



Article

Narratives that Educate: The Impact of Teaching Indigenous and Folk Literature on Student Learning in Philippine HEIs

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Abstract

This qualitative multiple-case study looks at how teaching indigenous and traditional literature in Philippine Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) affects how effectively students learn. Based on the ideas of culturally responsive pedagogy, this study looked at how employing indigenous and traditional literature in Philippine colleges and universities affects how students learn and how professors teach. It explored on how students feel about these kinds of literature and what they learn about their own beliefs, feelings, and society as a result. The study also looked at how teachers educate and what problems and opportunities they have when they use local stories to help students become more culturally aware and think critically, wherein there were three schools that have quite diverse cultures. This study extracted its data from 12 teachers in semi-structured interviews, having 15 students in focus groups, watching classrooms, and looking at student work and instructional materials. It used Braun and Clarke's (2006) theme analysis to understand the data. Indigenous and folk literature helps kids feel good about themselves, think more critically, understand how other people feel, and talk to people from other cultures. Teachers employed methods that were based on real-life circumstances and experiences, but they had problems since there were not enough resources, and the curriculum was too limited. This type of literature, along with its imperfections, encouraged ethnic pride, open conversation, and learning that changed people's lives. The study shows that colleges and universities in the Philippines need to make their courses and support for indigenous storytelling far more culturally inclusive.

Keywords: *indigenous literature, folk narratives, culturally responsive pedagogy, intercultural competence, Philippine higher education, transformative learning, cultural identity, qualitative research*

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Introduction

In recent decades, Philippine education has seen a growing call to decolonize the curriculum and promote culturally responsive teaching that centers indigenous perspectives, oral traditions, and local knowledge systems. This movement stems from recognizing that educational practices historically influenced by colonial paradigms have marginalized the country's diverse ethnolinguistic communities' voices, worldviews, and literary traditions. Within Philippine Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the dominance of Western literary canons continues to overshadow indigenous and folk narratives that embody cultural wisdom, lived experience, and ancestral knowledge. Literature such as epic chants, riddles, folktales, myths, and oral histories is not merely a creative expression. They are repositories of cultural identity, environmental philosophy, and social memory (Clemente, 2019).

Including indigenous and folk literature in tertiary education presents an opportunity to reconnect students with their roots while promoting inclusive and transformative learning. As Gay (2010) argues, culturally responsive teaching involves using instructional materials and content that reflect students' cultural identities, fostering engagement, self-worth, and academic growth. Galang (2015) supports this view by noting that integrating regional folklore into classroom discussions helps students reflect on their values and identities. Similarly, Manuelli (2016) found that using indigenous Pacific literature fostered community cohesion and cultural pride. These findings echo Deardorff's (2006) model of intercultural competence, which underscores the importance of empathy, reflective thinking, and communication in navigating cultural difference skills that are inherently nurtured through culturally grounded storytelling.

Despite increasing discourse around decolonized education and the integration of local knowledge systems, there remains a significant gap in empirical research that examines the actual pedagogical use and impact of indigenous and folk literature (Casil-Batang, 2021) in Philippine HEIs. Existing studies often focus on preserving cultural content or curriculum frameworks, but rarely investigate how students and educators interact with these texts within classroom settings. Furthermore, few inquiries explore how such literature contributes to students' cognitive, emotional, and intercultural development in real learning environments (Bangayan-Manera, 2019). This study addresses these gaps by investigating the role of indigenous and folk literature in cultivating empathy, critical thinking, and cultural awareness among college students across selected HEIs in the Philippines.

Cultivating cultural rootedness in a highly globalized world is essential for students to engage with diverse perspectives meaningfully. Literature from

marginalized or historically excluded communities not only creates space for inclusion and recognition but also challenges conventional ways of learning (Saquing, 2018). This is particularly crucial in the Philippine context, where more than 110 ethnolinguistic groups coexist, yet many remain absent from formal education narratives. The Narratives that Educate study investigates how indigenous and folk literature can enhance students' cultural engagement, reflective thinking, and intercultural understanding when integrated into college-level instruction. Grounded in both literary and educational theory, this research contributes to broader national and academic efforts to build learning environments that are historically grounded, culturally responsive, and socially transformative.

Research Questions

1. How do students perceive integrating indigenous and folk literature into their coursework in Philippine higher education institutions?
2. What cognitive, emotional, and cultural learning outcomes do students develop by studying indigenous and folk narratives?
3. How do educators in higher education teach indigenous and folk literature, and what challenges or opportunities do they experience in fostering cultural awareness and critical engagement?

Methodology

This study used a qualitative research design because with three goals: (1) to look at how teachers in Philippine higher education institutions teach indigenous and folk literature; (2) to see how these literary traditions affect students' cultural awareness and engagement; and (3) to find out what both teachers and students think about the educational effects of these stories. It looked at many case studies to learn more about how things are done in the classroom and how people live in different cultural and institutional settings.

The study picked three universities to highlight the differences between the country's regions and cultures. Southern Luzon State University was established in Luzon, Southern Leyte University was established in Visayas, Mindanao State University, and Tawi-Tawi Institute of Technology and Oceanography was established in Mindanao. We got our information by talking to 12 faculty members who had taught indigenous or folk literature for at least three years, 15 students who had taken related courses, and watching how cultural content was taught and received in real time in the classroom. We also learned more from course materials like syllabi,

reading guides, and examples of student work, such as creative projects and introspective essays.

This researcher filmed all the interviews and talks, typed them out, and then used Braun and Clarke's (2006) theme analysis method to look at them. It used inductive and deductive coding approaches to ensure that the themes were deep and fit with the study's theoretical base in culturally responsive schooling. Member-checking made the data more trustworthy, and getting ethical approval and informed consent ensured that the research followed ethical guidelines. This plan ensured the research was based on solid footing, included various viewpoints, and represented the many distinct voices in higher education in the Philippines.

Data Analysis and Findings

The Perception of Students in Philippine Higher Education Institutions Regarding the Integration of Indigenous and Folk Literature

Adding indigenous and folk literature to the curriculum is a big step toward making Philippine higher education more culturally sensitive. These stories, which are frequently based on oral traditions and local cosmologies, are an excellent way for kids to learn about their own culture, feel for others, and think critically. Schools have not usually taught indigenous and folk literature, but now they are seen as important for breaking down colonial ways of knowing and encouraging learning that includes everyone (Estacio, 2019; Ladia, 2021). Reading these works gives people of all ages a chance to talk to each other, learn more about social issues, and validate the views and experiences of people in their communities (Baldonado & Dayagbil, 2022). This is important as colleges and universities try to deal with issues of cultural relevance and representation. There has not been much research on how children read and understand different types of literature, though, especially in institutions that have historically focused on Western literary canons. There has not been enough research on the problems teachers face when they use indigenous texts to teach students about other cultures (Salvador-Amores, 2013; San Juan, 2017). This study intends to fill these gaps by looking at how students, teachers, and learning outcomes linked to indigenous and folk literature are perceived at three colleges and institutions in the Philippines that are incredibly unique.

Affirmation of Cultural Identity and Heritage

Many students thought combining indigenous and folk literature was a terrific way to learn about the country's rich history and exhibit their cultural identity. They

assumed that taking the class would help them make up for the fact that Western literary canons are everywhere and help them reconnect with their roots.

Participant Responses:

"Reading these stories reminded me of my childhood in the province, our myths, our superstitions, it felt personal, not just academic." Participant 9

"We used to think our culture was backward or not academic enough. Nevertheless, this course made me realize how rich and meaningful our literature is." Participant 1

When students read indigenous and folk stories in class, it helps them feel like their culture is authentic. For many kids, this is the first time they have seen their own experiences in a school setting, which helps them feel more connected to and proud of who they are. This supports Gay's (2010) idea that teaching in a way sensitive to different cultures can help people build their identities.

Awakening Critical Awareness and Social Sensitivity

Students said that reading indigenous and folk literature made them think more critically about social and political issues like colonization, the marginalization of indigenous people, and the importance of oral histories in learning the truth about the past.

Participant Responses:

"I became more aware of the struggles of the Lumad and other indigenous communities. These stories gave faces and emotions to what we usually only read in news articles."

Participant 4

"The folklore we studied was not just entertainment; it revealed indigenous groups' worldview, values, and even resistance to colonial forces." Participant 5

Indigenous and folk literature help students see history from different points of view. These stories teach students to be empathetic and think critically, which are important skills for interacting with people from other cultures (Deardorff, 2006). This theme shows how literature can change how people think about things and how society thinks about things.

Initial Resistance and Shifting Perceptions

Some students initially did not think indigenous and folk literature was important for school because they thought it was not as hard as canonical writing.

Nevertheless, as the course went on, many people said their minds changed and they saw how rich these stories were regarding culture and intellect.

Participant Responses:

"At first, I thought this course would be too 'local' and useless for my major. Nevertheless, I have learned much about literature and who we are as a people." Participant 6

"I used to associate literature only with Shakespeare or Rizal. Now, I appreciate why elders' stories are also literature; they are just as profound." Participant 2

This theme shows how teaching can change how students think. For instance, students learned more about literature by doing reflective exercises, discussing it in context, and listening to oral stories. This backs up Banks' (2015) claim that multicultural education broadens students' intellectual horizons by exposing them to different stories.

Engagement through Creativity and Local Relevance

Students liked activities that let them respond to indigenous literature creatively, such as drawing, acting, or telling stories in their way. These formats made them more interested in what they were studying and made it more fun.

Participant Responses:

"We were asked to rewrite a local myth in a modern setting. It helped me relate our old stories to what is happening now." Participant 5

"I got to perform a chant from our local tribe. It felt empowering to bring my culture to life in the classroom." Participant 14

Students were more interested and learned better when they did things and were active. Teachers helped students connect what they learned in class to their own lives by letting them use ideas from books in their own cultures and communities. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory is clear: pupils learn best when actively involved.

College and university students in the Philippines responded that reading indigenous and folk literature in class was a great way to learn and change their lives. It helped them learn more about themselves, be more open-minded, think critically, and be creative. At first, some youngsters were not sure, but how the stories were conveyed in a way that respected other cultures changed their minds for the better.

These results support the idea that indigenous and folk literature can be instrumental in education that is whole, open to everyone, and cognizant of social issues.

Cognitive, Emotional, and Cultural Learning Outcomes of Filipino Students

In the last few years, more people have realized how important it is for Philippine higher education institutions (HEIs) to teach indigenous and folk literature. These literary traditions are a part of the country's long and rich cultural past. They let kids learn about worldviews, values, and histories not typically found in regular books. As schools become more open to and aware of other cultures, indigenous and folk stories are great ways for youngsters to learn about their culture, think critically, and feel for others. These stories differ from other works of literature because they show how people of different races and languages live in the Philippines. Using them in college classes helps students read literature better and see things from other people's points of view. This study looks at the learning outcomes that emerge from this type of integration. It focuses on the cognitive, emotional, and cultural aspects of students' growth and development. Philippine higher education institutions (HEIs) can help students feel more connected to their nation, develop a stronger sense of morality, and become better at talking to individuals from various cultures by focusing on indigenous and folk stories in their classrooms.

Deepened Cultural Awareness and Identity Affirmation

When students read stories from indigenous and traditional cultures, they learnt more about and respect their cultural roots. These books taught students about languages, customs, and values from their region that are not generally taught in regular school. They were proud of their heritage because of the exposure, which made them ponder their ancestry. Folk tales, myths, and oral literature were like mirrors that showed pupils how they and their communities were written about at school.

Participant Responses:

"Before studying these texts, I never thought of my community's stories as valuable. Now, I feel proud that we have our literature that speaks of our beliefs and struggles."
(Participant 9, SLSU -Student)

"Reading the epic of Tuwaang made me understand that literature is not just about the West. Our stories are just as grand, just as worthy." (Participant 6, MSU-TCTO-Student)

Students can be proud of their culture and fight against colonialism, which has become a part of their lives, by reading indigenous literature. Banks (2015) says multicultural education helps students connect with their cultural heritage and fight

for social justice. This result is part of a whole educational experience that everyone can have, which is helpful.

Enhanced Critical Thinking and Cognitive Flexibility

Indigenous and folk literature makes students think more profoundly about morality, community, and history, making them question their black-and-white views of the world. Students learn to think about diverse meanings, compare points of view, and see things unique to a specific situation through myths, symbols, and oral traditions. This helps people learn how to think and understand things in general.

Participant Responses:

"In one of our readings, the protagonist was a trickster—not a hero or villain in the usual sense. I had to rethink how values are presented in literature." (Participant 3, SLSU – Student)

"Discussing these texts in class helped me understand that truth and wisdom can be found outside Western logic. It broadened my thinking." (Participant 7, MSU-TCTO – Student)

These answers suggest cultural variety and critical literacy are linked to cognitive outcomes. According to Gay (2010), culturally responsive teaching helps students grow better at judging things by giving them texts that show them other ways of knowing. The stories changed how the kids thought about complicated and confusing things.

Emotional Empathy and Ethical Sensitivity

Folklore and stories from indigenous cultures frequently have emotional parts that make people feel for others. Some subjects include family, community sacrifice, moving, and caring for the environment. Students said being emotionally connected to characters and communities made them feel more human and gave them a sense of right and wrong.

Participant Responses:

"The story about the displacement of the Manobo people made me emotional. It was not just a reading; it was a real struggle." (Participant 5, MSU-TCTO – Student)

"I cried reading about how a woman turned into stone because of grief. It taught me how oral stories carry emotional truths." (Participant 2, SLSU- Student)

Students learned more about ethics by getting emotionally involved. Bennett (2009) says empathy is important for progress between cultures, and reading books that focus on voices that are usually left out helps people develop their moral

imagination. These results help kids better understand others and stand up for fairness and inclusion.

Strengthened Intercultural Communication and Perspective-Taking

Folklore and native stories often use idioms, metaphors, and story patterns that are only used by specific ethnic and language groups. As students read these stories, they better understood and talked to people from different cultures. This made people talk to each other more civilly and want to learn more about how other people see the world.

Participant Responses:

"We had to read a story in Cebuano. At first, I was lost, but our discussion helped me understand how language shapes thought." (Participant 1, SLSU-Student)

"Our professor had us interpret a Tausug epic. It made me realize how different and rich Muslim cultures are." (Participant 10, MSU-TCTO -Student)

Reading indigenous and folk stories can help people learn about other languages and cultures. Deardorff (2006) says that you must have the right mindset, knowledge, and skills to work with people from different cultures. The students in this study learned how to think about cultural things they did not know about, which helped them communicate better with each other.

Reading indigenous and folk literature in colleges and universities in the Philippines helps students learn a lot. They get better at critical thinking and interpretive reasoning, learn how to be more empathetic and ethical, and learn more about their own culture and other cultures. These results support that reading books relevant to your culture and situation can be a great way to learn.

Challenges or Opportunities They Experience in Fostering Cultural Awareness

In the last few years, teaching indigenous and folk literature in Philippine colleges and universities has become an important approach to help students learn about other cultures, think critically, and create a sense of national identity. Teachers must do more than only teach literature now. They must also protect cultural heritage using literature based on oral traditions and community stories. On the other hand, this position is challenging because it requires both cultural awareness and help from the company. As universities in the Philippines try to make their curricula more open and freer from colonialism, including indigenous and folk traditions, it becomes both a chance and a source of conflict. It lets kids reconnect with their culture but also makes it hard for instructors to deal with limited resources, uncertain policy direction, and curricular restrictions (Gay, 2010; Caruana, 2014; Nakata, 2007). This study examines

how literature teachers in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao teach indigenous and folk literature. It illustrates the teaching methods, school settings, and student-centered behaviors that support or damage their efforts. This study is focused on frameworks for culturally responsive teaching and indigenous education. It highlights how vital it is for instructors to assist children in becoming culturally aware, thinking critically, and shaping their own identities through reading books that show the diverse voices of the Filipino people.

Contextualized and Experiential Pedagogy

When teaching indigenous and folk literature in college, teachers often use methods based on the students' own experiences and the setting of the work. These include using stories from the area, activities that immerse students in the culture, storytelling sessions, and writing that makes students think about what they have read. The goal is to show that folk and indigenous literature are not just old texts, but also living traditions that show the values, beliefs, and histories of different Filipino communities.

Participant Responses:

"I try to incorporate stories from the students' locality. They relate better when the stories are familiar, when they have heard them from elders or have experienced similar customs." (Participant 4, Faculty, Southern Luzon State University)

"We invited a local elder to narrate the origin myths in person. The students were amazed. It was not just literature anymore; it was culture alive in the room." (Participant 8, Faculty, Mindanao State University-Tawi-Tawi)

These strategies help students learn more about different cultures by teaching them how folk tales connect to their lives and other people's lives. Teachers help pupils recall their culture by showing them how literature may connect what they learn in school to what they already know about their culture. Gay (2010) says culturally responsive teaching gives youngsters the tools to relate what they learn in school to their culture.

Resource Limitations and Institutional Constraints

Teaching indigenous and folk literature is important to most people, but teachers often must deal with problems with how things are set up. Some of these include the lack of culturally appropriate teaching materials, institutions not giving

enough support for involvement in the community, and the lack of time because of the tight curricula that follow Western literary canons.

Participant Responses:

"Sometimes we have to rely on photocopied stories or oral retellings because published indigenous texts are hard to find or expensive." (Participant 2, Faculty, Southern Leyte State University)

"The curriculum is packed with Western classics, and there is little room for indigenous texts unless we squeeze them into thematic modules." (Participant 7, Faculty, Mindanao State University – Tawi-Tawi)

These rules make it tougher for teachers to teach in a deep and meaningful way, so they must be creative within their current structures. The results are comparable to what Caruana (2014) found: institutional systems usually do not allow for flexible teaching techniques that incorporate everyone; thus, people only engage with non-dominant narratives on the surface. So, it is vital to adjust the curriculum and rules so that instructors have the tools to teach literature in a way that makes sense and is relevant to their culture.

Opportunities for Critical Dialogue and Identity Formation

Indigenous and folk literature is challenging to teach. However, it allows students to talk about important things, perceive things from a decolonial point of view, and figure out who they are. Teachers claim that when students talk about oral traditions, myths, and folk tales, they examine the stories they hear, reflect on their cultural background, and learn more about how colonial and postcolonial influences have changed their lives.

Participant Responses:

"When we read legends from the Cordilleras or epics from Mindanao, students begin to ask, why didn't we learn these earlier? They start reflecting on their erased histories." (Participant 5, Faculty, Southern Luzon State University)

"It is empowering for students to see their own cultures represented in the curriculum. They realize literature is not only from abroad or Manila, it is in their families, their communities." (Participant 10, Faculty, Southern Leyte State University)

Mezirow's (2000) theory of transformative learning suggests that changing how you think about your beliefs can change how you see things. Because of this, teachers assist students in thinking about their identity, resistance, cultural pride, and literary form. These activities help kids learn about their civic duties, be more understanding,

and get along better with individuals from other cultures. These are crucial skills for living in a community with many different cultures.

Teachers in higher education in the Philippines employ a variety of culturally sensitive ways to teach indigenous and folk literature. These strategies mix academic study with real-life experiences. However, they have challenges with institutions and resources that make it impossible to integrate completely. Even yet, the stories are beneficial for helping students become informed, caring, and culturally aware since they give them opportunities to think critically, engage with culture, and explore their identities.

Discussion

Adding indigenous and traditional literature to colleges and universities in the Philippines has been a project that has enriched culture and changed the way teachers teach. The Philippine context is marked by diverse ethnic and linguistic groups (Butac et al., 2025), and education in this context is culturally rich. The study's results show three main things: first, students see these stories as ways to express their cultural pride and identity; second, the learning outcomes cover cognitive, emotional, and sociocultural areas; and third, teachers use flexible, often community-based methods but still must deal with systemic problems.

Gay's (2010) model for culturally responsive education says that students reported that indigenous and folk stories helped them personally connect with their cultural heritage. These stories taught us about local histories and values not usually covered in literature classes, primarily in the West. Banks (2015) suggests that bringing local experiences to the classroom might make it more inviting and accepting of students' identities. The study also revealed that reading real-life oral histories and stories about people going through hard times made people feel empathy and pride. According to Mezirow's (2000) transformative learning theory, thinking about other cultures can affect how people see things and help them learn more about themselves. Therefore, it is appropriate for many institutions in the Philippines to actively localize curriculum content by incorporating cultural modules and community-based resources (Gadaza et al., 2025).

Teachers at all three case study sites used hands-on and reflective teaching strategies such as oral storytelling, fieldwork, and group interpretative assignments (Bangayan-Manera, 2019). Many teachers claimed they were still having trouble because there was not enough assistance from the school, the rules for the curriculum were out of date, and there were not enough materials (Frutas, 2019). Bangayan-Manera (2019) mentioned something similar about how intercultural pedagogy needs

assistance from the system to grow in the institution, where students are learning. It was easier to see these problems in regions where not many culturally appropriate publications or indigenous languages used in the classroom. Moreover, Gadaza et al (2025) confirmed that cultural roots through localized content, a hands-on teaching strategy, significantly enhance students' cultural self-awareness and national pride.

The study also showed that folk tales can help people think critically because they are like conversations. Students learned about how various cultures are when they were encouraged to look critically at myths, stories, and epics. They also learned how to examine colonial histories and value different points of view. This supports Nakata's (2007) theory of the "cultural interface," which says that indigenous and Western thinking methods can coexist, allowing students many chances to talk about their ideas and cultures in the classroom.

Conclusion

Teaching indigenous and folk literature in colleges and universities in the Philippines is very significant for changing how literature is taught. It does this by putting local voices first, helping kids create their cultural identity, and getting them to think critically. It helps fill in the gaps in knowledge between generations. It allows teachers and students to understand local ways of knowing in academic fields generally dominated by Western canons. Students are learning more about other cultures, becoming more understanding, and being more involved in their studies. Schools must be willing to change, update their curricula, and provide instructors the help they need to improve for this type of teaching to work.

In the future, it will be very necessary for teachers to learn about culturally responsive frameworks, buy localized teaching materials, and cooperate with indigenous groups to ensure everything is authentic and done ethically. By fixing these structural problems, higher education in the Philippines may move toward a more inclusive and decolonized way of teaching that recognizes the country's rich cultural history and gives students the skills they need to work with people from different cultures in an increasingly varied world.

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