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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Weaving Wisdom into the Classroom: Exploring Teachers' Experiences in Integrating Indigenous Sagada Practices into Contemporary Teaching

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Abstract

Integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices into formal education offers opportunities to make learning culturally meaningful while sustaining community knowledge, identity, and heritage. This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of secondary teachers in Sagada, Mountain Province, as they integrated Indigenous Sagada practices into contemporary teaching. Specifically, the study examined how teachers incorporated local narratives, cultural practices, community values, oral traditions, and Indigenous knowledge into classroom lessons; the pedagogical benefits they observed; the challenges they encountered; the strategies they used to maintain cultural authenticity; and the meanings they attached to culturally grounded instruction. Participants were purposively selected from among teachers with experience contextualizing instruction using Sagada culture and community knowledge. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews and analyzed phenomenologically through significant statements, meaning units, thematic clustering, textural and structural descriptions, and synthesis of the essence of the experience. The findings suggest that culturally grounded instruction can strengthen learner engagement, comprehension, participation, cultural pride, and communicative confidence when Indigenous knowledge is integrated respectfully rather than treated as decorative content. The study underscores the importance of community consultation, teacher preparation, contextualized resources, and culturally sustaining pedagogy in Indigenous education.

Keywords: culturally responsive pedagogy, Indigenous Peoples Education, Sagada, Kankanaey, Indigenous knowledge systems, phenomenology, contextualized instruction

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I. Introduction

Education is never culturally neutral. The stories learners hear, the examples used in lessons, the ways knowledge is communicated, and the experiences considered worthy of classroom discussion influence how students understand both language and themselves. In multilingual and Indigenous communities, culturally responsive teaching becomes particularly significant because schools may either create distance between formal learning and community life or establish meaningful connections between academic knowledge and learners' cultural worlds.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education has formally recognized the right of Indigenous Peoples to culturally responsive education. DepEd Order No. 62, s. 2011 established the National Indigenous Peoples Education Policy Framework and emphasized participation, inclusion, empowerment, continuous dialogue, and partnership with Indigenous communities. The policy was designed in response to the continuing need for culturally responsive basic education among Indigenous Peoples. DepEd subsequently adopted the Indigenous Peoples Education Curriculum Framework through DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2015. The framework specifically directs schools serving Indigenous learners to localize, indigenize, and enhance the curriculum according to their educational and social contexts and stresses meaningful community participation in integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices and Indigenous Learning Systems into formal education.

These policies are particularly relevant in Sagada, Mountain Province, where Indigenous knowledge and community life remain closely connected with cultural landscapes, oral histories, agricultural practices, ritual traditions, community institutions, and relationships with the natural environment. Recent research by Haenraets et al. (2025) documented the continuing cultural significance of the dap-ay, begnas, patpatayan, and babawi-an within Northern Kankanaey life in Sagada. Their study describes the dap-ay as a traditional council space and begnas as a set of agro-cultural ceremonies connected with community, ancestors, land, prosperity, and well-being. The researchers further emphasize that contemporary Sagada traditions remain interwoven with Indigenous knowledge, land-based engagement, conservation, and cooperative community approaches.

The relevance of these practices to education extends beyond teaching facts about culture. Local traditions contain language, values, narratives, symbolic meanings, patterns of interaction, and forms of knowledge that can function as pedagogical resources. Oral accounts, communal discussions, agricultural experiences, rituals, environmental knowledge, and cultural values can provide meaningful contexts for inquiry, discussion, interpretation, reflection, collaboration, and other learning activities across the curriculum.

Culturally responsive pedagogy provides an important framework for understanding this approach. Gay (2018) defines culturally responsive teaching as instruction that uses learners' cultural knowledge, experiences, and perspectives to make learning more relevant and effective. Ladson-Billings (1995) similarly argues that effective culturally relevant pedagogy should support academic achievement while affirming cultural competence and developing learners' critical understanding of society. More recently, culturally sustaining pedagogy has moved beyond merely acknowledging students' backgrounds toward sustaining linguistic and cultural plurality within schooling (Paris & Alim, 2017).

These perspectives are highly applicable to educational practice. Instruction in Indigenous communities can become problematic if academic learning is implicitly associated with replacing local identities, knowledge systems, or languages. Conversely, when instruction is presented as an additional communicative resource through which learners can describe, interpret, preserve, and share their own cultural experiences, learning can reinforce rather than undermine cultural identity.

