

Original Article

Ayta Learners' perspective on Education: A Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract: Education is a basic human right that all should not be deprived of. All should have access to quality educational services to ensure that the youth will become productive citizens and contribute to the growth of the nation. The study investigated the perspectives of Ayta students in education, with an emphasis on the impact of cultural background, access to higher education, and current support structures. Thirty Ayta students are enrolled in grades 7 and 8 at Tubo-tubo Integrated High School in Dinalupihan, Bataan. They underwent a semi-structured interview. The researcher created a series of interview questions for the study. The study based the questions on the statement of the problem to ensure that all participants' data directly aligned with the study's objective. According to the study, the student population is largely female between the ages of 12 and 13, indicating that Ayta girls are more likely to pursue an education. Their principal sources of income are traditional activities such as broom making, farming, and agriculture. A key finding shows that there is a divide between Ayta cultural knowledge, which is usually taught through hands-on activities, and the main school curriculum, which does not always include Ayta points of view. The cultural divide prevents Ayta students from properly appreciating formal education, since they perceive the curriculum as culturally misaligned. Despite legislation like the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) and government assistance programs like scholarships and the Alternative Learning System (ALS), Ayta students continue to face significant barriers to higher education, such as financial constraints, cultural disconnection, and linguistic challenges. These findings highlight the importance of improving the execution of existing rights and providing more support to Ayta students in order for them to overcome these barriers and gain access to culturally appropriate educational opportunities. The proposed program promotes culturally responsive education pathways that incorporate Ayta knowledge systems.

Keywords: Ayta, indigenous people, access, higher education, culture

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a basic human right that all should not be deprived of. All should have access to quality educational services to ensure that the youth will become productive citizens and contribute to the growth of the nation [1]. As access to education has been given attention, it was envisioned that all school-aged children are fully educated through formal schooling [2]. While the people living in the urban, lowlands, and even rural areas enjoy great opportunities in education, unfortunately the indigenous peoples are not on equal footing [3]. Indigenous peoples are defined by their distinct traditions, culture, and heritage [4]. They account only 6% of the total human population but reaches 19% of the poorest community [5]. These would include languages, behavior, style of living, and even prerogatives in life [6,7]. They spread in 90 countries worldwide and consist of an estimate of 476

million in population [8]. There is a critical gap among indigenous groups, and that is caused by lack of respect and resources. Indigenous traditions are often ignored in schooling. Teachers who speak students' languages are few, and their schools often lack resources. Indigenous peoples' cultural traditions are rarely taught truthfully and fairly. Despite international agreements stating the universal right to education, indigenous peoples do not fully experience these rights, and there is a large education gap between them and the rest of the world (Education United Nations for Indigenous Peoples, n.d.). For instance, in Canada, the divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous bachelor's degree holders is growing. Indigenous persons with bachelor's degrees climbed by 1.9 percentage points (to 12.9%) in 2021, but the Canadian-born non-Indigenous population rose by 2.9 percentage points (to 27.8%). The trend was similar for Métis (+2.5 percentage points, 15.7%), First Nations (+1.6 percentage points, 11.3%), and Inuit (+0.9 percentage points, 6.2%) (Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, 2023). That among the multitude of data motivates indigenous peoples' priorities to be acknowledged through the UNESCO 2030 Agenda's 'leave no one behind' commitment. Sustainable Development Goal 4 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' calls on States to "ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations." Target 4.5 explicitly addresses their learning needs (Indigenous peoples' right to education, 2019). History has proven that the indigenous peoples have been suffering marginalization, discrimination, and displacement in the current society [9-11]. They have been neglected of their basic human rights because they remain different from the modernized world and their proximity to the center of services of the community [12-14]. One of their basic rights that have been commonly under-served is education [15, 16]. Since the dawn of time, education of the indigenous peoples has been placed at the far end of the priority list [17, 18]. The most prevalent violation they experience is discrimination [19, 20]. Most of the people living within and around their native lands would not treat them properly [21]. It is as if they do not have any right to experience the same level of freedom and access to social commodities [22, 23]. It brings to the elevated state of inequity among the natives. The people living in the lowlands whose appearance is more pleasing and whose skin complexion is much fairer are given more privilege than those with dark skin and kinky hair [24]. The disparity of treatment trickles its way down to the education opportunities of the natives [25, 26]. These have been considered prevailing factors why the IPs were not able to have better chances of completing education as compared to others with lighter skin or straighter hair [27]. Indigenous peoples' education might resemble that unfinished roadworks around town. They never get finished and never get any attention for improvement. Problems abound on issues revolving poor access to education [28]. The situation of accessing education among the rural areas might already be problematic but conditions among the tribal areas are even worse. IPs would have to walk hours just to get to the nearest schools. Roads from their homes to the school are not established pavements but dirt roads and even crossing rope bridges above rivers. These infrastructures were not given appropriate funding due to problems of logistics and lack of density of population. For an infrastructure to be built, a substantial population should be the beneficiary. Since the tribes' people are few in numbers, they are not on the priority list for provisions of roads and facilities. Being left underfunded by the government, education for the IPs also experiences the same dilemma. These are also in connection to the inequity of funding among the indigenous peoples and the common community. Majority of the funding are focused on the town proper and municipalities where most of the population are centered. That leaves the tribal areas with less or very little of the government funds to improve their far-flung communities. Since the basic needs for infrastructure are lacking thus the effect of poor access to education takes effect. The opportunity for the IPs to be able to go to school is hampered by these obstacles. While the local education agency is attempting to provide quality education, the school administrators themselves find it taxing to support last mile schools

