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Creative 'Bila-bila' Folkloric Music and Dance: A Proposed Contextualized Teaching Strategy for MATATAG Curriculum in Marinduque, Philippines

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Abstract

This study explores Bila-bila, a folkloric music and dance tradition from Marinduque, Philippines, emphasizing its role as both a cultural symbol and an instructional resource within the Department of Education's MATATAG curriculum. Through an analysis of its musical structure, lyrical themes, choreographic movements, and traditional costumes, the research highlights Bila-bila's significance in affirming Marinduque's identity as the nation's "butterfly haven." The performance reflects the province's ecological and cultural landscape, embodying the people's relationship with nature and their dedication to preserving heritage. Findings indicate that Bila-bila fosters social cohesion, strengthens cultural pride, and promotes environmental awareness by using the butterfly as a symbol of biodiversity and sustainability. Beyond cultural and ecological relevance, the study positions Bila-bila as a meaningful instructional tool that can enrich the MATATAG curriculum. Its integration into classroom practice enables teachers to contextualize lessons, advance heritage education, and nurture learners' appreciation for Filipino traditions while aligning with the curriculum's goals of localization and cultural integration. The recognition of Bila-bila by government agencies such as the DILG and LGU underscores its value as both a cultural emblem and an educational innovation. As a localized resource, it actively engages learners with Marinduque's heritage while deepening ecological and cultural consciousness. Ultimately, the study demonstrates Bila-bila's enduring potential to bridge cultural preservation, environmental responsibility, and educational development, ensuring its legacy within both community life and formal education.

Keywords: Bila-bila, MATATAG curriculum, Cultural heritage, Contextualized learning, Folkloric teaching strategy, Marinduque, Environmental awareness, Intangible cultural heritage

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Introduction

Integrating Bila-bila into the Department of Education's MATATAG curriculum directly advances SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) using a local cultural asset to deliver relevant, value-rich learning. The MATATAG reform, rolled out in phases beginning SY 2024–2025, explicitly targets coherent, streamlined learning standards and provides updated Music and Arts curriculum guides that can host contextualized content such as folk dance and local heritage themes (Department of Education [DepEd], 2023a, 2023b). Embedding Bila-bila within these guides can strengthen cultural identity while meeting contemporary competencies in arts literacy and civic engagement (DepEd, 2023b).

Bila-bila, a butterfly-themed folk tradition rooted in Marinduque's landscape and community life, embodies the island's reputation as a "*butterfly haven*," celebrated annually through parades, performances, and conservation-oriented activities. Recent provincial and national features document how the festival mobilizes tourism, entrepreneurship, such as butterfly farming, and environmental awareness, making it a ready-made platform for place-based, sustainability-oriented lessons (Marinduque Provincial Government, 2022; Department of Trade and Industry [DTI], 2021; Philippine Information Agency [PIA], 2022).

International and national scholarship supports culture- and place-based education as a lever for relevance, identity formation, and community resilience. UNESCO (2015, 2018) underscores that integrating intangible cultural heritage (ICH) into schooling deepens emotional engagement, pride, and belonging, especially among marginalized learners, while emphasizing the importance of intergenerational transmission. Philippine policy likewise mandates culture-based and contextualized education through IPED and related DepEd issuances, providing a governance basis for local content like Bila-bila (DepEd, 2016).

Culturally responsive and place-conscious pedagogies provide theoretical grounding for such integration. Gay (2010) stresses that filtering instruction through learners' cultural knowledge elevates engagement and achievement, while Gruenewald (2003) argues for a "critical pedagogy of place" that roots curricula in local ecological-cultural realities to foster stewardship and civic responsibility, an excellent fit for butterfly conservation narratives embedded in Bila-bila.

Arts-integration research further indicates academic and socio-emotional gains from embedding arts processes into core learning. Meta-analyses and quasi-experimental studies report positive (though varied) effects on academic performance, memory, and arts learning, suggesting that movement, music, and story embedded in

Bila-bila can support retention, motivation, and cross-curricular outcomes such as science of life cycles or local economic practices (Winner, Goldstein, & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013; Hetland & Winner, 2004).

Finally, Philippine dance scholarship supplies historical precedent for school-based folk-dance instruction. Aquino's (1960/1980) pioneering documentation and subsequent NCCA work established the value of systematic research and pedagogical codification of folk forms, foundations that contemporary curricula like MATATAG can update with local variants such as Bila-bila (National Commission for Culture and the Arts [NCCA], 2019).

Despite supportive policy, theory, and festival documentation, empirical studies that design, implement, and evaluate a Bila-bila-based learning sequence within the MATATAG Music and Arts CG (and across science/values integration) remain scarce. Existing literature tends to treat folk dances broadly rather than as a locality-specific form tied to biodiversity and livelihood; discuss culture-based education conceptually without reporting classroom trials aligned to MATATAG standards; or describe the festival's tourism and cultural value without measuring learner outcomes such as arts proficiency, environmental literacy, and civic disposition under school conditions. There is also limited evidence on teacher professional development models and assessment tools tailored to Bila-bila modules and how such modules concretely advance SDG-aligned targets of inclusivity and sustainability (DepEd, 2023b; UNESCO, 2018). Addressing these gaps through design-based or mixed-method evaluations can demonstrate how a place-specific ICH like Bila-bila operationalizes MATATAG priorities while producing measurable gains in identity, knowledge, and sustainability competencies.

Methodology

This study explored Bila-bila as a cultural symbol of Marinduque and a potential pedagogical tool within the MATATAG curriculum. Using a qualitative approach, it examined Bila-bila's socio-cultural and educational significance through thematic analysis of data gathered from interviews, field observations, and document reviews.

Two respondent groups were engaged: cultural practitioners, including performers and historians, who provided insights into Bila-bila's history, music, dance, and costumes; and seven Grade 7 MAPEH teachers, who assessed its integration into classroom instruction. The study also registered Bila-bila's music with the Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines (IPOPHIL) and the National Library of the Philippines, recognizing its cultural and intellectual value [3].

Field participation and document analysis further enriched the study, comprehensively understanding Bila-bila's role in cultural preservation and education. Data were analyzed using thematic coding, leading to a conceptual framework positioning Bila-bila as both a heritage marker and a teaching strategy. Ethical considerations were observed, and findings will be shared through scholarly publications, conferences, and community workshops to promote Bila-bila's continued relevance in education and cultural preservation.

Results and Discussions

Creative Bila-bila's Musical Composition, Lyrical Composition, Dance Properties, Costume, and Received Recognitions

The study highlights the multifaceted ways in which Bila-bila dance contributes to Marinduque's identity in terms of the musical composition, dance properties, and costume. It serves as a bridge between the island's natural beauty, cultural heritage, and economic aspirations. By understanding and appreciating this intricate connection, we can further leverage Bila-bila's potential to enrich Marinduque's present and future, ensuring its enduring appeal as a vibrant island brimming with cultural treasures.

Analysis of the piece:

The music is written in G Major and 2/2 and $\frac{3}{4}$ time signatures, which is multi-metric. The tempo is lively, and it has 87 measures, and the types of notes used were half notes, quarter notes, dotted quarter notes, and eighth notes. The rest used are eight rests. The first part is lively, and the second part is waltzing style. The chords used are C Major, G Major, D7, D Major, E Major, A Major, and E7. The nature of the music is folkloric.

Analysis of the lyrics:

The song "Bila-Bila" by Rex Emmanuel L. Asuncion celebrates beauty, freedom, and the enchanting spirit of a place. Below is an analysis of the lyrics:

Imagery and Symbolism: The lyrics vividly paint an image of a beautiful and unique individual described as a "mariposa" (butterfly) with captivating qualities. "Parang isang dalaga" (like a young lady) suggests grace and femininity.

Connection to Nature: The song invites the listener to join in the celebration, whether in the fields ("bukid") or meadows ("parang"). This connection to nature emphasizes that the beauty and freedom represented by "Bila-Bila" are intertwined with the natural landscape.

Emphasis on Dreams and Aspirations: The lyrics highlight the dreams and aspirations associated with “Bila-Bila,” portraying her as a source of inspiration. The repeated phrases “*Ang kampay mo, ang indak mo’y sadyang mapangarap*” (Your wings, your dance are truly dreamy) suggest a sense of optimism and the pursuit of aspirations.

Chorus: With its repetitive and uplifting lines, the chorus encourages “Bila-Bila” to soar freely. The use of “*Lipad hala lipad bila-bila*” reinforces the theme of freedom and flight, further connecting the character to the enchanting beauty of their island.

Cultural and Natural References: References to the “bukid,” “parang,” and “harding Maganda ng aming munting isla” (the beautiful garden of our small island) ground the song in a specific cultural and geographical context, likely Marinduque. It adds a sense of local identity and pride to the narrative.