Recent Philippine evidence supports this approach. Roque et al. (2025), studying culturally responsive pedagogy in English instruction, found that teachers integrated learners' languages, traditions, and cultural identities into classroom instruction and created learning environments in which students' backgrounds were valued and represented. Their findings indicate that culturally responsive teaching can connect academic competencies with learners' lived realities.

Obregon and Boquia (2025), in a phenomenological study of teachers working with Indigenous learners in Southern Philippines, found that teachers encountered difficulties involving vocabulary, comprehension, speaking, reading, writing, participation, and sociocultural factors. Teachers responded through adaptive instruction, collaborative learning, community engagement, and strategies responsive to learners' circumstances. Their findings reinforce the importance of flexibility and contextual understanding in classrooms serving Indigenous learners.

Evidence from Mountain Province is similarly relevant. Padonga (2026) found that culture-responsive instruction grounded in Indigenous history and culture promoted student understanding, engagement, and classroom participation in a rural Mountain Province high school. The study emphasized contextualized instruction, learner-centered dialogue, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, teacher agency, and reflective practice. Padonga focused on Araling Panlipunan where the findings have broader implications for culturally responsive teaching because they demonstrate how indigenous history and cultural knowledge can be meaningfully integrated into contemporary curriculum and classroom practice.

Research concerning Indigenous secondary learners in Mountain Province further indicates that traditions, oral storytelling, community cooperation, environmental stewardship, and respect for elders remain important dimensions of learners' cultural experiences. At the same time, teachers and learners have identified challenges involving cultural erosion, limited contextualized materials, insufficient curriculum integration, and teacher preparation.

The classroom therefore represents both an opportunity and a responsibility. Teachers can use local narratives, cultural practices, community experiences, and Indigenous values to make more meaningful. However, integration must avoid trivializing sacred traditions, oversimplifying complex practices, presenting culture inaccurately, or transforming Indigenous knowledge into classroom content without regard for community ownership and cultural protocols.

This concern is particularly significant in relation to Sagada traditions. Haenraets et al. (2025) warn that living cultural practices such as begnas face risks of discontinuation or compromised integrity. Education can contribute to cultural continuity, but only when integration respects the meanings and custodianship attached to Indigenous knowledge.

The municipality of Sagada, Mountain Province, provides a distinctive setting in which teachers work at the intersection of contemporary schooling and Indigenous community life. Five public secondary schools operate within the municipality, providing diverse contexts in which teachers engage with local cultural knowledge and community practices. This broader educational and cultural context provides an important setting for understanding how teachers negotiate cultural knowledge and contemporary pedagogy.

Despite growing research on culturally responsive instruction and Indigenous Peoples Education, fewer phenomenological studies have specifically examined how secondary teachers in Sagada experience the integration of local Indigenous practices into contemporary teaching. The present study addressed this gap by foregrounding teachers' perspectives, pedagogical decisions, challenges, cultural responsibilities, and professional learning.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The study explored the lived experiences of teachers in integrating Indigenous Sagada practices into contemporary teaching.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. How did teachers describe their experiences of integrating Indigenous Sagada practices into instruction?
2. What Indigenous practices, narratives, values, and community experiences were incorporated into learning activities?
3. How did culturally contextualized instruction influence students' participation, comprehension, communication, and cultural awareness?
4. What challenges did teachers encounter when integrating Indigenous knowledge into contemporary lessons?
5. How did teachers balance curricular competencies with cultural authenticity and sensitivity?
6. What roles did community knowledge, elders, local language, and teacher reflection play in culturally responsive instruction?
7. What meanings did teachers attach to their role in sustaining Indigenous wisdom through culturally responsive education?

2. Review of Related Literature

Indigenous education recognizes that teaching and learning occur within cultural, linguistic, historical, and community contexts. The Philippine National Indigenous Peoples Education Policy Framework explicitly recognizes the need for culturally responsive education and emphasizes participation, inclusion, empowerment, community partnership, and respect for Indigenous knowledge (DepEd, 2011). The Indigenous Peoples Education Curriculum Framework further requires meaningful community participation in curriculum localization and indigenization and recognizes Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices as legitimate foundations for educational content (DepEd, 2015).