where IPs is usually found. The provisions for school materials and physical plants and facilities find it hard to reach the tribal areas due to geographic hazards and logistic challenges. Aside from the infrastructures, other challenges that burden the IPs are the cultural and behavioral aspects of their daily lives. Education materials that are mass produced cater only the common language of the land. That leaves the materials rendered in the native languages of the IPs off the shelves. Though mother tongue or native language-based teaching methods were introduced but that cannot suffice the learning materials that the students need for self-learning and mastery. Furthermore, curriculum can be culturally insensitive as well. There have been numerous learning materials that are using the natives – their language, dress, image, and the likes, wrongly. Misrepresentation, discrimination, alteration among all others has been identified among nationally produced reading materials and class activity sheets. These contribute to the worsening situation of the IPs in education. They become a laughingstock among other students hence becoming victims of bullying. As a result, they have been veering away from schools. That leads to under education among the native children. They feel that since from the distant passed up until now, they have been left and still are being left behind. And so, they have focused mainly on their traditional ways of living. That involves their ideals which does not give importance to education. Originally, they have not needed proper education to get by. Now, they steer away from education so as not to be victimized by multi-faceted trauma inducing experiences at school. In relation to poor education, their source of living has been seen as one of the reasons why they do not give much attention to education. Farming seasons of planting and harvesting equates to long period of absenteeism among the native children. They are required by their parents to help with the crops. That means that they will not be coming to schools in week's even months. An obstacle encountered in the education of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) in Brunei is the inadequate creation and advancement of authentic instructional resources. According to [29], it is essential to conserve and document the original languages in Brunei to inspire people to seek education and to highlight the importance of their education and culture. In relation to that, [30] found that language poses significant challenges for IP learners when they reach higher learning institutions. Indigenous peoples in Cambodia also demonstrate lower levels of educational achievement in comparison to the majority population. The primary school enrollment rate in Mondulkiri is 41.74 percent. The 2013 report from the Ministry of Education revealed a decrease in enrollment and a rise in the dropout rate. The factors that contribute to learner's school drop-out encompass poverty, emigration, reliance on seasonal agriculture, insufficient school infrastructure, and considerable distances to travel to school, erratic teaching timetables, uninviting school environment, and limited awareness of the advantages of private education [14]. Another issue pertains to the lack of a dedicated institution catering exclusively to the needs of indigenous students. At a particular university in Mindanao, Philippines, [19] found that there was a lack of inclusivity in the study's locale, and the needs and initiatives of indigenous people were not prioritized. Consequently, the study advised the creation of a student group specifically focused on promoting their rights and developing activities to meet their needs. In contrast, [24] documented the difficulties encountered by indigenous students at a specific secondary school in the Philippines. The dissatisfaction of IP learners with their performance can be attributed to two main factors. