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## Research Article

### A Systematic Literature Review on the Significance of the School of Living Traditions in Preserving the Cultural Heritage of Indigenous Peoples

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#### ABSTRACT

This systematic literature review investigates the critical role of the School of Living Traditions (SLT) and its educational approaches in preserving the cultural heritage of Indigenous Peoples (IP) in the Philippines. A set of pre-defined inclusion-exclusion criteria led to the selection of six pertinent papers, which were comprehensively analyzed and synthesized. The examination of these articles revealed recurring themes, allowing for the development of thematic constructs to address the study's objectives. The findings underscore the pivotal role of SLTs in safeguarding the profound traditions of Indigenous Peoples, thereby ensuring the transmission of cultural legacies to younger generations and empowering IP communities. Notably, the significance of SLTs lies in their ability to preserve the authentic essence of cultural practices, contributing to the empowerment of Indigenous communities. In the transmission of this indigenous knowledge, systems, and practices, pedagogical approaches within SLTs are centered on culture-based education and experiential learning. These approaches aim to facilitate meaningful learning experiences that enable individuals to derive personal significance from their acquired knowledge and apply it in real-world contexts. Consequently, this research sheds light on the instrumental role of SLTs in fostering cultural preservation and empowerment within Indigenous communities through tailored educational methodologies.

**Keywords:** *Cultural heritage, Education, Indigenous peoples, School of living traditions, Systematic literature review*

#### Introduction

The Philippines is a culturally diverse country with an estimated 14-17 million Indigenous Peoples (IPs) belonging to 110 ethnolinguistic groups (UNDP, 2010). These groups have

defined, shaped, and influenced Philippine society from the beginning to the present through their vibrant traditions and dazzling cultural activities. The IPs are evidence of the richness

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of our culture and serve as the repository of our country's cultural heritage.

According to UNESCO (2019), indigenous peoples hold a rich diversity of living heritage, including practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills. The practice and transmission of this heritage contribute to the ongoing vitality, strength, and well-being of communities.

However, the formal recognition and legal protection granted to indigenous peoples (IPs) do not always translate into equitable conditions. Despite these safeguards, many IPs are in disadvantaged positions within the broader societal context. As we march forward in the pursuit of development, there is a disheartening tendency to leave these "minority" groups behind, gradually eroding their cultural identity (Jovel et al., n.d.).

The disappearance of these practices not only signifies a loss for the IPs themselves but also underscores a broader societal failure to appreciate the richness of their heritage—the invaluable treasures of our shared past. In allowing these cultural legacies to slip away, there is a risk of forgetting the unique identities of indigenous communities and, in a larger sense, losing touch with our collective history.

To address this issue, it is imperative to take decisive actions to empower indigenous peoples. Merely acknowledging their existence and cultural significance is not enough, concrete steps must be taken to ensure that IPs are active participants in the processes of development and progress.

Preserving the living heritage holds immense importance for indigenous communities, as it is the foundation of their identity and culture. The ongoing transmission of this heritage plays a crucial role in fortifying the identities and cultures of indigenous peoples (Tauli-Corpuz, cited in UNESCO, 2019).

As a UN member country, the Philippines has made various efforts to preserve the culture of the IPs. Different governing bodies were created to serve the needs and protect the rights of the IPs through the National Commission for Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) and the preservation of cultural heritage, which is under the function of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA).

In addressing the preservation of cultural heritage and the gradual loss of indigenous knowledge and practices, the NCCA has initiated a notable project known as the School of Living Tradition (SLT). The primary objective of this program is to concentrate on passing down indigenous skills and techniques to the younger generation. The initiative seeks to motivate specialists and masters in various cultural domains to persist in their pursuits, further develop and extend the boundaries of their work, and impart their knowledge to younger individuals who will assume their roles in the future (National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 2023).

The School of Living Tradition (SLT) plays a pivotal role in imparting the cultural knowledge of indigenous communities to younger members under the mentorship of a cultural master, cultural bearer, or community elders. This educational initiative ensures the transmission of traditional crafts and practices, with the cultural master overseeing and guiding the learning process (UNESCO, 2021). By emphasizing education, this approach highlights its crucial role in preserving and passing on the community's cultural heritage to succeeding generations.

This study examined the influence of the School of Living Tradition (SLT) in safeguarding the cultural heritage of Indigenous Peoples, emphasizing its significance as discussed in the existing literature. The investigation aimed to identify the roles played by the SLT in cultural preservation, as documented in published studies, and analyze the methods employed to transmit indigenous knowledge and skills to younger community members. This review offers valuable insights to deepen our understanding of the SLTs' effectiveness and provide a foundation for informed discussions and potential improvements in strategies aimed at upholding the rich cultural heritage of Indigenous Peoples.