Culturally responsive pedagogy provides an important theoretical basis for implementing these policy commitments. Gay (2018) argues that students learn more meaningfully when instruction draws from their cultural experiences, values, communication styles, and prior knowledge. Ladson-Billings (1995) similarly emphasizes academic achievement, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Culturally sustaining pedagogy extends these ideas by asserting that schooling should not merely accommodate culture but actively sustain linguistic and cultural diversity (Paris & Alim, 2017).

This orientation has particular importance in indigenous classroom instruction, where teaching practices may either

marginalize community languages and knowledge or provide learners with additional ways to communicate their own experiences. Roque et al. (2025) found that culturally responsive instruction that incorporated learners' traditions, languages, and identities contributed to learning environments where students felt represented. The findings suggest that culture can function as an instructional resource rather than an extracurricular supplement.

Obregon and Boquia (2025) likewise demonstrated the significance of adaptive approaches when teaching to Indigenous learners. Their phenomenological investigation involving teachers identified linguistic and academic challenges involving vocabulary, comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as participation and cultural circumstances. Teachers responded through collaborative learning, adaptive instruction, advocacy, and community collaboration.

Culturally sustaining instruction is not without difficulty. Esparrago-Kalidas (2025), studying Indigenous formal education among Lumad communities, identified challenges related to limited support, teacher preparation, curriculum constraints, language, historical context, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices. Nevertheless, teachers demonstrated agency by adapting culturally sustaining pedagogy within their classrooms. This highlights the importance of teacher judgment and institutional support.

Local context is equally essential. Place-based pedagogy connects learning with community landscapes, histories, and environments. Anderson (2025), provides support for the place-based dimensions of the study, particularly the use of local communities and environments as learning resources. This perspective strongly complements Indigenous education because local landscapes frequently carry social, linguistic, historical, and spiritual meanings.

Within Sagada, cultural landscapes provide particularly meaningful educational contexts. Haenraets et al. (2025) documented the dap-ay, patpatayan, and babawi-an as important sites within the Northern Kankanaey ceremonial landscape and explained their relationships with begnas, communal traditions, land, and cultural identity. The study also notes that Sagada history has been maintained significantly through oral-based traditions. These oral traditions have direct pedagogical relevance to instruction because storytelling can support listening, narrative comprehension, oral communication, vocabulary development, interpretation, and writing.

A recent Mountain Province study by Padonga (2026) similarly demonstrated that instruction grounded in Indigenous history and cultural knowledge strengthened learner engagement and understanding. Indigenous Knowledge Systems were integrated into curriculum content rather than treated as occasional supplements, while learner-centered and dialogic instruction promoted meaningful classroom participation.

Research involving secondary learners in Mountain Province also identified oral storytelling, community cooperation, cultural traditions, environmental stewardship, and respect for elders as continuing elements of local Indigenous knowledge. These practices influenced learners' understandings of community relationships, governance, history, and social responsibility.

For teaching, such cultural resources can support several competencies. Oral traditions can provide material for listening and narrative reconstruction; cultural events can become contexts for descriptive, expository, and reflective writing; community issues can support argumentation and critical literacy; interviews with elders can develop questioning, note-taking, transcription, and reporting skills; and locally grounded vocabulary can stimulate comparison, translation, and semantic inquiry.

At the same time, instructional choice requires sensitivity. Indigenous students may draw on Kankanaey and simultaneously to construct meaning. Sociocultural theory suggests that learning develops through interaction and culturally mediated tools (Vygotsky, 1978). Translanguaging perspectives likewise recognize multilingual learners' repertoires as resources for learning rather than deficiencies (García & Wei, 2014).

However, integration requires authenticity. Indigenous knowledge is not simply content available for unrestricted classroom use. Some practices are culturally sensitive, sacred, gendered, community-owned, or governed by specific protocols. DepEd's IPEd framework therefore emphasizes sustained community engagement and meaningful Indigenous participation rather than teacher-led appropriation of Indigenous material.

The literature consequently suggests that culturally responsive teaching in Sagada must integrate four major principles: cultural relevance, linguistic responsiveness, community participation, and ethical cultural representation. The present study examined how teachers experienced these principles in actual classroom practice.

3. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The study was anchored in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Sociocultural Theory, and Place-Based Education. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy explains how teachers can use learners' cultural knowledge, identities, experiences, and communication patterns as resources for academic learning (Gay, 2018). It provided a framework for examining how Sagada traditions were incorporated into instruction without separating academic development from cultural identity.

Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory complemented this framework by emphasizing that learning is mediated through

language, interaction, culture, and social participation. Indigenous cultural knowledge, local language, community narratives, peer discussion, and elder knowledge can therefore function as mediational resources in learning and meaning-making.

Place-Based Education further emphasizes learning through the cultural, social, environmental, and historical characteristics of local places. Anderson (2025) demonstrates the relevance of place-based approaches within language education, where local communities and environments can become meaningful sources of communicative content.

4. Methodology

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of teachers who integrated Indigenous Sagada practices into contemporary teaching. Phenomenology was appropriate because the investigation focused on how teachers understood, experienced, and assigned meaning to culturally responsive instructional practice rather than measuring the frequency of particular teaching techniques. Following Moustakas (1994), the study examined significant statements, formulated meanings, thematic clusters, textural descriptions, structural descriptions, and the shared essence of the phenomenon. Participants were selected through purposive criterion sampling and consisted of teachers who had substantial experience teaching secondary learners and had incorporated local Sagada narratives, cultural practices, Indigenous knowledge, community values, or contextualized materials into classroom instruction. Teachers had sufficient teaching experience to describe the opportunities and challenges associated with cultural integration and voluntarily agreed to participate. Data were gathered through individual semi-structured interviews that explored culturally grounded teaching activities, language use, local stories, community practices, learning materials, student responses, cultural sensitivity, teacher preparation, challenges, and professional reflection. With informed consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The data were analyzed using phenomenological procedures. Transcripts were read repeatedly to develop a holistic understanding of participants' accounts. Significant statements were identified and transformed into meaning units and initial codes. Related codes were grouped into thematic clusters, and similarities and differences across participants were examined. Textural descriptions captured what teachers experienced, while structural descriptions described the classroom, cultural, linguistic, and institutional conditions shaping those experiences. These descriptions were synthesized to determine the shared essence of integrating Indigenous Sagada practices into teaching. Trustworthiness was established using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was strengthened through sustained engagement with interview data, participant clarification, and peer debriefing; dependability was supported through an audit trail; confirmability was addressed through reflexive documentation; and transferability was enhanced through rich description of the cultural and school context. Ethical clearance was obtained from the appropriate institutional research ethics committee and permission was secured from relevant school and education authorities. Participants provided written informed consent and were informed of the study's purpose, confidentiality protections, voluntary nature, and right to withdraw. Participant identities were represented using codes such as P1, P2, and P3.

5. Findings

Phenomenological analysis generated six interconnected themes describing teachers' experiences of integrating Indigenous Sagada practices into teaching: (1) Bringing Home into the Classroom: Local Culture as a Bridge to Language Learning; (2) Stories That Speak: Oral Traditions as Resources for Reading, Speaking, and Writing; (3) Learning Through Dap-ay Values: Dialogue, Community, and Collaborative Meaning-Making; (4) Crossing Languages Without Losing Identity: Negotiating Kankanaey and ; (5) Teaching Culture With Care: Authenticity, Respect, and Community Responsibility; and (6) Between Tradition and Contemporary Schooling: Teacher Adaptation, Constraints, and Professional Growth.

Theme 1. Bringing Home into the Classroom: Local Culture as a Bridge to Meaningful Learning

The first theme revealed that teachers experienced Indigenous Sagada culture as a powerful bridge between students' familiar world and the demands of learning. Participants described using local experiences, community activities, agricultural practices, family traditions, cultural values, landscapes, and Indigenous events as starting points for varied learning activities across different areas of the curriculum..

Teachers observed that students responded more readily when tasks were connected with situations they already understood. Instead of beginning with unfamiliar settings from textbooks, teachers allowed learners to describe their own community, explain cultural practices, compare local traditions with those in texts, and write about experiences meaningful to them.

Participant Responses

PI: "When the topic is something they already know from the community, they have more ideas to express. The problem is no longer what to say in because they already understand the experience."

P3: "I sometimes ask them to describe a community practice or something they have observed in Sagada. They become more willing to write because the content is familiar to them."

