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Cultural Identity and Historical Consciousness: A Study of Philippine History Instruction in Tertiary Education

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Abstract

This is a qualitative multiple-case study which explored how the teaching of Philippine History in higher education affects college students' cultural identity, national pride, and historical consciousness, and how teachers took advantage and managed limitations in providing culturally responsive and historically factual education. Using data in five private universities with diverse geographical and cultural settings in the Philippines, the research was conducted with 25-30 respondents from among history professors and students through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. The revisited themes: affirming cultural origins through local stories, taking back identity from colonial discourses, and emotional connection of the past create a sense of cultural self-awareness and nationalistic pride of the students. The pedagogical emphasis on multiply-perspectival analysis, local grounding in lived reality, and reflective, intrinsically motivated learning was considered to promote critical historical consciousness and civic engagement. But the findings also revealed structural barriers, namely inflexibility in curricula, institutional bias towards technical education, and the removal of cultural, social, and political contents, that restrict the possibilities for educators to offer context-related teaching. Despite these obstacles, faculty enacted pedagogical agency as they described their use of innovative practices as digital storytelling, local history projects, and interdisciplinarity. The paper concludes with a call for policy reform, curricular (re)flexibility and strengthening culturally embedded pedagogy that enables school history to be something more than an instrument for performing and celebrating national identity formation or unexamined citizenship practice.

Keywords: Philippine history instruction, Cultural identity, National pride, Historical consciousness, culturally responsive teaching, decolonizing curriculum

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Introduction

Studying Philippine History in college is essential in building the students' cultural identity and historical consciousness. From the basic education system to higher levels of analysis and critical thinking in college, the way history is taught should be different - i.e., from memorizing dates to critically engaging with historical narratives, local histories, and national identity formation. However, in the thick of the forces of globalization and standardization, it seems that the instructional emphasis of numerous general education courses is removed from the lived realities, cultural legacies, and historical battles of the Filipino people. The college level is a very important space to look at and understand how Philippine History is constructed, transmitted, and assimilated among the students in their civic and cultural education years.

In the face of contemporary calls for decolonizing curricula and re-centering indigenous and localized knowledge and perspectives, there is increasing interest in the contribution of history teaching to students' sense of identity and their comprehension of the nation's tangled past. This article delves into the pedagogy, cultural identity, and historical consciousness triangle in higher education-level Philippine history courses. It examines the curriculum content and pedagogy that influences how students relate to the past and what it means to be historically-minded citizens.

Cultural identity significantly influences how students see themselves, their communities, and their places in society. Recent research has highlighted the need to embed culturally relevant pedagogies into HE curricula to support identity development. Students are known to perform their best in a learning situation in which they are recognized and respected in terms of their cultural experiences and identities (Hutchison & McAlister Shields, 2020). As such, co-constructed learning activities allow students to tap into their cultural contexts and increase academic engagement and self-efficacy. This process takes on form in postcolonial societies like the Philippines, where education was utilized as a mode of cultural marginalization for a long time.

Developing this view, Eslit (2024) asserts that Filipino cultural identity is not static; it is situated on a continuum drawn by ancient lineage and contemporary social transformations. In his new preprint, he says Filipino identity is a "kaleidoscope of resilience and adaptability," intimating that identity formation is a dance, an internal cultural affirmation, and an external transaction with global forces. These results support the idea that schools should allow students to discover and assert their

identities, primarily through subjects like Philippine history, which are connected to collective memory and nation-building.

As an aspect of historical thinking, however, a historical consciousness is desired in history education as more than mere “identification” with a particular culture. Historical awareness is the sense of knowing that what has happened in the past influences how we understand what is happening now and is also a means to anticipate what might happen in the future. For modern classrooms, it has been proven that modern teaching methodologies, such as digital storytelling, can increase students’ interest in history. As evidenced by a study by (author, 2020) in *Research in Learning Technology*, digital storytelling can help students retain historical narratives innovatively and encourage greater personal and intellectual engagement with the material. This approach turns passive learning into active questioning, motivating students to question sources, tell history from different points of view, and resist other narratives that may exclude indigenous or other voices.