## **Methodology**

This study employed a systematic literature review methodology to investigate the utilization of education to preserve the country's cultural heritage. Systematic literature reviews are recognized as methodologies essential for

comprehensively synthesizing extensive information and contributing insights into questions related to effectiveness and operational outcomes (Petticrew & Roberts, as cited in Verdin, Godwin, Copibianco, 2016).

The search strategy encompassed vital terms such as "school of living tradition," "school for living tradition," "education," "indigenous people," "IPEd," and "cultural heritage preservation." Additionally, related terms

like "pdf," "research," "journal," and "study" were incorporated. Inclusive criteria comprised open-access journals, peer-reviewed articles, and "grey materials" such as government reports and books, stipulating that they be written in English and published between 2010 and 2022 in the Philippines. The examination of article references further augmented the search for additional pertinent studies (please see Appendix 1 for the list of reviewed articles).

Table 1. The inclusion and exclusion criteria of this study

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Not English
Country focus	Philippines	Foreign countries
Type of Article	Peer-reviewed conference papers, government reports, law review	Research posters
Methodology	Quantitative & Qualitative	
Study focus	School of living tradition and preservation of the cultural heritage of Ips	Cultural heritage preservation of IP was mentioned but not focused on School of Living Tradition
Year of publication	January 2010 to January 2022	Studies on or before December 2022

Eighteen papers were initially identified and meticulously evaluated for relevance, including six papers that met the predetermined criteria for incorporation into the literature review. The analytical process involved scrutinizing the common ideas expressed in each academic article, facilitating the development of thematic constructs to address the study's objectives. This systematic approach ensured a comprehensive exploration of the literature, enabling the extraction of pertinent insights and contributing meaningfully to the understanding of the relationship between education and the preservation of cultural heritage.

### Findings and Discussion

The literature has been analyzed and divided into two main parts to ascertain the significance of SLT in preserving the cultural heritage of the Indigenous Peoples (IPs) in the country, as outlined in the published literature. The first part elucidates the roles of SLT in preserving the cultural heritage of the Ips; in contrast, the second part explores the approaches to transmitting indigenous knowledge and skills to the young members of the community.

### The Role of SLT in Cultural Heritage Preservation of Indigenous Peoples

The six reviewed articles, as a whole, presented the three leading roles of the SLTs in preserving the cultural heritage of the IPs. Establishing the SLTs safeguards the significant traditions of the IP communities, ensures the transmission of traditions to the younger generations, and empowers the IPs.

### SLTs Safeguards the Significant Traditions of the IP Communities

The central idea in all the articles reviewed is that the primary function of SLTs is to safeguard the significant tradition of IP communities. This idea reflects the mandate of the National Commission for Culture and Arts (NCCA) specifically on the conservation and promotion of the nation's historical and cultural heritage, recognizing and preserving the endangered human cultural resources such as weavers, chanters, dancers, and other artisans, as well as the conservation and development of such artistic, linguistic and occupational skills that are threatened with extinction (Saley as cited in Mi-ing 2019)

Talavera (2011) highlighted in his study the significant role the Hudhud School of Living Tradition (HSLT) played as a strategy for safeguarding the intangible heritage of the Hudhud Chants of the Ifugao. Intending to encourage the transfer of the *hudhud* practice to the youth, different activities focused on the HSLTs, such as documentation, cultural awareness, and promotion in the community and on a national level, development of teaching guides, and performances in proper cultural context.

Amon the Magbukon Aytas in Bataan, David (2013) confirmed that through the establishment of SLT, the culture of the IPs was indeed protected and maintained. Arts, cultural appreciation and preservation, awareness of human existence and their unique identities, and continuation of wisdom from generation to generation persisted because of the Ayta Magbukon community's continuous cooperation and government agencies' support in the researcher's endeavors.

In Central Panay, the teaching of Sugidanon epics allowed one to explore how oral literature genre and story cycle have become text and what that means for Panay Bukidnon people. For some members of IP communities in Iloilo, Sugidanon is tied to tangible and intangible benefits, including a greater degree of political autonomy as IPs, the perpetuation of epic chanting through the SLT program, and profit-sharing with the University of the Philippines (Gowey, 2019).

