



# AMERICAN JOURNAL OF YOUTH AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT (AJYWE)

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 1 (2022)

Indexed in



PUBLISHED BY: E-PALLI, DELAWARE, USA

## A Proposed Model and Framework for Developing a Curriculum for Indigenous Learners with Disabilities

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### Article Information

**Received:** June 28, 2022

**Accepted:** June 30, 2022

**Published:** July 1, 2022

### Keywords

*Indigenous Peoples; Indigenous Peoples Education; Disability, Curriculum Development*

### ABSTRACT

The experiences of indigenous person with disabilities at the intersection of being an indigenous person and being a person with disability can be described as a case of double discrimination. Special Education, which is one of the measures stated in the United Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to eradicate disability discrimination as well as to promote full and effective participation in society, is still an area studies which has not been investigated in detail from an indigenous perspective. In the Philippines, for example, even though inclusion is an embodied philosophy and policy in its Enhanced Basic Education Curriculum, it does not clearly provide for a guide for implementing special education services to indigenous learners with disabilities. Thus, in this paper, I explored into the gaps of disability from an Indigenous perspective and the primary Philippine policies on disability education and Indigenous Peoples Education. These analyses were used to conceptualizing a proposed model and framework for developing a curriculum for Indigenous Learners with Disabilities.

### INTRODUCTION

My inspiration for this study happened in one of the major courses under the Special Needs Education Program at our university that I am currently teaching. We were then collaboratively developing a model and framework for their respective community's rehabilitation programs. One of the tasks was to identify members of the community who could be members of the multidisciplinary team. In the language of special education services, multidisciplinary team refers to the mechanism for organizing and coordinating educational, health, and care services to meet the needs of individuals with complex educational needs (Øvretveit, 1996). Following the medical model of disability, this team includes a regular teacher, a special education teacher, a specialist doctor, a clinical nurse specialist, a community mental health nurse, a psychologist, a social worker, and an occupational therapist, among others. All of a sudden, a student said that their community's dorarakit will also be a part of the team that he is organizing for community-based rehabilitation program, that he is developing for individuals with disabilities in their community. The student is a member of a Yapayao-Isneg group in Adams, Ilocos Norte. Also known as the Apayao or Iapayao group, the Yapayao-Isneg is a sub-group of an upland minority population who migrated from the mountain region of Kalinga-Apayao to their present locations in the Municipality of Adams in the Province of Ilocos Norte, Philippines (Wallace, 2005). Dorarakit, the ritualist-healer of their community, according to him, can also be a mamagbaga, or counselor. Here, the student is equating the tasks of a health worker, a guidance counselor, and a social worker in the multidisciplinary team to what the dorarakit is doing for their community.

From this experience, I looked into how I conceptualized my knowledge of special and inclusive education as an

advocate and as an educator preparing future teachers of our communities: I found that I missed looking at this discipline from the perspectives of our Indigenous community.

Current educational discourses that encourage educators to contextualize the curriculum for more effective learning. According to Mouraz and Leite (2013, p. 2), contextualization, when viewed as a means of closely aligning teaching and learning with learners' realities, is a requirement for addressing the topic of content and activity structure. In the situation of learners with disabilities, special education has also been contextualized. Particularly in the Philippines for example, as it strives to educate children with disabilities as many as possible, contextualization of the special education curriculum was seen as viable educational alternative. Inciong and Quijano (2004, p. 5), highlighted the Philippine efforts towards contextualizing special education named Silahis Centers or the school within the school concept as a feasible model for implementing and promoting the inclusion of children with disabilities within regular schools throughout the country. As it addresses the claim of Miles (1995, p. 50) that the international development of special education ignored or dismissed the theoretical and philosophical frameworks prevalent in global South contexts in relation to disability, rights and education, another Philippine reality to be confronted is the existence of Indigenous communities.

Thus, in this paper, which I am also writing to direct my future actions as an educator and advocate of inclusive education, I argued that Philippine laws provide for adequate and proper education for learners with disabilities and learners who are members of Indigenous communities. Nevertheless, primary policies that serve as guides for these services are operating separately and, therefore, are not providing direction for the education

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of Indigenous learners with disabilities. Thus, a model and framework for making a curriculum for Indigenous learners with disabilities needs to be developed.

### Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to proposed a model and framework for developing a curriculum for Indigenous learners with disabilities. Specifically, I answered the following questions: (1) what are the perspectives of the Indigenous peoples on disability and disability education; (2) what are the gaps in the primary Philippine policies on disability education and Indigenous peoples education; and (3) what model and framework can be proposed for developing a curriculum for Indigenous learners with disabilities.

### METHOD OF ANALYSIS

This study employed a reflective research analysis of literatures on disability studies, indigeneity, and Indigenous peoples education in order to answer the questions enumerated in the previous section. After the analysis, the researcher proposed and discussed a model and a framework towards developing a curriculum for Indigenous learners with disabilities.

### RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the analysis done to interrogate the intersections of disability studies, indigeneity, and Indigenous peoples education which led to the development of the proposed model and framework for developing a curriculum for Indigenous learners with disabilities.

#### Disability and Disability Education through Indigenous Perspectives

The term persons with disabilities (PWDs) is defined by the United Nations, as people who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that, when combined with other barriers, prevent them from fully and effectively participating in society on an equal basis with others (United Nations, 2006). The aforementioned convention attempted to address concerns about the harsh situations experienced by people with disabilities who face various or aggravated kinds of discrimination based on race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, property, birth, age, and Indigenous heritage (United Nations, 2006, p. 2). A part of the spectrum of disability and other barriers which, by extension, still part of UN's definition though not usually discussed is the possibility that a person with disability is a member of an Indigenous community. Avery (2016, p. 4) describes the experiences of indigenous people with disabilities at the junction of being an indigenous person and being a person with a disability as double discrimination. A proof can be seen through the implementation of special education programs. Special education is an area that has not been thoroughly investigated from an indigenous perspective despite the fact that it is one of the measures stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons

with Disabilities to eradicate disability discrimination and promote full and effective participation in society (United Nations, 2006, p. 17). Because indigenous children with disabilities are twice as likely to be identified as requiring additional support to participate in mainstream education and care programs, according to Gill (as cited in Nash 2020, p. 43), special education must be designed to adopt the practices of the Indigenous community's culture and environment.

This gap in being an Indigenous people with a disability, as well as the right of Indigenous peoples to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories, and aspirations that must be appropriately reflected in their education (United Nations, 2007, p. 14), motivates scholars in disability studies and indigenous studies to regard indigenous knowledge in particular (Kalyanpur, 2018, p. 404). He even stated that if a special education program is built on indigenous knowledge, creative solutions will emerge (2018, p. 404), such as acquiring skills and behaviors that are important in their culture and necessary in being a part of their community (p. 407) through their indigenous way of learning through observation (p. 407). Kalyanapur further stated that indigenous knowledge lays the path for disability inclusion in the community (p. 409) as well as eradicating the stigma associated with disability caused by old western medical practices of identifying and labeling people with impairments. He used the indigenous Indian name *viklang* as an example, which is a more neutral term for people with disabilities than other disparaging labels or typologies for people with disabilities. In another study, Bevan-Brown (n.d.) explores Māori perspectives on disabilities that moved for greater inclusion of Indigenous peoples with disability. After examining three studies on intellectual disability, blindness and vision, and autism spectrum disorder, she identifies core Māori values, attitude, and practices that support disability inclusion. Ultimately, he argues that Indigenous peoples will be supportive of disability inclusion movement as they share the same struggle on discrimination, marginalization, and disempowerment. By identifying the core Māori values that support disability inclusion, this study presented the holism and sufficiency of indigenous knowledge to support and provide for various challenges of an Indigenous person such as disability. Furthermore, because of the Indigenous idea that all children are gifts to the community, according to Greenwood (as referenced in Nash 2020, p.30), there is rarely a debate concerning handicap. Recognizing the dynamism of disability for Indigenous peoples, Levers (2006, p. 486) described disability as a socially driven notion that changes considerably among cultures. Because disability is a social construct, Annama et al. (2013, p. 47) pointed out that disability among Indigenous peoples is exacerbated by other forms of social discrimination such as racism, classism, and sexism, rather than physical discrimination. For example, cultural bias in assessment, which is critical in providing necessary support to a person with disability, have long been an issue especially

in the Philippines where assessment instruments are often made or from western countries. Additionally, some of the alleged disabilities are based on what is wrong and lacking according to the modern perspective and concept of what is normal. Examples are specific learning disabilities such as dysgraphia, dyslexia, and dyscalculia. These disabilities in writing, reading, and numeracy are based on the standards of a literate society to acquire learning.