P5: "The local context becomes the bridge. We start with what they know, and from there we work on the vocabulary, organization, and grammar."

The theme demonstrated that cultural contextualization reduced the conceptual distance between the learner and the learning task. Rather than engaging with unfamiliar and decontextualized examples, students used to communicate knowledge already meaningful within their cultural experience.

This finding is consistent with Gay's (2018) argument that culturally responsive instruction uses students' cultural experiences and knowledge as foundations for learning. Roque et al. (2025) similarly found that culturally responsive instruction reflected learners' language, traditions, and identity and made culture central to classroom learning.

Padonga's (2026) Mountain Province study also found that contextualized instruction grounded in Indigenous culture strengthened learner engagement and comprehension. The present finding suggests that cultural integration supported learning and engagement because learners did not need to construct meaning from unfamiliar experiences while simultaneously adjusting to unfamiliar cultural context. Indigenous knowledge became a cognitive and communicative resource.

Theme 2. Stories That Speak: Oral Traditions as Resources for Learning and Cultural Transmission

The second theme captured teachers' use of local stories, oral accounts, community memories, legends, and elder narratives as instructional resources. Participants recognized that Sagada culture contains rich oral traditions that could be transformed into meaningful learning activities without removing their cultural significance.

Teachers described asking learners to listen to stories from family or community members, retell them in , identify themes and values, compare versions of narratives, write reflections, or reconstruct oral accounts into written texts. These practices allowed oral heritage and contemporary literacy instruction to intersect.

Participant Responses

P2: "The students know many stories from their grandparents, but they do not always think of them as something they can use in English. When they retell the story, we can work on sequencing, vocabulary, and speaking."

P4: "I asked them to interview an older family member about a local practice and then write the account in Filipino. They were very interested because they discovered details they had not asked about before."

P6: "Local stories are good for comprehension because they can focus on how to express the meaning in English instead of struggling to understand an unfamiliar cultural setting."

The theme highlighted oral tradition as both cultural heritage and instructional resource. Haenraets et al. (2025) note that Sagada history has been significantly communicated through oral traditions, emphasizing the importance of spoken knowledge within Northern Kankanaey culture.

The use of oral narratives as instructional resources is consistent with sociocultural learning because learners use culturally familiar knowledge as a mediating tool for developing new linguistic capabilities (Vygotsky, 1978). It also supports place-based language education. Anderson (2025) found that language educators perceived local places and communities as valuable contexts for connecting learners meaningfully with classroom learning.

Research involving Indigenous learners likewise supports contextualized and culturally grounded literacy instruction. Recent Philippine research on reading instruction among Indigenous learners identified cultural affirmation, contextualized materials, and family-community involvement as important pedagogical practices.

Thus, using Sagada oral narratives did more than increase student interest. It allowed literacy development to contribute to intergenerational cultural transmission.

Theme 3. Drawing on Community Values: Dialogue, Listening, and Collaborative Meaning-Making

The third theme reflected teachers' experiences of drawing instructional inspiration from Indigenous values of communal dialogue, shared responsibility, listening, and respect for community knowledge. Participants did not necessarily reproduce the dap-ay as a classroom institution; rather, they described using the values associated with communal consultation and respectful dialogue as models for discussion and collaborative work.

Activities included small-group interpretation, peer discussion, oral reporting, debates, collaborative writing, and collective reflection in which learners were encouraged to listen carefully and consider different perspectives.

Participant Responses

PI: "In our culture, people listen before making a decision. I try to bring that value into discussions so that students do not simply wait for their turn to speak; they also respond to what others are saying."

P5: "Group discussion works well when I connect it with the idea of community responsibility. They understand that everyone should contribute and not leave the work to one member."

P7: "I tell them that communication is not only speaking good in English or Filipino . It also means listening respectfully and understanding another person's point of view."

The theme connected Indigenous communal values with collaborative and dialogic pedagogy. Haenraets et al. (2025) describe the dap-ay as an important traditional council space within Sagada's cultural landscape. Although the contemporary classroom is institutionally different from the dap-ay, values of dialogue, social responsibility, and community participation can inform interactional pedagogy.

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory supports this interpretation because learning develops through socially mediated interaction. Padonga (2026) likewise found that learner-centered and dialogic pedagogy enhanced participation in culturally grounded instruction in Mountain Province.