Mobility in higher education is now seen as an efficient tool to promote ICH. Pastera (2024) found that young Filipino college students who were exposed to cultural expressions at the local level, such as oral traditions, rituals, and community-based arts, had ‘stronger feelings of belonging and identity that lead to greater levels of civic engagement. His research indicates that providing instruction on local heritage, particularly within the subject areas of history and culture, not only develops cultural literacy but also inculcates social responsibility. Moreover, Pastera insists that institutional backing is necessary to maintain ICH learning. Faculty may face challenges when proposing programs requiring community partners, visits to heritage sites, or interdisciplinary study without administrative support. Therefore, incorporating ICH as formal instruction, there is a need to change not just the content of teaching, but also institutional priority and the policy framework in education.

At the policy level, attempts to indigenize and decolonize education in the Philippines have made headway in projects such as the Indigenous Peoples’ Education (IPEd) policy. Miole’s research in the *IAFOR Journal of Education* (2024) analyses the IPEd as a cultural interface model, a conceptual framework in which the indigenous knowledge system (IKS) and critical education meet and intersect. This rights-based approach promotes community participation, linguistic inclusivity, and curricular diversity. Her results suggest that the policy affects access to education more broadly than elementary schooling and has important implications for higher education reforms. When transferred to the tertiary sector, this model has the potential to support the epistemic transition between academic discourse and indigenous world views so that a more inclusive and contextually grounded curriculum can be facilitated.

These studies allude to a pressing call to reimagine Philippine History education in tertiary institutions. Universities and colleges, by combining elements of identity and culture, critical pedagogy, heritage, and inclusion, can help to provide students with the intellectual and moral awareness that would enable them to become informed and critically aware citizen members of a diverse nation.

Although previous scholarship draws much attention to the role of history in constructing national identity and both national and collective memory, few empirical works have focused on how these are conceived, or not, in instruction in Philippine History in higher education. Most of this literature primarily addresses curriculum policy, the content of textbooks, or implementation at the high school level. It leaves a lacuna regarding college history education's pedagogical and practical realities. Additionally, there is a lack of investigation into how students make sense of, connect with, and perceive historical narratives shared in school and their own cultural identities.

Filling this void is the focus of this study on how teaching Philippine History in tertiary schools helps shape the students' cultural identity and historical consciousness. It also aims to explore the barriers that historians of education face in teaching culturally responsive history and the promising pedagogic practices that exist to meet national goals and student realities.

Research Objectives

1. To examine how Philippine History instruction in tertiary education contributes to developing students' cultural identity and national pride.
2. To analyze how historical narratives, themes, and teaching approaches promote historical consciousness and critical understanding among college students.
3. To identify the challenges and opportunities educators face in delivering culturally responsive and historically grounded Philippine History instruction at the tertiary level.

Methodology

Using a qualitative multiple-case study design, this study aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of how Philippine History at the tertiary level figures in the formation of students' cultural identity, historical consciousness, and pedagogical issues of instructors. The study's emphasis on meanings, perspectives, and experiences from students and faculty across unique institutional contexts led to the use of a qualitative methodological approach. Its multi-case design allowed the researcher to

examine different sites, compare teaching approaches, and trace similarities and differences across schools.

The research was conducted in five purposively selected higher education institutions from different regions in the Philippines. These institutions were selected because they offer general education Philippine History courses and because of their geographic and cultural variation. The participants were history teachers, general education heads, and undergraduates in Philippine History. A sample of 25-30 was chosen through a purposive and criterion-based method. Inclusion criteria for faculty were that they had at least 1 year teaching experience on Philippine History; for the students, this was their current enrolment in the same course during the semester of data gathering.