Gratitude and Admiration: The lyrics express gratitude for the blessing that “Bila-Bila” represents, portraying her as a gift from a higher power (“*Ikaw ay isang biyaya, mula sa ating Mayliha*”). Her admiration for her extends to the freedom she embodies and the joy she brings to the community.

Repetition and Structure: The repetition of specific lines, especially in the chorus and the closing lines, creates a rhythmic and memorable structure. This repetition emphasizes key themes and contributes to the song’s uplifting and celebratory tone.

Linguistic Analysis of “Bila-Bila” Lyrics:

Lexical Choices: The lyrics feature a mix of Tagalog and English, creating a bilingual and culturally rich expression. Words like “*mariposa*,” “*bukid*,” and “*Ligaya*” contribute to the local flavor, while English words like “blessing” and “island” add a global dimension.

Imagery and Descriptive Language: The lyrics use vivid imagery and descriptive language to paint a picture of beauty and freedom. Words like “*mariposa*” (butterfly), “*harding Maganda*” (beautiful garden), and “*sa iyong mga pakpak*” (with your wings) evoke visual and sensory experiences.

Cultural References: Using terms like “*Maganda*” and “*Ligaya*” reflects cultural references, connecting the song to Filipino values and concepts. The lyrics celebrate the beauty of the Philippines, specifically referring to a captivating and joyful figure.

Repetition: The repetition of the chorus, particularly the phrase “*Lipad bila-bila*,” adds a rhythmic and memorable element to the song. This repetition reinforces the theme of flying and freedom.

Symbolism: The repeated mention of “*kampay mo*” (your wings) and “*lipad*” (fly) symbolize freedom, aspiration, and the pursuit of dreams. The song encourages embracing one’s unique qualities and reaching for dreams.

Rhyme and Rhythm: The lyrics maintain a consistent rhyme scheme and rhythmic flow, enhancing the song’s musicality. The rhyming words and the repetition of certain sounds contribute to the overall melodic quality.

Message: “Bila-Bila” conveys a positive and uplifting message, celebrating individual uniqueness, freedom, and the homeland’s beauty. The song suggests that embracing one’s dreams and distinctive qualities leads to fulfillment and abundance.

Poetic Elements: The lyrics incorporate poetic elements such as metaphor (“*ang apakpak mo’y ikampay, bila-bilang Inday*”), alliteration (“*lipad hala lipad bila-bila*”), and personification (“*sa kampay mo, sa indak mo’y tunay na pangarap*”). These elements contribute to the artistic and expressive nature of the lyrics.

“Bila-Bila” is not just a song; it is a cultural celebration, an ode to beauty, freedom, and aspirations embodied by a central figure. The blend of nature, dreams, and cultural references makes this song a powerful expression of identity and pride, rooted in the unique charm of Marinduque.

Costume and Materials

According to the designer, Dr. Liza Marie Manoos–Pacia, the *kimona* was designed in a colorful and glittering style. The *saya* is designed in a long, wide art skirt with a finger ring on both sides so that the female dancers can act like butterflies.

For the boys, the Barong Tagalog or Camisa de Chino and colored trousers are the most appropriate costumes.

The materials are created because they are commonly designed for a butterfly net or the *Marindukanon* term “*sigpaw*”.

The study confirms that the Bila-bila dance plays a significant role in shaping and reflecting the identity of Marinduque, particularly concerning the province’s booming butterfly industry and recognition by agencies like DILG and LGU.

Butterfly Booming Industry:

Cultural Representation: Bila-bila’s graceful movements and vibrant costumes often incorporate butterfly motifs, mirroring the natural beauty of Marinduque and its abundance of these winged creatures. It visually represents the island’s unique ecological feature, attracting tourists and enhancing the “*butterfly haven*” image.

Community Engagement: Performances and workshops can be integrated into butterfly-related events and festivals, fostering pride and cultural ownership among

locals. It promotes community participation in the butterfly industry, potentially leading to sustainable development and economic benefits.

Educational Tool: Bila-bila can be used to raise awareness about butterfly conservation and environmental protection. Performances can incorporate messages about habitat preservation and responsible tourism, fostering eco-conscious practices among visitors and locals alike.

Recognition by Agencies like DILG, LGU, and the Academe

Cultural Heritage Preservation: Bila-bila's recognition by official bodies like DILG and LGU underscores its importance as part of Marinduque's intangible cultural heritage. It increases support for cultural preservation efforts, safeguarding Bila-bila for future generations and enriching the province's cultural landscape.

