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Conserving the Bukidnon Roots: A Narrative Inquiry Among the Indigenous Students' Practices of Preserving Identity and Tradition

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ABSTRACT

The culture of the Bukidnon people reflects a profound connection to traditions, rituals, and ancestral lands, which have been passed down through generations via oral storytelling and shared practices. However, these traditions face increasing risks of decline as modernization, external influences, and the absence of formal documentation threaten their continuity and survival. Statements from indigenous students were gathered through a narrative approach, with participants selected using peer-driven referrals to ensure inclusivity within the community. Their accounts were organized and examined thematically, highlighting patterns of cultural preservation while keeping each individual's perspective intact. The findings show that indigenous students continue to preserve their cultural identity through rituals, traditions, language, and community participation, reflecting strong cultural attachment and continuity. However, academic demands, distance from ancestral communities, social stigma, modern influences, and environmental threats create significant challenges that shape how these practices are sustained. The results suggest that strengthening support systems within educational and community settings is essential to help indigenous students sustain their cultural practices while navigating academic and social demands.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The Bukidnon people are known for their rich and vibrant culture, which reflects a way of life deeply rooted in traditions, rituals, and spiritual beliefs tied to their ancestral lands (Improgo, 2012). For generations, these practices have defined their identity and shaped their relationship with the natural environment. Songs, chants, and stories handed down orally have served as the primary means of transmitting values, wisdom, and customs, allowing each generation to remain connected with its roots (Jaro, 2021). This oral tradition has ensured that cultural practices are not just remembered but lived, preserving a sense of unity and belonging within the community.

In recent years, however, these cultural practices have come under threat due to rapid modernization and the strong influence of external forces that disrupt traditional ways of life (Sanmee, 2024). The younger generation, faced with competing priorities and exposure to new cultural models, shows a noticeable decline in practicing and passing on their knowledge (McCloud, 2018). This has led to a slow fading of traditions that once formed the foundation of the Bukidnon identity. The absence of written records or formal documentation further exacerbates the situation, creating a gap in continuity and making it more challenging for future generations to recover what has been lost (Eslit, 2024).

Despite the importance of cultural preservation, there remains a lack of adequate studies that focus on how indigenous students themselves contribute to sustaining

their traditions and practices. Much of what is known about indigenous knowledge has been documented from external perspectives. At the same time, the voices and lived experiences of the youth who stand at the crossroads of tradition and modernity are often left unheard. This gap highlights the need for increased attention to the younger generation's active role in preserving cultural identity, particularly in academic settings where preservation is not always a priority.

Recognizing the urgency of this situation, it is essential to emphasize how cultural heritage contributes not only to the safeguarding of indigenous identity but also to the enrichment of national and global heritage (Gadaza *et al.*, 2025). Preserving cultural practices protects cultural assimilation and eventual loss, ensuring that the wisdom of the past continues to inspire future generations (Hipolito, 2024). Communities can empower indigenous students to carry forward their traditions with pride while also contributing to a more inclusive cultural narrative at the national and global level by understanding and strengthening these preservation efforts.

The study seeks to identify the specific cultural practices that indigenous students continue to uphold as a way of preserving their culture. Consequently, the study aims to strengthen ongoing efforts in cultural preservation and shed light on the role of the youth in ensuring that traditions remain meaningful and relevant in the face of modern challenges.

Conceptual Framework

The study is anchored on a foundation of cultural and

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social theories that explain how identity is preserved and transmitted across generations. Cultural Identity Theory (Urrieta, 2018) provides the lens to understand how traditions and practices shape the sense of self among indigenous students, helping them navigate between their cultural roots and the demands of modern society. Alongside this, Acculturation Theory (Ward & Geeraert, 2016) explains the challenges they face as they adapt to external influences while striving to maintain their own cultural distinctiveness. Together, these theories highlight the tension between preserving identity and adjusting to new realities, which is central to the experiences of indigenous communities today.