Three methods were used to answer the research questions: semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), and document analysis. Faculty interview data and academic coordinator interview data allowed for a closer look at how faculty embed cultural identity and historical reflection in their instruction and the barriers the institution faces. FGDs were also held with students to draw their observations on how the teaching of Philippine History shaped their identity and historical consciousness. Curriculum materials, including course outlines, textbooks, and CHED policy memoranda, were also reviewed to determine the degree to which cultural and historical coverage can be found within the course.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke's six-step approach: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of themes, review and thematic refinement, defining and naming of themes, and final reporting. The categorization of the data was shaped by the three research aims: (1) cultural identity formation, (2) historical consciousness and critical engagement, and (3) pedagogical challenges and institutional opportunities. Furthermore, data sources (interviews/FGD and the documents) were triangulated to strengthen the credibility and validity of the findings.

Ethical implications were adhered to at all stages of the study. All participants provided informed consent and were assured that they had the right to refuse to participate, that their involvement was voluntary, and that it was anonymous and confidential. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional ethics review boards at the participating universities, and all data were stored securely and strictly used for academic purposes. To establish the study's trustworthiness, it used triangulation, member-checking, peer debriefing, and the thick description of information to guarantee a well-rounded and credible portrayal of the intertwining of cultural and

historical education and the teaching of Philippine history in the Philippine higher education.

Results and Findings

Philippine History Instruction in Tertiary Education

Analysis of participants' responses yielded four main themes depicting the ways Philippine History teaching in the higher education level helps shape students' cultural identity and national pride. These themes point to the transformative capacity of culturally responsive and situated pedagogy to influence how learners understand themselves and their culture. "For one, by affirming cultural roots through local historical content, students see their communities as part of the national story. Second, reclaiming identity from colonial narratives enables the students to question and critique history's dominant stories and see the glory of pre-colonial Filipino history. Third, feeling familiar about the stories of the past: emotional engagement with ancestors' stories and cultural rootedness through linking historical education and personal/familial remembering. Last on the list, localized learning around local grievances and resistance breeds stronger national pride and civic consciousness (Eijansantos et al., 2021).

Theme 1.1: Affirmation of Cultural Roots through Local Historical Content

By the time they are high school students, they read historical accounts that concern their provinces, communities or cultural groups and see themselves as actors in the national epic. This theme emphasizes that local content provides ownership and personal relevance to studying History. Philippine History is seen less as something far and Manila-centric and starts to become something they belong to. The presence of local heroes, regional protests, provincial participation in national movements, and such things make them feel Filipino not just in general, but personal and specific.

"When we study the local heroes from our province, I feel proud to be part of that story. It makes me see myself as a Filipino who comes from a place that also shaped history." (Student participant 4)

"I use stories of local revolutionaries during lectures. I notice students become more attentive—they feel represented." (Faculty participant 8)

This motif suggests how to add the regional or local history and figures into the Philippine History subjects for the enrichment of the cultural identity of the students. As the students learn what their community has also offered into the national narrative, they learn to become more identified with Filipinos. For teachers, VET-

specific instruction provides a strong option for developing interest and “*cultural pride*” among students.

Theme 1.2: Reclaiming Identity from Colonial Narratives

This theme illustrates the critical unlearning process students experience in challenging and moving away from colonial biases established in conventional history education, focusing on pre-colonial communities, indigenous political rule, and cultural expressions before colonization. Philippine history classes double as sites of intellectual decolonization. Students begin to learn that the Filipino identity is not a result of colonization, but an inheritance from various vibrant indigenous societies. This repositioning moves their sense of identity from a mere (colonized) receiver of culture to a member of a vibrant, sovereign body of culture.

“Before, I thought our history only started with the Spanish. But now I understand that we already had our government, culture, and heroes even before colonization.” (Student participant 7)

“Teaching about the barangay system or the babaylan helps dismantle the idea that Filipinos were uncivilized before the Spaniards came.” (Faculty participant 10)

Decolonizing historical content helps students challenge colonial narratives that have long dominated traditional instruction. Participants expressed that learning about pre-colonial governance and indigenous knowledge systems reshaped their perceptions of Filipino identity. This affirms their cultural heritage and cultivates a sense of pride and ownership over their historical roots.

