemic frameworks, curricular localization will remain discretionary and precarious.

However, this fragmentation also represents a critical juncture: the opportunity to reimagine curriculum, pedagogy, and policy from the ground up. The proposed strategies, ranging from community immersion and dialogical instruction to interdisciplinary frameworks and the institutionalization of indigenous advisory roles, chart a concrete path forward. They position higher education as a space for learning and a transformative arena for epistemic justice and cultural reclamation.

Anchored in Decolonial Theory, the study challenges the ongoing coloniality of Philippine academic structures and reasserts the legitimacy of local epistemologies. Guided by Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, it reframes instruction as a relational, identity-affirming process that draws from students' cultural worlds rather than erasing them.

Content revision is not enough to truly decolonize the Philippine universities. The paradigm itself must shift—from one that privileges Western frameworks to one that values diverse ways of knowing, being, and teaching. This transformation will enhance student engagement and critical thinking and restore education to its rightful place as a vehicle for liberation, community dignity, and national sovereignty.

Conflicts of Interests

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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