Tourism Promotion: Agencies can leverage Bila-bila's unique character and appeal to promote Marinduque as a cultural destination. Inclusion in tourism campaigns and initiatives can attract broader audiences interested in experiencing authentic Filipino traditions and fostering cultural exchange.

Identity Branding: Bila-bila can be effectively used as a symbol of Marinduque's distinct identity. Its incorporation into official logos, promotional materials, and local events strengthens the province's brand image and fosters a sense of unity and shared pride among Marinduqueños.

Cultural Integration of Creative Bila-bila through Contextualized Teaching

The interviews with seven Grade 7 MAPEH educators in Marinduque provided rich insights into how Bila-bila, as a folkloric tradition, could be effectively integrated into the MATATAG curriculum. The thematic analysis of the data revealed three interconnected dimensions that underscore Bila-bila's potential as a contextualized teaching strategy: cultural alignment, learner engagement, and pedagogical flexibility.

Cultural Alignment

Specifically, all respondents emphasized the cultural richness of Bila-bila as a reflection of Marinduque's identity, describing it as a "living heritage" that symbolizes the province's ecological and cultural landscape. Teachers highlighted how Bila-bila's symbolic connection to the butterfly, Marinduque's emblem, promotes environmental consciousness and cultural pride among learners. Further, they viewed this alignment as a strong foundation for using Bila-bila to teach both arts and music and cross-disciplinary themes such as environmental sustainability and history.

Learner Engagement

Respondents reported that Bila-bila's vibrant music, dynamic dance movements, and colorful costumes naturally captivate learners, making it an effective tool for fostering active participation. Most noted that the contextualized use of Bila-bila in lessons could spark curiosity and deepen learners' appreciation of their local culture, creating a more meaningful and engaging learning experience. Additionally, teachers pointed out that the communal nature of Bila-bila performances encourages collaboration and social interaction among learners.

Pedagogical Flexibility

Respondents identified various ways to incorporate Bila-bila into lessons across multiple disciplines. For example, they suggested using its lyrical content in Filipino classes to teach poetry and values education, its movements in Physical Education, and its historical context in Araling Panlipunan (Social Studies). They also proposed designing projects and activities integrating Bila-bila with modern technologies, such as creating digital dance tutorials or composing new verses inspired by current social issues. Moreover, they appreciated how Bila-bila could serve as a versatile entry point for addressing the MATATAG curriculum's focus on inclusive and localized education.

Findings of the Study

The findings align with the MATATAG curriculum's emphasis on localization and inclusivity, positioning Bila-bila as a viable tool for meeting these objectives. Drawing from the educators' perspectives, the study highlights three critical implications for curriculum design and implementation:

1. **Cultural Relevance Enhances Learning Outcomes** - Integrating local cultural elements like Bila-bila fosters contextual understanding and emotional resonance, making lessons more impactful. This approach supports the MATATAG curriculum's goal of creating meaningful connections between learners' experiences and academic content.
2. **Promotes Holistic Development** - Bila-bila enriches cognitive learning and develops practical and psychomotor skills through its musical, symbolic, and performative dimensions. Activities involving Bila-bila encourage teamwork, creativity, and critical thinking, essential competencies in the 21st-century education framework.

3. Sustainability and Cultural Preservation - By integrating Bila-bila into the curriculum, educators contribute to preserving Marinduque's intangible cultural heritage. This initiative aligns with global calls for education systems to play an active role in safeguarding local traditions, ensuring their relevance for future generations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Considering the study's findings, limitations, and recommendations, Bila-bila demonstrates significant potential as a proposed contextualized teaching strategy that aligns with the MATATAG curriculum's focus on inclusive and localized education. Therefore, we concluded that integrating into classroom practices could enrich the learning experience, foster cultural appreciation, and contribute to preserving Marinduque's heritage. However, its role as an educational resource remains in the proposal stage, requiring further exploration, pilot testing, and refinement to establish its practical viability and effectiveness.

Collaborating efforts among educators, curriculum developers, cultural practitioners, and policymakers are essential to advance Bila-bila from a conceptual proposal to an implemented teaching strategy. This initiative can bridge the gap between cultural preservation and education by addressing the identified limitations, such as the need for broader stakeholder engagement, learner feedback, and resource development. Bila-bila holds promise as a vibrant and innovative tool for contextualized learning, enriching Filipino learners' educational experiences while safeguarding Marinduque's cultural legacy.

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