Tomaquin's (2013) ethnohistorical study of the Manobo in Surigao del Sur emphasizes the multifaceted approach of SLTs, incorporating elements such as oral tradition, topography, religious ceremonies, and sociocultural change to preserve Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). The establishment of an SLT in Carromata, San Miguel, Surigao del Sur reflects a deliberate effort to counteract cultural transition and protect the unique identity of the Surigao del Sur Manobo.

Moreover, the creation of SLT responded to the cultural loss faced by many IPs. For instance, in the Talaandig tribe in Bukidnon, Marti (2019) advanced that the initiation of indigenous education through the School of Living Traditions in Songco led to the deliberate

effort to instill cultural pride in Talaandig children by engaging them in language preservation, traditional arts and crafts, dance, storytelling, and traditional sports.

In summary, the central role of SLTs in safeguarding the cultural heritage of Indigenous Peoples emerges as a consistent and vital theme across diverse studies. Putting up SLTs nationwide signifies a collective commitment to preserving and protecting the invaluable treasures of the past, ensuring that the legacies of our country's Indigenous Peoples endure amidst the currents of modernity. As Filipinos navigate the path toward modernization, preserving cultural identity through SLTs stands as a unifying force, binding the nation to its roots and fostering a sense of shared heritage.

### ***SLTs Ensure the Transmission of Traditions to the Younger Generations***

UNESCO declares two approaches to preserving cultural heritage: one is to record it in tangible form and conserve it in an archive; the other is to maintain it in a living form by ensuring its transmission to the next generations (NCCA, n.d.). The establishment of SLT is in response to the second approach. This undertaking focuses on transmitting indigenous knowledge (IK) to the young. Through the culture masters/specialists, the younger people were trained to take place their position in the future, which is expressed in the rationale for establishing the SLT (David, 2013)

The SLT identifies the features or components of their students' traditional culture that are important to the cultural community. These are deemed imparted to the youth so enduring values and traditions can be perpetuated.

Initially, the SLT students of Ayta Magbukon did not know about the IK that the Cultural Masters had transferred to them until they were taught. In addition, they fully understand now that they will be the following bearers of these skills and knowledge (David, 2013). Learning their cultural practices means they are responsible for protecting it and transferring this learning to the next Ayta Magbukon generation so their culture will live forever.

Marti's (2019) study mentioned Adelfa Saway, a Talaandig School of Living Traditions teacher's view on SLT:

*"The children who attend this school learn our customs and traditions. They also learn our connection with nature... at least in this school, something about our culture gets planted in their minds. We have trained them to become good leaders in the future to take care of their children, the environment, and the customs passed down from our elders."*

This helped to form the Talaandig vision of a transformed society, where the youth know their roots and identity, epic chant songs, and dance the Binanog rhythm by heart with a sense of dignity that same dignity provided for by the very Source of Life in our world.

The guiding purpose of all such SLTs like the Balay Turun-an (also called GAMABA Training Center) is the conservation of living traditions in pursuance of UNESCO directives to "preserve cultural heritage" by placing indigenous youths under local culture bearers, who are paid a monthly stipend in exchange for their services. Students are also incentivized with food, transportation, and educational materials assistance. They may attend with parental consent (National Commission for Culture and the Arts, as cited in Gowey 2019).

The IPs' cultural practices and traditions will continue as long as there are cultural bearers who will carry their culture. Through the SLTs, the younger generation is encouraged to be the following cultural bearers in their community to maintain their traditions. Teaching them about their heritage will surely be a great move in preserving their culture (Besmonte, 2022).

### ***SLTs Empower the IPs***

The setting up of SLTs enables the IP communities to realize their rich cultural heritage, which is the country's mirror to the past and reflects Filipino history and identity. Aside from that, SLT is a significant move of the government to involve minority groups in the development effort, and investing in the heritage preservation of IPs is not incompatible with progress.

Within the Marinduque Indigenous Peoples (IPs) community, Guadalupe (2019) asserted that the Kalutang School of Living Music Tradition serves as a validation of the indigenous funds of knowledge among the locals. It empowers them to deliberately affirm their identities by choosing to sustain their traditional practices, all the while engaging in negotiations with the established state music education system.

Talaavera (2011) asserted that the sustainability of the SLTs, as in the case of the Hudhud SLT, rests on the mobilization of political and financial resources from local, national, and international institutions. More importantly, there are human resources available on the ground. The Ifugao have demonstrated the resolve to safeguard their culture actively, part of which is through chants.