Theme 1.3: Emotional Connection to Ancestral Narratives

History means more when students can emotionally relate to the content. This theme encapsulates an awareness of the personal and family memories that, through the mediation of classroom utterances, can make echoes: those which are retained only by hearing (oral recollections), which are the remnants of ancient traditions of our forebears (ancestral traditions), or are part of country conventions (local customs). These emotional bonds enhance cultural self-consciousness and intensify learners’ respect for their culture. Moreover, when those indigenous practices, oral literature, or locally inspired legends are integrated, the curriculum is enriched and awakened to the capacity for personal reflection, identity reconstruction, and pride of ancestry.

“When we discussed the oral traditions of my region in class, I felt emotional. It reminded me of my grandparents and the stories they used to tell.” (Student participant 17)

“Some students cry when we talk about the struggles of their ancestors. It makes history feel personal, not just academic.” (Faculty participant 6)

The teaching of Philippine History becomes transgressive when it deals with emotionally charged issues, such as ancestral struggles, rituals, and myths. Liaisons across these emotional relations lead to such a deeper self-awareness of culture. By bringing in ancestral memory and oral histories, instructors personalize the subject and enable students to find themselves within a living, developing cultural tradition.

Theme 4: Strengthening National Pride through Contextualized Learning

Context-based learning is instruction that is based on learners’ context, their own lives, and culture. This theme highlights how history teaching improves national pride when connected with local struggles, resistance movements, and indigenous resilience. They educate students about the collective power, bravery, and capability of the Filipino people in their past. By connecting these stories to larger national narratives, students learn to appreciate their history and place as part of a resilient nation with shared values and cultural continuity.

“Learning about local resistance movements and how our ancestors defended the land makes me feel proud to be Filipino.” (Student participant 6)

“History should not just be about memorizing dates; it should inspire love for country. That is what I try to do in my class.” (Faculty participant 2)

This theme captures the emotional and patriotic outcomes of contextualized history instruction. Students who learn about the resilience and agency of their forebears often develop stronger attachments to their Filipino identity. Faculty members see their role as educators and nation-builders—using historical instruction to cultivate informed, patriotic citizens.

Historical Narratives, Themes, and Teaching Approaches Promote Historical Consciousness and Critical Understanding

In analyzing how historical narratives, themes, and teaching approaches have impacted students’ historical consciousness and critical understanding, several features emerged throughout the case studies. The results found that students are exposed to varying degrees of opportunity to think critically about the past, and that this is firmly molded by how students are invited to question, connect with, and engage with the past, rather than simply through content coverage, per se. Once Philippine History instruction extends beyond simply storing and “remembering” facts from the textbook—instead, furthering multi-perspectival thinking, real-world

connections, and critical reflective inquiry, history becomes a more meaningful and living experience. The themes below demonstrate how they also serve as a foundation for students' emerging historical understandings, their capacity to connect the past to the present, and their power to become informed and engaged community members.

Theme 2.1: Seeing History from Many Sides

History was not taught as a fixed story in many participating classes. Instead, students were encouraged to explore different versions of the same event—stories passed down in communities, narratives from colonizers, and textbook interpretations. Teachers challenged students to question where these stories come from, who benefits from them, and what might be missing.

"When our professor compared textbook accounts with indigenous oral versions of the same event, I realized that history is not just about one truth."

"I ask my students to question sources—who wrote them, and why. That sparks deeper conversations in class."

Most participating classes did not teach history as a fixed story. Instead, they were encouraged to consider different stories of the same event - stories held in common by a community, accounts by colonizers, interpretative renderings in textbooks. Teachers asked students: Where do these stories come from? Who has benefited from them, and what is missing?

This approach showed students that history is not just a chronology of facts but a layered narrative constructed by perspective and power. By learning to think critically about historical sources, students gained a greater understanding of how the truth of the past is frequently influenced by who is writing the story. Lentz puts this reflection at the root of historical consciousness and practiced critical thinking.

Theme 2.2: Making the Past Relevant Today

Students shared how lessons became more meaningful when teachers connected the past to issues, they see in the news or experience in their communities. Topics like land disputes, corruption, or people's movements did not feel like distant history; they echoed in today's headlines.

"Learning about land struggles during the Spanish period made me understand current issues about ancestral domain and indigenous rights."