Complementing these perspectives, Cultural Preservation and Transmission Theory (Holl, 2023) emphasizes the importance of sustaining traditions through active participation, oral storytelling, and intergenerational learning. This theory emphasizes that culture persists only when it is consciously practiced and passed on, highlighting the crucial role of indigenous students in maintaining continuity. It also frames the risks associated with cultural decline, particularly when oral traditions lack formal documentation. Within this context, the youth become both the inheritors and transmitters of knowledge, responsible for ensuring that their identity remains intact despite shifting environments.

Anchoring these theoretical perspectives within a legal framework, Republic Act No. 10066, or the National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009, strengthens the call for preservation by mandating the safeguarding of cultural heritage. This law acknowledges the significance of indigenous knowledge as an integral part of national identity and global heritage. When considered together, the theories and the law complement each other by offering both conceptual and practical grounding for cultural preservation. They provide a balance between understanding the lived experiences of indigenous students, explaining the pressures of acculturation, and ensuring that these cultural practices are protected through formal recognition and support.

Statement of the Problem

The culture of the Bukidnon people embodies a heritage deeply rooted in traditions, rituals, and oral practices that connect them to their ancestral lands. However, with the growing pressures of modernization and external influences, many of these practices are at risk of being forgotten, especially as the younger generation shows a decline in continuing them. The absence of formal documentation further worsens the situation, leaving much of their cultural identity vulnerable to disappearance. In this context, the study seeks to address the following questions:

1. What cultural practices are still observed by indigenous students as a way of preserving their identity and traditions?
2. What difficulties do they encounter in their efforts to preserve cultural identity?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Identity and Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Cultural identity is closely linked to indigenous knowledge systems, which include beliefs, values, skills, and practices developed through long interaction with the natural and social environment. Related literature emphasizes that indigenous knowledge is not only a source of cultural meaning but also a guide for daily living, community relationships, and environmental care (Rosales & Cruz, 2023; Tan, 2025). This knowledge is shaped by shared experiences and passed on through generations, allowing indigenous communities to maintain a strong sense of identity despite social change (Miole, 2022; Colicol, 2024; Camino-Singcolan, 2025). Understanding cultural identity through indigenous knowledge systems helps explain how traditions remain relevant and meaningful, especially for younger members who navigate both traditional and modern settings.

Oral Traditions and Modes of Knowledge Transmission

Oral tradition has long been recognized as the primary way indigenous knowledge is shared and preserved. Studies describe storytelling, chants, songs, rituals, and daily conversations with elders as key ways through which values, history, and cultural norms are passed on (Tan, 2021; Cenabre-Galindon, 2023). These oral forms allow knowledge to remain flexible and closely tied to lived experience, making learning personal and community-centered. Through repeated participation and listening, younger generations gradually internalize cultural meanings and practices (Jaro, 2021; Pacio, 2023; Pregoner *et al.*, 2024).

However, related literature also points out that reliance on oral transmission makes indigenous knowledge vulnerable when fewer people actively practice or share it. Changes in lifestyle, reduced interaction with elders, and limited opportunities for cultural gatherings weaken this mode of transmission (Cacay & Taja-on, 2023; Vargas-Chaves, 2024). As a result, scholars highlight the importance of documenting oral traditions while still respecting their cultural context (Blanza & Paborada, 2024; Camino-Singcolan, 2025). This balance between living practice and careful recording supports the continuity of indigenous knowledge without removing it from its communal roots.

Challenges of Modernization and Cultural Assimilation

Modernization has brought both opportunities and challenges to indigenous communities, particularly in education, technology, and social interaction (McCloud, 2018; Espiritu, 2024; Sanmee, 2024). Related studies note that increased exposure to dominant cultures often places pressure on indigenous youth to adapt to new values, languages, and lifestyles. This can lead to reduced participation in traditional practices and a growing distance from cultural roots. Formal education systems,

while important for development, may unintentionally limit space for indigenous knowledge when curricula focus mainly on modern content (Blanco, 2024; Eslit, 2024).

Cultural assimilation further intensifies these challenges by shaping attitudes that view traditional practices as outdated or less important. Literature highlights that feelings of shame, discrimination, and lack of recognition contribute to cultural withdrawal among the youth. Environmental changes and loss of ancestral lands also disrupt rituals tied to nature (Mahmood, 2024; Violon, 2024; Jacoba, 2025). These findings suggest that cultural preservation requires active effort and support to ensure that modernization does not result in the gradual loss of identity and tradition.