The finding also corresponds with the IPEd Curriculum Framework, which emphasizes partnership, participation, and community engagement rather than treating Indigenous knowledge as static classroom content.

Thus, teachers integrated Indigenous wisdom not only through what they taught but also through how classroom interaction was structured.

Theme 4. Bridging Languages, Sustaining Identity: Multilingual Meaning-Making in the Classroom

The fourth theme described teachers' efforts to develop learners' communicative competence while maintaining respect for their indigenous language and identity. Participants recognized that students often understood complex cultural meanings more fully in Kankanaey and that insisting on -only communication could restrict rather than facilitate meaning-making.

Teachers therefore described strategic movement between languages. Local terms were sometimes retained when no direct equivalent captured their full cultural meaning. Students were encouraged to explain concepts first in familiar language and subsequently reformulate ideas in .

Participant Responses

P2: "There are cultural words that lose something when we translate them directly. Sometimes I allow the original term and ask the students to explain its meaning in English, since our subject uses English as the mode of instruction."

P4: "If students cannot immediately explain an idea using the English language, I let them clarify it first using the language they are comfortable with. After that we work together on how to express it in ."

P8: "I do not want them to feel that learning Araling Panlipunan means they should leave their own language behind. Filipino or English languages should give them another way to express who they are, since we use English and FIlipino as mode of instruction in the subject."

The theme suggested that multilingual flexibility supported rather than weakened development. García and Wei (2014) argue that multilingual learners draw on integrated linguistic repertoires in constructing meaning. Strategic use of learners' first languages can therefore scaffold comprehension and expression.

This interpretation is especially relevant to Indigenous education because language is closely connected with cultural concepts. DepEd's IPEd framework recognizes Indigenous Learning Systems and Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices as legitimate curriculum resources and calls for meaningful community participation in their inclusion.

Obregon and Boquia (2025) found that teachers working with Indigenous learners encountered difficulties involving vocabulary, comprehension, and macro skills and responded through adaptive approaches and collaboration. Similarly, studies of teachers in IPEd contexts have documented translanguaging and contextualization as strategies for culturally mediated learning.

The present theme therefore framed not as a replacement for Kankanaey identity but as an additional communicative resource.

Theme 5. Teaching Culture With Care: Authenticity, Respect, and Community Responsibility

The fifth theme revealed that teachers experienced cultural integration as an ethical responsibility. Participants recognized that not every Indigenous practice could simply be converted into classroom content. Some traditions had sacred, ceremonial, community-specific, or sensitive meanings.

Teachers therefore described the importance of checking information, consulting knowledgeable community members, avoiding oversimplification, and distinguishing between cultural information that could be discussed openly and

knowledge that required greater caution.

Participant Responses

P3: "We cannot assume that because we are from the community we already know everything correctly. If I am not sure about a practice, I ask someone who knows more before I use it in class."
P6: "There are traditions that should not be presented as entertainment. We have to explain the meaning and also respect what should not be casually discussed."
P9: "I remind the students that culture is not just an example for an activity. It belongs to the community, so we have to present it accurately and respectfully."
This theme represented ethical cultural responsiveness. DepEd's IPEd framework explicitly emphasizes sustained community engagement and the meaningful participation of Indigenous communities in integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices into education. This policy principle reflects an important distinction between cultural inclusion and cultural appropriation.
The concern was particularly significant in Sagada because some cultural practices and landscapes carry ceremonial meanings. Haenraets et al. (2025) emphasize that safeguarding tangible cultural sites is closely connected to safeguarding intangible Indigenous knowledge and practices and warn about threats to the integrity of traditions such as begnas.
Esparrago-Kalidas (2025) likewise found that culturally sustaining pedagogy requires careful attention to Indigenous languages, practices, community agency, histories, and the institutional conditions surrounding cultural education.
Teachers therefore functioned not as owners of Indigenous knowledge but as educational mediators accountable to the community from which that knowledge originated.

Theme 6. Between Tradition and Contemporary Schooling: Teacher Adaptation, Constraints, and Professional Growth

The final theme captured the challenges teachers experienced while attempting to sustain culturally responsive instruction within contemporary curriculum demands. Participants described limited localized materials, preparation time, pressure to cover prescribed competencies, uncertainty about cultural accuracy, differences in students' cultural knowledge, and the need to connect traditional content with contemporary communication skills.
Despite these difficulties, teachers reported that culturally grounded teaching strengthened their professional creativity and encouraged reflection on conventional teaching practices.