In the case of Ayta Magbukon, the move to preserve their cultural heritage was instilled in their hearts and minds to realize, understand, and appreciate their uniqueness as human beings. As this program gains acceptance and credence from both the simple and the prudent, the education and wisdom encompassed in the culture understudy will have an explicit possibility of incessant transfer to the younger age group and contemporaries, thus, an extensive and positive reception of the culture and its people as a whole (David, 2013).

The Schools of Living Tradition of Mindanao is an innovative and exciting educational development that helps place the elders and the youngest children at the heart of cultural and linguistic revival and the renewal of indigenous leadership. Setting up the School of Living Traditions was a conscious effort to sustain the tribe's pride in their cultural identity (Marti, 2019).

Educating the IP of their unique cultural identity and worth would make them proud of who and what they are. The SLT is an avenue of inclusiveness where everyone or every community in the country is valued. The community is considered the primary consultants/ experts of their own culture, and they were allowed to practice their indigenous knowledge.

### Approaches to Cultural Heritage Preservation Through Education

Education plays a crucial role in the preservation of cultural heritage, serving not only to impart knowledge and acculturate individuals but also to transmit and enrich the dynamic heritage of society. The interdependence between education and living heritage emphasizes the enduring nature of their relationship, highlighting their mutually reinforcing connection (Aziz et. al, 2020).

In analyzing the different approaches to transmitting indigenous knowledge and skills to the young/ members of the community, the challenge was to find the details or elaborate explanations of how the teaching-learning process is done in SLTs. Nevertheless, the researcher synthesized the ideas on how the students are made to learn, and this led to two approaches: culture-based education and experiential learning. My findings and the approaches to transmitting indigenous knowledge and skills are presented below.

#### Culture-Based Education

The most common theme reiterated from the different studies is that teaching in SLT is grounded in culture-based education. This would include localization, contextualization, and indigenization of the lessons to respond to the needs and framework of the learners. Teaching is centered on community life and the unique traditions of the tribe. This resonates with the findings of Aziz et al. (2020), arguing that students' success within the education system is enhanced when education is grounded in their context. This approach establishes a sense of belonging and enables students to connect their learning to their own lives.

Among the Ayta of Magbukon, the cultural masters and elders taught the students traditional cooking using indigenous food plants (IFP) such as *Bilukaw*, *Ubod*, *Takipan*, *Malau-ban*, and *Limuran*. The Cultural master and elders taught the SLT students to identify and use medicinal plants that are available in the surroundings, traditional songs, chants, and dances (David, 2013)

In Mi-ing (2019), her exploration of the educational praxis of IPed (Indigenous People Education) in Mt. Province, which is connected to

the SLT, revealed that learning institutions practice contextualization and integration of authentic experiences in the teaching-learning processes. IPed Program is DepEd's response to the rights of the IP to basic education that is responsive to their context, respects their identities, and promotes the value of their indigenous knowledge, skills, and other aspects of their cultural heritage (DepEd Order no. 22, s. 2016).

The use of the mother tongue in teaching is also emphasized to enable the learners to learn best. The Balay Turun-an in Panay Bukidnon program itself predates mother-tongue instruction policies in the Philippines, which were fully implemented along with K-to-12 reforms in 2012 and expanded from twelve to nineteen approved languages by 2016. Further integration of indigenous Panay knowledge into local public education appears promising in light of these efforts. For Panay Bukidnon youth, the SLT takes this a step further by providing opportunities to learn to chant that is unavailable outside their communities (Gowey, 2019).

Fundamentally, following a culture-based approach by anchoring on the local realities of the community is a move towards a decolonized education. It empowers them to be part of knowledge production, thereby facilitating community engagement and strengthening heritage conservation through a shift in curricula (Acabado & Martin, 2020).

#### Experiential Learning

Learning through experience is underscored in the teaching-learning process of the IP. Theory and application go hand in hand to see that meaningful learning happens. Aside from that, the students must demonstrate the skills required to learn a particular subject as it embraces the principle of inculcating life skills and life-long learning through the revitalization of indigenous knowledge systems (NCCA, 2020). According to Huber et al. (2005), the use of integrative learning entails the connection of skills and knowledge from diverse sources and experiences, applying theoretical concepts to practical situations in various settings.

The cultural masters taught seven traditional dances of the Ayta Magbukon (*Hayaw*

*Bakulaw, Hayaw Pandyadyawo, Hayaw Yaham, Hayaw Ligaw-an, Hayaw Pagbabakal, Hayaw Panilan, and Hayaw Talipi*). These traditional dances are simple with no spectacular movement and costume, unlike the traditional ones of Tagalog, Ilokano, Kapampangan, and other significant groups. Nevertheless, they proudly say they owned these dances without any influences from different cultures or foreigners who settled in the Philippines. These dances show their way of life in the village, in the river, in the mountains, and their relations with the environment (David 2013).