Role of Youth in Cultural Preservation

The youth play a vital role in sustaining indigenous culture, as they serve as the link between past traditions and future continuity. Related literature emphasizes that when young people actively engage in cultural practices, they help keep traditions alive and meaningful (Gadaza *et al.*, 2025). Their participation in rituals, language use, and community activities strengthens cultural transmission and encourages pride in identity. At the same time, scholars note that empowering youth through education and community support enables them to balance modern life with cultural responsibility, making them key agents in preserving indigenous heritage (Hipolito, 2024; Jacoba, 2025).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design and Locale

The study employed a narrative inquiry research design (Adhikari, 2021), which is particularly suited to exploring the lived experiences of individuals through the stories they share. This design allowed the researchers to capture the voices of indigenous students and understand how their personal narratives reflect broader cultural practices and preservation efforts. Conducting the research at San Isidro College provided a meaningful context, as the institution is home to students who are members of the Bukidnon indigenous community.

Sampling Method and Respondents

To reach participants, the study used the respondent-driven sampling (RDS) technique (Navarrete *et al.*, 2022), where initial participants referred other qualified individuals from within their community. This approach was chosen to ensure that indigenous students currently enrolled at San Isidro College, who may not always be easily identified through formal listings, were able to take part in the research. The method was practical for engaging a population that is closely knit and sometimes hesitant to volunteer without the trust built through peer networks.

The participants were college students at San Isidro College

Table 1: Demographic profile of the participants.

Participant	Sex	Tribe
Participant 1	Male	Higa-onon
Participant 2	Female	Higa-onon
Participant 3	Male	Bukidnon
Participant 4	Male	Manobo
Participant 5	Female	Higa-onon

who are members of the highland indigenous people of Bukidnon. Their inclusion was significant because they represent the younger generation at the intersection of traditional practices and modern education. Engaging these students as participants offered valuable insights into how indigenous culture is being lived out, negotiated, and preserved in the present day, particularly within the academic environment.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument used was a researcher-made questionnaire designed to elicit detailed narratives from the participants. To ensure its credibility and appropriateness, the instrument underwent expert validation by three professionals with backgrounds relevant to culture and research, resulting in a Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.973. This high rating indicated that the tool was both reliable and effective in capturing the intended data. The questionnaire provided structure to the interviews while still allowing participants to share their experiences freely.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data were gathered through face-to-face interviews conducted with the participants in settings that were comfortable and appropriate for open conversation. Each interview lasted between fifteen and thirty minutes, allowing enough time for participants to share their experiences and insights without feeling rushed. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission to ensure accurate documentation of their responses and to support careful review during analysis. This approach helped capture the depth and detail of the narratives while maintaining consistency across all interviews.

Before the interviews began, the researchers clearly explained the purpose of the research and what participation would involve. Participants were informed that their involvement was voluntary and that they were free to decline any question or withdraw at any point without any negative consequences. Informed consent forms were provided and signed prior to data collection to confirm their understanding and agreement. These steps ensured that the data gathering process was conducted in an ethical, respectful, and transparent manner, fostering trust between the researchers and the participants.

Data Treatment

The data gathered from participants' stories were

treated using Thematic Narrative Analysis (Bengtsson & Andersen, 2020). This approach allowed the researchers to identify patterns and recurring themes across individual accounts while preserving the unique voice and perspective of each participant. Through this method, the narratives were examined not only for their content but also for the meaning they conveyed about cultural identity, tradition, and preservation. The analysis thus provided a deeper understanding of the lived realities of indigenous students and the challenges and opportunities they face in maintaining their heritage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are organized into two main areas: the cultural practices that indigenous students continue to observe and the difficulties they encounter in preserving their cultural identity.