Participant Responses
P1: "The challenge is finding materials. Sometimes I know the local example I want to use, but I still have to create the learning activity and make sure it matches the competency."
P5: "There is a balance. We need to teach the required learning competencies, but we also want the lesson to have meaning for the students."
P10: "This way of teaching made me more reflective. I started asking myself whether my lesson only follows the textbook or whether the students can actually see themselves in what we are learning."

The theme demonstrated that culturally responsive teaching depended heavily on teacher agency and professional adaptation. Padonga (2026) similarly found that teacher agency and reflective practice were central to sustaining culturally responsive IPEd implementation in a Mountain Province secondary-school context.

Esparrago-Kalidas (2025) identified related challenges involving curriculum constraints, insufficient support, limited training, language concerns, and teacher preparation in culturally sustaining Indigenous education. Teachers nevertheless adapted their instruction to preserve Indigenous knowledge and identity.
Obregon and Boquia (2025) likewise emphasized teacher flexibility and patience when teaching Indigenous learners in .
The finding suggests that culturally grounded instruction cannot depend exclusively on individual teacher commitment. Institutional support is necessary through contextualized resources, community partnerships, professional development, collaborative material design, and adequate planning time.
Teachers began with knowledge familiar to learners: stories, values, community experiences, Indigenous language, cultural landscapes, or local practices. These resources were transformed into opportunities for discussion, interpretation, reflection, collaboration, communication, inquiry, and other curriculum-related activities. In language-related lessons,

these included listening, speaking, reading, writing, and vocabulary development. Through classroom learning and different forms of communication, students learned to articulate ideas beyond their immediate linguistic context, while classroom reflection returned attention to the meaning and value of their own culture.

The teachers' experiences showed that indigenous culture and contemporary schooling did not necessarily compete. Contemporary educational practices could function as a means through which learners described local knowledge, communicated Indigenous perspectives, and examined cultural experiences through additional forms of expression.

At the same time, the process required boundaries. Effective integration depended on cultural accuracy, community respect, ethical judgment, and recognition that some knowledge was not simply instructional material.

The essence of "weaving wisdom into the classroom" therefore lay in teachers' ability to connect contemporary educational demands with the cultural knowledge, values, practices, and identity of Sagada while making learning meaningful and relevant to learners' lived experiences.

6. Discussion

The findings demonstrated that integrating Indigenous Sagada practices into teaching was both a pedagogical strategy and a cultural responsibility. Teachers did not simply insert cultural examples into otherwise unchanged lessons; instead, culturally meaningful experiences shaped content, interaction, language choice, and learning tasks.

The first theme, Bringing Home into the Classroom, showed that local knowledge functioned as a scaffold for meaningful learning. Students could engage more confidently with learning tasks when the content itself was familiar. This supports culturally responsive pedagogy, which views students' experiences as academic assets rather than obstacles (Gay, 2018).

Stories That Speak revealed the importance of oral tradition. In a community where historical and cultural knowledge has been communicated through oral traditions, narrative activities offered a natural connection between Indigenous learning systems and contemporary classroom learnng. Haenraets et al. (2025) provide important cultural support for this interpretation by documenting Sagada's oral historical traditions.

Drawing on Community Values demonstrated that Indigenous integration extended beyond content. Communal dialogue, listening, cooperation, and shared responsibility informed classroom interaction. This finding is significant because culturally responsive pedagogy concerns not only the examples teachers use but the relationships and participation structures through which learning occurs.

Crossing Languages Without Losing Identity emphasized the pedagogical importance of multilingual flexibility. English and Filipino proficiency did not require denying Kankanaey linguistic resources. Instead, the local language supported conceptual understanding and allowed students to examine culturally specific meanings before communicating them in .

Teaching Culture With Care brought ethical responsibility to the center of the findings. Indigenous knowledge carries ownership, history, and cultural protocols. This finding strongly supports DepEd's insistence on community participation in IPEd curriculum development.

Finally, Between Tradition and Contemporary Schooling showed that culturally responsive instruction depended on substantial teacher agency. Teachers had to align curriculum competencies with local knowledge, develop their own materials, determine culturally appropriate examples, and negotiate limitations in time and resources.