### Primary Philippine Policies on Disability Education and Indigenous Peoples Education

Philippine laws provide for adequate and proper education for learners with disabilities and those who are members of Indigenous communities. Section 1, Article 14 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution states that the state shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all. Republic Act 10533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, which is the primary document that instructs on basic education in the Philippines, lists standards and principles for developing the enhanced basic education curriculum. Its first principle can already summarize the other principles and can likewise instruct for the provision of appropriate education both for children with special needs and learners from Indigenous communities: "The curriculum shall be learner-centered, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate."

Prior to Republic Act 10533, which was enacted in 2013, there were already policies for both children with special needs and learners from Indigenous communities. First is the Philippine Department of Education Order 72, s. 2009, or the Inclusive Education as a Strategy for Increasing the Participation Rate of Children. According to the policy, the DepEd promotes inclusive education as its philosophy, which includes accepting all children regardless of race, size, shape, color, ability, or disability, with support from school staff, students, parents, and the community. Also, the said policy lists ways in which to implement an inclusive education program such as (a) child find or identify the location or mapping of areas where children with disabilities are located in order to deliver special education services to them or them; (b) assessment, which includes continuous identification of strengths and weaknesses; (c) program options or the availability of special education services in the area closest to the child's residence; (d) curriculum modification; and (e) parental involvement. The policy also outlines the roles and responsibilities of each individual who is expected to assist in the implementation of the program. Despite this, the 6-page policy does not explicitly lay out the process or plan for implementing an inclusive education program at the national, local, or even classroom level. The policy is an out-of-date directive that lacks a consistent, clear, and decisive approach (Muega 2016, p. 2) not only for integrating children with special needs into general education but also for learners in various difficult

situations in addition to disability.

Meanwhile, Indigenous Peoples Education is guaranteed through the Philippine Department of Education issued Order No. 62, s. 2011, titled Adopting the National Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) Policy Framework. The framework ensures that functional literacy is achieved by providing high-quality basic education through appropriate pedagogy, content, and assessment, as well as the integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs) in all learning areas and processes. It also aspires to provide adequate and culturally appropriate learning resources and environments for IPs learners, including the creation of textbooks and other supplementary learning materials.

As the IPED Framework aims to create an educational system inclusive and respectful of learners belonging to minority groups or Indigenous communities, when it comes to the education of Indigenous learners with disabilities, it can hardly instruct. First, the above-mentioned policy on inclusive education was much earlier than the introduction of the IPED Framework, so it is not surprising that the consideration of the Indigenous perspective is not seen in this policy. Second, the policy on the education of learners with disabilities does not actually lay out a plan and suggestions on how to localize or contextualize it based on the needs of the particular community that includes learners with disabilities. Third, services for learners with disabilities go beyond learning areas and require other supports, such as rehabilitation and transition programs and medical support. This means that even these supports must be in line with the requirement of the IPED framework that Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices be part of all learning areas and processes.

### A Model for Developing a Curriculum for Indigenous Learners with Disabilities

In the previous finding, the weakness of the Philippine Policy on inclusive education were discussed. Also, the need for the implementation of special inclusive education to comply with the integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices as provided in the IPED framework for learning areas and supports in IPED. Furthermore, we explore on the concept of disability and disability education through Indigenous perspectives. Therefore, in this section, we will fill the gap identified by proposing a model for developing a curriculum for indigenous learners with disabilities.

At the center of this model is the Indigenous learners with disabilities. The learner is supported by the Environment/ Ancestral Domain, the Family and the Community, the Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices, and the Indigenous Values of the community. From these immediate supports of the learners, curriculum developers can frame the curriculum through the suggested phases named after Ilokano social engagement practices. I used Ilokano because the language is used as the lingua franca among the Indigenous communities in Northern Luzon.



1. *Pannakisarsarita* shall be the phase when the curriculum developer assesses the strengths, weakness, needs, and community participation of an Indigenous learners with disability through active conversation. Named after the practice of pannakisarsarita, this phase will not interrupt the individual, the community, and the environment which is happening in formal interviews restricted with interview guides and time limits.

2. *Panagmatmat* in this phase, the curriculum developer critically observes the natural and spontaneous activity of the Indigenous learners with disability as he takes part in the activities or the practice of IKS within his family and community in their ancestral domain or environment.