Cultural Practices Observed by Indigenous Students Continued Participation in Rituals and Ceremonial Practices

The results indicate that indigenous students continue to take part in rituals and ceremonial practices that are closely linked to farming, healing, thanksgiving, and the natural environment. As shared by the participants:

"We still observe rituals connected to farming and the environment, like asking permission from the spirits of the land before planting or harvesting (Panalabugta)." — Participant 1

"Example of our rituals include panlagan or kaliga (Thanksgiving ritual), Pamuhat, and Damlag (Healing ritual)." — Participant 2

"We still practice panalanahig... and pamuhat (thanksgiving ritual)." — Participant 4

"Some examples of our customs are our... offering rituals at the beginning of the year which we called 'Panalaniban.'" — Participant 5

These practices remain part of their lived experiences, reflecting how cultural identity is expressed through action rather than symbolism alone. Rituals such as those performed before planting or harvesting, healing ceremonies, and offerings at the start of the year indicate that tradition remains relevant in everyday life. The continued observance of these practices demonstrates that cultural identity is actively maintained through participation, even as students engage with modern education and urban settings.

The persistence of ritual practices suggests that indigenous students play an important role in keeping cultural traditions alive despite changing circumstances. Their involvement reflects an effort to balance traditional beliefs with contemporary demands, allowing rituals to remain meaningful rather than ceremonial remnants of the past (Blanza & Paborada, 2024; Hipolito, 2024; Gadaza *et al.*, 2025). This continued engagement supports the transmission of cultural knowledge and reinforces community values tied to spirituality, respect for nature,

and collective well-being. As such, ritual participation serves as a foundation for sustaining cultural continuity across generations.

Practice of Indigenous Dances, Songs, Chants, and Music

The results indicate that indigenous students actively engage in cultural performances such as traditional dances, chants, and music. Participants shared about their dances:

"Our traditional dances, like the Inamu... and Binakbak... are performed during gatherings." — Participant 1

"I continuously observe and learn from our traditional dances and rituals." — Participant 2

"We... dance the binanog, which imitates the movement of an eagle." — Participant 4

Additionally, participants shared about their songs:

"For traditional songs, we have banggoy, ambula, and sola cueve." — Participant 2

"We still sing bayok, which are traditional chants used to express emotions or tell stories." — Participant 4

These practices function as living expressions of identity, storytelling, and collective memory. Through regular participation in dances and the performance of chants during gatherings, students continue to embody cultural meanings that are passed down through movement, sound, and rhythm. These forms of expression provide a visible and audible way for culture to be shared and recognized within the community.

The continued practice of these artistic traditions highlights their role in strengthening cultural identity among indigenous students. Engaging in dance and music allows them to preserve tradition in a form that is adaptable to both community and public spaces (Tan, 2021; Cenabre-Galindon, 2023). This participation supports cultural continuity by making tradition accessible and engaging, especially for younger members. It also reinforces pride in identity, helping cultural expressions remain active rather than fading due to lack of practice.

Community Gatherings, Festivals, and Cultural Celebrations

The results indicate that community gatherings and cultural celebrations remain important spaces where indigenous students connect with their heritage. As shared by the participants:

"We also practice the Kaamulan (gathering/festival), although now it's mostly in the city." — Participant 1

"I connect... by joining community events which we celebrated last month, our IP Day." — Participant 5

Participation in festivals and community events provides opportunities for collective expression and reinforces a shared sense of belonging. These gatherings allow cultural practices to be performed, observed, and celebrated in a communal setting, even when held outside ancestral areas

or within urban spaces.

The continued involvement of students in these events suggests that communal activities play a key role in cultural preservation. Such gatherings help sustain traditions by creating regular opportunities for practice and interaction with other community members. They also serve as a bridge between tradition and modern life, allowing culture to adapt to new settings while maintaining its core values (Tan, 2021; Blanza & Paborada, 2024; Tan, 2025). This reinforces the idea that cultural identity thrives through shared experiences rather than isolation.

Observance of Customs, Values, and Social Traditions

The results reveal that indigenous students continue to observe customs and values that guide social relationships and community life. As shared by the participants:

"The 'Tampudas' (peace pact) is a very important tradition... emphasizing peace among different tribes or families." — Participant 1

"Pamlang (Traditional Marriage), Peg-ampo (Praying to Magbabaya God), and other traditional festivals." — Participant 2

"We still observe... respect for our elders especially for our 'Datu' and 'Bae' and our way of helping one another called the Bayanihan." — Participant 5

Practices related to peace-building, respect for elders, leadership roles, cooperation, and traditional ceremonies reflect deeply rooted moral and social principles. These customs shape how students relate to others and maintain harmony within their communities.