Through the cultural specialists, the Panay Bukidnon in Central Panay were taught how *sugidanon* chant is done, their traditional dances, and their art of weaving. The students have direct experience in doing these cultural practices that allow them to transfer what they have learned into practice. The same strategy was used in teaching the *hudhud* chant among Ifugao students.

## Conclusion

Education is a potent force in any preservation effort. This idea led to the establishment of the SLTs, which significantly impacted the preservation of the cultural heritage of the IP—the experiences of the Ifugao in MT. Province, the Aytas of Magbukon, Bataan, the Panay Bukidnon of Central Panay, the Manobos of Surigao del Sur, and the Talaandig tribe in Bukidnon were evidence of how their traditions are preserved through the SLTs.

In the preservation of the cultural heritage of the IP, it was found that SLT safeguards the significant traditions of the IP communities, ensures the transmission of traditions to the younger generations, and empowers the IPs. These roles of SLT are connected with the ultimate goal of maintaining indigenous knowledge, systems, and practices.

Regarding the pedagogical approaches to cultural Heritage Preservation, teaching in SLT is grounded in culture-based education and experiential learning. Education is centered on the community's traditions, practices, and needs. These approaches focused on authentic and meaningful learning wherein learners must be able to see personal meanings in what

they learn and transfer what they have learned in reality.

The IP is the repository and rich source of our cultural heritage; thus, we must value and recognize their significant roles in our country's history. When we support them in preserving their cultural heritage, we give them a sense of pride and honor to pass on their traditions, beliefs, and practices, which are a big part of our Filipino identity.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following are as a result of this recommended:

The Department of Education (DepEd) and educators are encouraged to acknowledge and actively integrate indigenous knowledge, systems, and practices of the Indigenous Peoples (IP) into their curricula. This involves incorporating IP perspectives, narratives, and traditional learning methods into mainstream education, fostering a more inclusive and culturally sensitive learning environment.

The National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) should play a proactive role in continually evaluating SLT projects. This involves assessing their impact and refining and adapting strategies based on ongoing feedback and evolving needs. Additionally, there is a pressing need to expand the reach of SLTs by establishing more centers across the country, ensuring the broader integration of cultural preservation efforts and community empowerment initiatives nationwide.

Lastly, future researchers are urged to undertake quantitative studies that will enable the measurement of the effectiveness of SLT implementation, providing objective and quantifiable data. Such studies could explore the tangible outcomes, educational benefits, and societal implications of SLTs, contributing to a more evidence-based understanding of their role in cultural preservation and community empowerment.

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## APPENDIX 1

## List of Articles Reviewed

AUTHOR	TITLE	TOPIC
Talavera, Renee C. (2011)	The Role of Schools for Living Traditions (SLT) in Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Philippines: The Case of Chants of the Ifugao	This study focused on the Hdhud SLT case that addresses the need to safeguard the continued practice of the Chants of the Ifugao and encourage its transmission to young Ifugao.
David, Neil (2013)	Preservation of Indigenous Culture of Bataan Through an Ayta Magbukon School of Living Tradition (SLT) Program	The study explored the significance of SLTs in preserving Ayta's indigenous culture in Magbukon, Bataan.
Tomaquin, Ramel D. (2013)	Trailblazing IPED Praxis in Mountain Province, Philippines	This study looked into the praxis of Indigenous Peoples education in Mountain Province, Philippines.
Guadalupe, J. (2019)	Hybridity, identity, and human agency in Kalutang School of Living Traditions.	The study explores the significance of the kalutang, tuned percussion sticks in Marinduque, Philippines, aiming to discuss the validation of indigenous knowledge within the Kalutang School of living music tradition, and examining socio-cultural themes in the non-formal music education system.
Gowey, David (2019)	This is How Began in the Past: Foregrounding the SUGidanon of Panay as an Example of Invented Tradition	This paper examined the SUGidanon Chnats as an invented tradition and its applicability to SLT.
Marti, Serge (2019)	Indigenous Education: The Call of the Territory	This book talked about indigenous education and the revival of the traditions of the IP.
Mi-ing, Julie Grace K. (2019)	The History, Worldviews, and Sociocultural Transition of the Manobolandia	The paper delved into discussing the ethnohistory of the Manobos in Surigao del Sur, Philippines.