Collectively, the results support a model of culturally sustaining education in which contemporary learning and cultural identity are mutually reinforcing. The goal is not to separate contemporary curriculum learning from Indigenous knowledge but to enable learners to use to communicate from a culturally grounded position.

7. Implications for Culturally Responsive Education

The findings suggest that curricula in Indigenous communities should provide deliberate space for contextualization rather than treating standardized textbook content as the only legitimate source of learning.

Teachers may develop locally grounded learning activities, interview projects, oral-history tasks, reflective and creative outputs, collaborative projects, and multimodal activities that connect curricular competencies with community knowledge.

However, localized materials should undergo cultural validation. Teachers, elders, community knowledge holders, parents, and IPEd focal personnel can collaborate to identify information appropriate for classroom use.

Teacher professional development should address culturally responsive pedagogy, IPEd policy, ethical use of Indigenous knowledge, multilingual pedagogy, contextualized-material development, oral-history methods, and community-based learning.

Schools may also develop repositories of culturally validated instructional materials so that contextualization does not depend entirely on individual teacher preparation.

8. Conclusion

The study revealed that the integration of Indigenous Sagada practices into contemporary teaching was an experiential, culturally grounded, and reflective process. Teachers used local knowledge not merely to make lessons more interesting but to create meaningful bridges between students' cultural experiences and the demands of contemporary education

The themes Bringing Home into the Classroom; Stories That Speak; Learning Through Dap-ay Values; Crossing Languages Without Losing Identity; Teaching Culture with Care; and Between Tradition and Contemporary Schooling showed that culturally responsive instruction operated across curriculum content, communication, classroom interaction, professional judgment, and community relationships.

Teachers found that familiar cultural experiences supported student expression, while local narratives provided rich opportunities for communication, interpretation, reflection, and culturally grounded learning. Communal values encouraged dialogue and collaboration, and strategic use of Kankanaey helped learners construct meaning without positioning as a replacement for Indigenous identity.

At the same time, culturally grounded instruction required ethical care. Teachers recognized that Indigenous culture could not be reduced to classroom decoration or simplified examples. Authentic integration required accuracy, respect, consultation, and recognition of community ownership.

The essence of the teachers' experience lay in weaving rather than replacing. Contemporary competencies were developed through engagement with cultural knowledge rather than through separation from it. English and Filipino became an additional means through which learners could articulate, interpret, and communicate their own world.

Thus, culturally responsive education holds potential not only to strengthen language learning but also to contribute to cultural continuity. When implemented responsibly, the classroom can become a space where students learn to communicate globally without becoming disconnected from the knowledge, language, and identity of Sagada.

9. Recommendations

Teachers may continue integrating culturally meaningful texts, experiences, oral traditions, and community knowledge into reading, speaking, writing, and listening activities while ensuring alignment with curriculum competencies.

Public Secondary schools in Sagada may strengthen partnerships with elders, community leaders, culture bearers, parents, and IPEd personnel for the validation and development of contextualized materials.

Professional development should be provided on culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogy, multilingual teaching, ethical Indigenous knowledge integration, local-material development, and oral-history methods.

The school may develop a culturally validated repository of Sagada-based instructional materials, including narratives, vocabulary resources, interview guides, contextualized writing prompts, and multimodal tasks.

Teachers should distinguish openly shareable cultural knowledge from culturally restricted or sensitive knowledge and seek community guidance where necessary.

Future research may examine students' experiences of culturally grounded instruction, compare practices across Sagada schools, or investigate measurable relationships between cultural contextualization and language engagement, confidence, and achievement.

10. Limitations

The phenomenological design emphasized depth of teacher experience rather than statistical generalization. The findings reflected the cultural and educational context of public secondary schools in Sagada and should therefore be interpreted within that setting.

The study relied primarily on participants' descriptions of their teaching experiences. Future studies may triangulate interviews with classroom observations, lesson plans, student outputs, community-member interviews, and Indigenous knowledge holders' perspectives.

Differences in teachers' cultural backgrounds, years of teaching experience, personal familiarity with Sagada traditions, and access to community knowledge may have shaped their experiences.

The study also recognized that Indigenous knowledge is culturally situated and that researchers and teachers cannot assume that all cultural information is equally accessible for documentation or publication.

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