The continued observance of these values suggests that cultural identity is preserved not only through visible practices but also through daily behavior and social interaction. Upholding respect, cooperation, and peace strengthens social bonds and reinforces cultural norms that define community life (Camino-Singcolan, 2025; Tan, 2025). This shows that cultural preservation extends beyond rituals and performances, embedding itself in the attitudes and actions of indigenous students.

Use of Indigenous Language and Oral Tradition

The results highlight the continued use of indigenous language and oral tradition within family and community settings. As shared by the participants:

"My elders taught me by having me join the rituals and telling the stories as we worked in the fields." — Participant 1

"These were passed down through storytelling... my grandfather used to tell us tales while sitting by the fire." — Participant 4

"Listening to the stories of our elders and practicing our tradition." — Participant 5

Language remains a key medium through which stories, values, and traditions are passed on. Storytelling by elders and everyday use of the native language allow cultural knowledge to remain active and meaningful across generations.

This continued reliance on oral tradition emphasizes its role as a living system of knowledge transmission. By listening to elders and practicing language at home, indigenous students contribute to preserving cultural memory in its original form (Jaro, 2021; Cacay & Taja-on, 2023). These practices help sustain identity by ensuring that cultural knowledge is not only remembered but lived and shared within personal and communal spaces.

Cultural Attire and Expressions

The results reveal that indigenous students continue to use traditional attire and cultural symbols during significant events. As shared by a participant:

"I wear our traditional tangkulo (bead cloth) during cultural events to show respect and pride." — Participant 4

Wearing traditional clothing during cultural activities reflects respect for heritage and serves as a visible expression of identity. These material expressions act as symbols of belonging and cultural pride. The use of traditional attire reinforces cultural identity by making tradition present in social and cultural spaces. It allows students to express respect for their roots while asserting visibility within broader society (Blanza & Paborada, 2024; Hipolito, 2024; Tan, 2025). Such practices support cultural preservation by keeping traditional symbols relevant and recognized, especially during communal and cultural gatherings.

Environmental Stewardship and Spiritual Connection to the Land

The results reveal that indigenous students maintain a strong connection to the environment as part of their cultural identity. As shared by a participant:

"Being Higaonon... means being a guardian of the forest and a peace-loving person." — Participant 1

Additionally, the participant shared:

"We still observe rituals connected to farming and the environment." — Participant 1

Practices and beliefs related to caring for the land, respecting nature, and maintaining harmony with the environment remain central to how they understand their role within the community. This connection reflects a worldview where culture, spirituality, and nature are closely linked.

The continued emphasis on environmental responsibility suggests that cultural preservation also involves protecting the natural spaces tied to tradition. By valuing the land and recognizing its spiritual importance, indigenous students help sustain practices that depend on natural settings (Mahmood, 2024; Jacoba, 2025). This connection reinforces cultural continuity and highlights the importance of safeguarding both cultural and environmental heritage.

Overall, the results indicate that indigenous students actively preserve their cultural identity through a range of interconnected practices. Participation in rituals, artistic

expressions, community gatherings, social customs, language use, symbolic attire, and environmental care reflects a holistic approach to cultural preservation. These practices demonstrate that culture remains lived, practiced, and shared, even within modern educational contexts. Collectively, they highlight the role of indigenous students as active carriers of tradition who sustain cultural continuity through everyday actions and meaningful participation.

Difficulties Encounter in the Preservation of Cultural Identity

Lack of Time Due to Academic Demands

The results reveal that academic responsibilities significantly limit indigenous students' ability to engage in cultural practices. As shared by the participants:

"School takes up most of my time... our traditional practices often require a lot of time." — Participant 1

"I don't have time to join because of schooling." — Participant 3

"One difficulty I faced is balancing my studies with joining cultural activities... I am a college student who is always busy at school." — Participant 5

Participants consistently described how schoolwork, class schedules, and academic pressure consume most of their time, leaving little opportunity to participate in traditions that often require extended preparation and active involvement. The data indicate that while students value their cultural identity, competing academic demands make regular participation in rituals and cultural activities difficult. This situation highlights how educational commitments can unintentionally reduce students' direct engagement with their cultural practices.