3. *Pannakipagpaset* approximately participation. In this phase, the curriculum developer is expected to participate in the natural and spontaneous activities of the Indigenous learners with disabilities. This is particularly included in this model with regard to Indigenous knowledges which may not be observable but can only be felt. It will also provide the curriculum developer a rich understanding of the Indigenous values towards disability because he experiences it first-hand.

4. *Panangamiris* is the exhaustive analyses of the previously gathered information to develop a curriculum for an Indigenous learner with disability. Here, he will subject the knowledges he gathered about the Indigenous learner with disability is supported by his community and how can it be used in providing Indigenous special education services further considering as well the goals of IPED, inclusive education, and the K to 12 curriculum.

5. *Pannakitungtong* is named after tongtongan which is the Cordilleran indigenous social and a political platform for decision-making and consensus-building. A phase which can approximate for the conduct of focus group discussion, here, the curriculum developer will be presenting the curriculum to the community, seek their opinions, suggestions, and recommendation, and eventually approval as well to be the Indigenous special education curriculum tailored for Indigenous learners

with disabilities in their community.

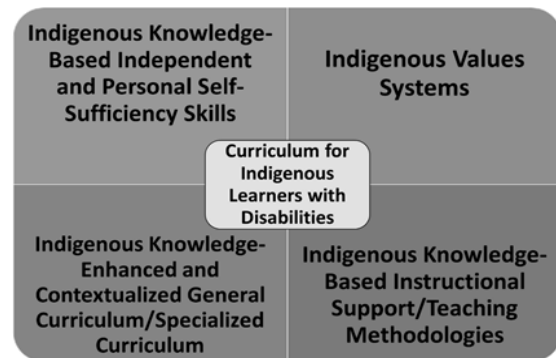
6. *Panagbukel* is the completion of curriculum development and ready for implementation.

### A Framework for Developing a Curriculum for Indigenous Learners with Disabilities

Based on the previously presented model, below is the proposed framework for developing a curriculum for indigenous learners with disabilities.

The framework below suggests that curriculum for indigenous learners with disabilities includes:

- Indigenous knowledge-based independent and personal self-sufficiency skills which refers to the skills one needs to survive independently or, at least, accomplish something for himself based on the expectation of his community;
- Indigenous values systems which bound the community and its members together;
- Indigenous Knowledge-Based Instructional Support/Teaching Methodologies. The Indigenous learner with



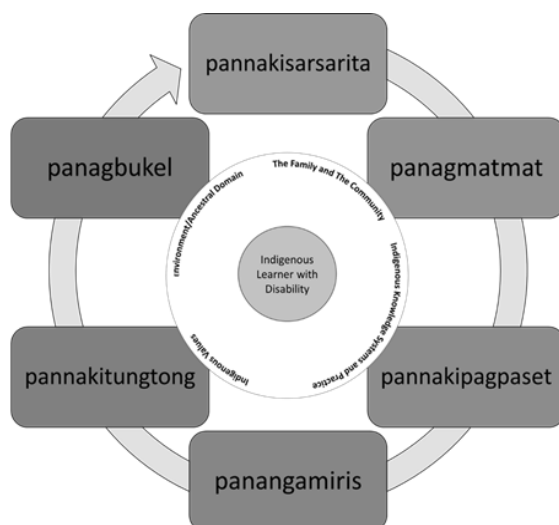
**Figure 2:** A proposed framework in developing a curriculum for indigenous learners with disabilities.

disability must learn through methodologies which are culturally-appropriate; and

- Indigenous Knowledge-Enhanced and Contextualized General Curriculum/Specialized Curriculum.

### CONCLUSION

After looking at Indigenous views on disability and disability education as well as the main policies of the Philippines on inclusive education and Indigenous peoples education, this article was able to find the gaps in current education implementation and curriculum that directly address the needs of learners who are both Indigenous and have a disability. With this finding, this article was able to propose a model and framework for developing a curriculum for Indigenous learners with disabilities. As this model and framework are contextualized by using Ilokano terms, an ethnolinguistic group in Northern Luzon, it also suggests the need for contextualizing special education services. Thus, the terms used must be modified according to the terms and local knowledge of the community in which both the model and framework will be utilized. Furthermore, as this model and framework are still theoretical, there can



**Figure 1:** A proposed process model in developing a curriculum for indigenous learners with disabilities.

still be improvement as this will be applied in curriculum development. Lastly, this model and framework, as well as the philosophy espoused in this article, are hoped to contribute to the dearth of literature zeroing in on the experiences of Indigenous learners with disabilities.

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