"I always relate historical injustices to what is happening today, especially social inequality and political corruption."

These connections helped students realize that history is not over but still unfolding. Understanding the past gave them tools to interpret the present more clearly. It also gave them a sense of responsibility. They saw themselves not just as learners of history, but as active citizens shaped by it, capable of shaping the future.

Theme 2.3: Learning by Doing and Reflecting

Instead of just listening to lectures or memorizing names and dates, students were given a chance to explore history in personal and hands-on ways. They wrote essays, interviewed, and traced their local histories. Teachers allowed them to reflect, ask questions, and build connections between what they learned and who they are.

"We were asked to write reflective essays on local heroes and how their values relate to us today. That activity made me think about my role in nation-building."

"Instead of lecturing, I assign historical investigation projects where students interview elders or analyze archival sources."

No longer confined to listening to lectures or committing names and dates to memory, students could experience history in personal and tactile ways. There were essays they wrote, interviews they completed, and local histories they even traced their families back to. Teachers allowed them to reflect, ask questions, and make connections between what they had learned and who they were.

This type of learning enabled students to feel they were part of the story. It allowed them to see history as more than something that happened in books or faraway places; they could see it as lived, experienced history that they could also remember in their families and communities. So their sense of ownership deepened their understanding, and their learning had a meaning for them.

Challenges and Opportunities Faced by Educators in Delivering Culturally Responsive and Historically Grounded Philippine History Instruction

Theme 3.1: Curriculum Inflexibility and Institutional Constraints

Teachers Lucy have reported structural barriers such as mandated curricula and school policies that restrict them from incorporating local, community-based, or indigenous histories in classroom activities 11,42. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED)-approved syllabus in Philippine History, for example, tends to favor a chronological, textbook-bound, and Manila-centered narrative. Though they guide learning, so each institution teaches the same basic information, the negative effect is that they prevent educators from connecting history to the communities they serve, including us in Colorado. Furthermore, gen ed administrators might favor what

they think are more market-driven subjects (business, STEM, IT), leading to reduced hours taught, underfunded departments, or history getting in the general education curriculum.

“Even when we want to localize our lessons and include indigenous history or local heroes, the curriculum is rigid. We must strictly follow the CHED syllabus, or we will be questioned during evaluation.” Participant 5

“Sometimes, the institution prioritizes employability skills and technical subjects over subjects like history, so we are given limited teaching hours or even made to combine topics superficially.” Participant 8

This theme reflects the deep tension between academic autonomy and educational standardization. The uniform application of the curriculum disregards the culturally heterogeneous realities of the Philippines, limiting opportunities to teach history in ways that affirm students’ identities and communities. The findings suggest that educators are constrained in their ability to enact culturally responsive pedagogy without institutional support for curricular flexibility or the incorporation of place-based content. This disconnect between policy and practice weakens the development of historical consciousness among students, as history is reduced to rote memorization rather than a reflective, identity-affirming discourse.

Theme 3.2: Cultural Disconnect and Student Engagement

Teachers see that students can be bored or frustrated during lectures that favor standardized or “mainstream” history, notably when it excludes or marginalizes their regional or cultural stories. Not to mention an unfamiliarity with even the directly provincial level and a fucking genocide, which makes history seem far away, intangible, irrelevant even, not to mention irrelevant. By contrast, when teachers introduce discussions on issues like their own regional heroes, the small fights of the local community, or the indigenous traditions of governance, students begin to show an interest in history, pride in who they as a people have become, and a sense of ownership as to the role of their region in the national history.

“Many of our students come from different regions or have little exposure to local histories. They find national narratives boring because they cannot relate to the figures or events discussed.” Participant 2

"If I start discussing Bicolano or Ilocano resistance movements, some students begin to see their communities in the story. That is when they start asking questions and becoming curious." Participant 4

This theme demonstrates the transformative power of culturally responsive history teaching in linking content and lived experience. When teaching history validates students' cultural and regional identities, it generates a sense of historical agency and belonging. Students are more likely to approach the content critically and reflectively when they can see themselves represented in the stories being told. The reading of the interpretation implies that cultural relevance is more than an instructional *"add-on,"* but rather is *"central"* to fostering skills such as historical empathy, critical thinking, and identity process. Without it, history is distant and does not contribute to greater civic and cultural understanding.