These results imply that cultural preservation becomes more challenging when academic life does not allow space for cultural participation. Limited time restricts students' ability to actively practice and experience traditions, which may weaken continuity over time (Miolo, 2022; Colicol, 2024; Gadaza *et al.*, 2025). The findings suggest the need for supportive environments where academic responsibilities and cultural engagement do not compete but can coexist, allowing students to sustain their cultural identity while pursuing their education.

Physical Distance from the Ancestral Community

The results indicate that physical separation from ancestral communities presents a major difficulty in preserving cultural identity. As shared by the participants:

"...our traditional practices often require... specific locations in the ancestral domain, far from the city." — Participant 1

"I study far from our community, so I can't always join our gatherings or rituals." — Participant 4

Participants noted that many cultural practices are tied to specific places within the ancestral domain, making participation difficult for students studying in urban

areas. The distance limits their ability to attend rituals, gatherings, and events that require presence in culturally significant locations, resulting in reduced participation despite continued cultural attachment.

This situation implies that geographic separation weakens regular cultural involvement and reduces opportunities for experiential learning. When students are unable to return home frequently, cultural practices become less accessible, which may affect the transmission of traditions (Jaro, 2021; Cenabre-Galindon, 2023; Mahmood, 2024). The findings emphasize the importance of finding ways to maintain cultural connection even when physical distance from the community is unavoidable.

Discrimination and Social Stigma Toward Indigenous Practices

The results reveal that discrimination and social stigma discourage students from openly expressing their cultural identity. As shared by the participants:

"Some feel embarrassed to wear our traditional clothes or practice rituals because they are seen as 'old-fashioned.'" — Participant 1

"One of the challenges... is discrimination, especially toward our traditional dances and language." — Participant 2

"Some are shy to show their culture because they think others will judge them." — Participant 4

Participants described experiences where indigenous dances, language, and practices were viewed negatively, leading some students to feel shy or hesitant to display their culture. These responses show that social judgment can create fear of exclusion, making cultural expression less visible in academic and social settings.

The implications suggest that stigma not only affects participation but also influences how students perceive their cultural identity. When students feel judged, they may choose to hide or limit cultural practices, which weakens cultural continuity (Blanco, 2024; Eslit, 2024; Camino-Singcolan, 2025). Addressing discrimination is therefore essential in creating safe spaces where indigenous students feel respected and encouraged to preserve their traditions.

Influence of Modern Culture and Preference for Contemporary Lifestyles

The results reveal that modern culture strongly influences indigenous students, often competing with traditional practices. As shared by the participants:

"Many young people today are more focused on modern ways and social media." — Participant 4

"Many young people nowadays are more interested in modern trends and forget about our traditional ways." — Participant 5

Participants observed that many young people prioritize modern trends, technology, and social media, which reduces interest in cultural activities. This shift reflects changing preferences that place less value on traditional

ways of life. These results imply that cultural preservation faces challenges as modern lifestyles reshape daily routines and interests. When traditional practices are perceived as less relevant, participation declines, making transmission more difficult (Holl, 2023; Espiritu, 2024; Hipolito, 2024). The findings highlight the need for approaches that help integrate cultural practices into contemporary contexts without losing their meaning.

Cultural Erosion and Loss of Indigenous Language

The results reveal that language erosion is a growing concern among indigenous students. As shared by a participant:

"It brings language erosion... younger generations prefer to speak Tagalog or English." — Participant 3

Participants noted that younger generations increasingly prefer using English, which limits everyday use of indigenous languages. This shift reduces opportunities for language practice and weakens its role in daily communication. The implication of this finding is that language loss directly affects cultural preservation, as language carries values, history, and shared identity (Cacay & Taja-on, 2023; Pacio, 2023; Sanmee, 2024; Vargas-Chaves, 2024). Reduced use of indigenous languages may lead to a gradual decline in cultural knowledge passed through oral traditions. Strengthening language use remains vital in sustaining cultural identity.

Conflicts Between Indigenous Beliefs and External Influences

The results reveal that indigenous beliefs sometimes conflict with external influences encountered in school and society. As shared by a participant:

"Modern ways and Christian beliefs in school also clash with our indigenous worldview." — Participant 1

Participants described tension between traditional worldviews and dominant belief systems, which creates challenges in maintaining indigenous practices. These conflicts can place students in situations where cultural beliefs are questioned or misunderstood. This finding implies that cultural preservation becomes difficult when students feel pressured to choose between belief systems. Such conflicts may lead to reduced practice of indigenous traditions (Rosales & Cruz, 2023; Mahmood, 2024; Sanmee, 2024). The results suggest the importance of mutual respect and understanding to allow indigenous beliefs to coexist alongside external influences.

Environmental Threats Affecting Cultural Spaces

The results reveal that environmental threats directly affect the preservation of cultural identity. As shared by a participant:

"Land grabbing and logging threaten the forests, which are central to many of our rituals and way of life." — Participant 1

Participants emphasized that land-related issues such as

logging and land grabbing threaten forests that are central to rituals and daily cultural life. The loss or degradation of these spaces limits opportunities to perform traditions connected to nature. The implication is that environmental damage undermines both cultural practice and identity. When sacred and functional cultural spaces are threatened, traditions tied to these areas become harder to sustain. Protecting the environment is therefore closely linked to preserving indigenous culture and ways of life (Espiritu, 2024; Violon, 2024; Jacoba, 2025).

Overall, the results indicate that indigenous students face multiple, interconnected difficulties in preserving their cultural identity. Academic demands, physical distance from ancestral communities, discrimination, and the strong influence of modern culture limit participation in traditional practices. These challenges are further intensified by language erosion, belief conflicts, and environmental threats that affect cultural spaces. Together, these difficulties reveal that cultural preservation is not hindered by a lack of value for tradition, but by structural, social, and environmental barriers that restrict students' ability to actively engage in and sustain their cultural identity.

CONCLUSION

The results show that indigenous students continue to preserve their cultural identity through everyday practices rooted in community life, tradition, and respect for nature. These include participation in rituals and ceremonies, traditional dances, songs, oral storytelling, use of indigenous language, observance of customs and values, and involvement in community gatherings and cultural events. The use of cultural symbols, traditional attire, and a strong spiritual connection to the land further show that cultural identity remains an active and meaningful part of students' lives rather than a symbolic or distant affiliation. Concurrently, the findings reveal several challenges that affect the preservation of cultural identity. Academic demands often limit the time students can devote to cultural activities, while studying far from ancestral communities reduces access to important cultural spaces. Discrimination and social stigma discourage open cultural expression, and modern lifestyles shift attention away from traditional practices. Language loss, conflicts between belief systems, and environmental threats also weaken the transmission of culture. These challenges reflect external pressures rather than a lack of commitment to cultural identity among indigenous students.

The study highlights how indigenous students actively balance cultural preservation with academic responsibilities and changing social environments. While cultural practices remain deeply valued, their continuity depends on the support students receive from schools, families, and communities. However, the study is limited by its small number of participants and reliance on self-reported narratives, which may not represent all indigenous student experiences. Based on the findings,

stronger collaboration between educational institutions and indigenous communities is recommended, including creating supportive spaces for cultural expression, recognizing indigenous traditions in school settings, and encouraging elders' involvement in cultural teaching. Such efforts may help reduce barriers to cultural participation and strengthen the preservation of indigenous identity.

Further Studies

Future studies may build on these findings by involving a larger and more diverse group of indigenous students from different tribes or geographic locations to gain broader understanding of cultural preservation practices. Longitudinal research may also be conducted to examine how cultural identity and practices change over time as students' progress through their education. In addition, studies that include the perspectives of elders, educators, and community leaders may provide a more holistic view of cultural transmission and the shared responsibility of preservation. Exploring the role of school programs, community initiatives, and policy support may further deepen understanding of how indigenous cultural identity can be sustained in changing social contexts.

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