Theme 3.3: Pedagogical Innovation and Interdisciplinary Opportunities

Despite structural and curricular constraints, many teachers are finding ways to innovate in teaching history to present students with more historically accurate ideas that are culturally more relevant to students. They employ digital storytelling, oral history gathering, family genealogy, and partnerships with local historians, cultural workers, and community groups. Such interdisciplinary approaches ensure that students in the program do not just study history as a sequence of dates and happenings, but as lived experiences that are the products of location, culture, memory, and identity. Teachers also employ multimodal materials—videos, archives, music, and mapping tools- to make historical themes relevant to social issues like indigenous rights, land struggles, and postcolonial identity.

"We use digital storytelling and project-based outputs to help students explore the history of their barangays or family lineage. It is difficult to manage, but very rewarding." Participant 5

"Partnering with local historians and NGOs has helped bring in voices from outside the classroom, especially when discussing martial law, local revolts, or indigenous governance." Participant 7

This theme reminds us that educators can take *"history and history education back as cultural work"*, as a living thing 'with a pulse', rather than as a unidirectional, static, conservative entity. The reading implies that culturally relevant, historically

embedded pedagogy can occur when instructors are open to possibilities outside of traditional lecture and incorporate interdisciplinary and community-based pedagogies. These practices facilitate more profound learning and help students demonstrate how history is made, debated, and experienced. Where institutional policies allow for such innovations to happen, by funding it, by having a degree of academic freedom, by providing professional development, there is a genuine prospect of reshaping how historical education is delivered, in ways that enable educators and students to become co-constructors of knowledge.

Under all three themes, there is a clear tune: educators are trapped between policy inflexibility and pedagogical imagination. However, it is within these struggles that transformation can be found. Institutions must acknowledge the importance of cultural relevance and local knowledge in meaningful historical education. Through redressing the curriculum in the form of a new curriculum overview (including space for regionalization) and empowering teachers to reinvent the wheel, the greatness that is the tertiary education system can birth a generation of students who are not only historically literate but who are also culturally embedded and socially conscious.

Discussions

This multiple-case study set out to (1) examine how Philippine History courses shape cultural identity and national pride, (2) analyze how narrative choices and pedagogy cultivate historical consciousness, and (3) surface the challenges and opportunities educators encounter when trying to teach in culturally responsive and historically grounded ways. The three objective-aligned clusters of findings concerning current scholarship and theory are discussed below.

Philippine History instruction as a site of cultural identity formation

The four themes, affirmation of cultural roots, reclaiming identity from colonial narratives, emotional connection to ancestral stories, and contextualized pride, confirm that identity work flourishes when history is localized and decentralized. Geneva Gay's culturally responsive teaching model argues that learning becomes personally meaningful only when the curriculum "*filters knowledge through students' cultural experiences*" (Patag, 2024). Our participants' descriptions of heightened engagement whenever provincial heroes, indigenous governance, or regional revolts were foregrounded mirror Gay's claim and extend it to the tertiary Philippine context.

Equally significant is the decolonial turn evident in Theme 1.2. Navales' (2025) review of indigenous knowledge integration warns that colonial curricula perpetuate epistemic injustice unless pre-colonial accomplishments and resistance are restored to

curricular center stage (Gay, 2018). Students in this study echoed that warning, describing a shift from seeing themselves as “recipients of civilization” to heirs of sophisticated pre-Spanish societies. Such shifts illustrate what Perez (2020) calls critical historical consciousness, an awareness that identity is negotiated against structures of power and erasure (Miole, 2024).

Emotionally resonant content (Theme 1.3) amplified these cognitive shifts; recollections of grandparents’ stories or community rituals triggered affective investment that rational argument alone rarely secures. Prior Philippine work on cultural-heritage appreciation among secondary learners (e.g., local awareness studies linking heritage sites to pride) suggests the same effect (Romero, 2020). Our findings push that insight into higher education, showing that undergraduates still crave and benefit from affective anchors in historical study.

Pedagogies that ignite historical consciousness and critical understanding

Three complementary teaching moves, multi-perspectival analysis, explicit present-day connections, and inquiry-based/reflective tasks emerged as the engines of critical historical thinking. Gay (2018) positions multiple perspectives as the antidote to single-story curricula; here, students explicitly credited side-by-side comparisons of textbook, colonial, and oral accounts (Theme 2.1) with exposing history as constructed rather than given. Such awareness aligns with international research on source criticism but gains local specificity when indigenous oral versions are included.

Making the past relevant to current land, corruption, or human-rights issues (Theme 2.2) resonates with literature on social-media-mediated historical consciousness among future educators, where linking Marcos-era abuses to contemporary authoritarian tendencies fosters civic vigilance (Hutchison & McAlister-Shields, 2020). Participants reported a similar “echo effect”, saying they now read headlines through a historical lens and feel morally implicated in ongoing struggles (Bangayan-Manera et al. 2020).

Finally, hands-on projects and reflective essays (Theme 2.3) transferred abstract content into lived identity work. This praxis echoes Freire’s insistence that knowledge arises in the dialectic between reflection and action. Students who interviewed elders or mapped barangay narratives did not merely learn history; they made it intelligible, bolstering ownership and agency.

Structural constraints and openings for culturally responsive practice

The third objective exposed the policy–practice tension that threads through Philippine higher education. CHED’s standardized syllabus, while guaranteeing

coverage, locks many instructors into Manila-centric chronologies and restricts teaching hours (Theme 3.1). Similar critiques surface in decolonizing-curriculum conversations worldwide, which argue that national prescriptions often erase regional epistemologies (Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2008).

Nevertheless, teachers are not passive. Through digital storytelling, community partnerships, and interdisciplinary projects (Theme 3.3), they “*hack*” curricular space to foreground local narratives—practices comparable to citizen-science approaches adopted by Lumad schools to indigenize STEM (Hutchison & McAlister-Shields, 2020). The Philippine case, therefore, illustrates adaptive agency: even within rigid structures, educators exploit micro-autonomies (choice of materials, assessment design) to enact culturally grounded instruction.

The persistent challenge is cultural disconnect (Theme 3.2). When regional identities remain invisible, students disengage—evidence that relevance is a prerequisite to rigor. Culturally responsive history is not an optional enrichment but the pedagogical baseline for fostering historical empathy, critical scrutiny, and national solidarity.

Integrated implications

1. Curricular policy reform. CHED and institutional curriculum committees should legitimize regionalization clauses that allow 20–30 % flexible content anchored in local histories.
2. Professional development. Training in oral-history methods, digital archiving, and decolonizing frameworks will equip instructors to use their micro-autonomies creatively.
3. Community collaboration. Formal partnerships with local museums, indigenous elders, and NGOs can institutionalize the successful ad-hoc collaborations identified here.
4. Assessment redesign. Reflective, project-based assessments must count towards course outcomes to reward depth of inquiry over rote coverage.

Conclusions

Across five diverse Philippine universities, Philippine History courses proved most potent when they (a) affirmed students’ regional and ancestral identities, (b) invited critical, multi-perspectival interrogation of sources, and (c) connected historical insight to present-day social issues. Educators who marshalled local narratives, affect-laden storytelling, and inquiry-driven projects cultivated cultural pride and historical consciousness, key ingredients of active citizenship. Their efforts,

however, unfolded against the grain of rigid, Manila-centric curricula and market-oriented administrative priorities.

The study therefore advocates a dual strategy: loosening structural constraints while simultaneously scaling the grassroots innovations already thriving in classrooms. If policy makers provide curricular flex space and resource backing, and if institutions treat local knowledge as intellectual capital rather than parochial footnotes, Philippine History instruction can move decisively from memorized chronology to living heritage, nurturing graduates who are not only historically informed but culturally rooted, critically engaged, and nationally committed.

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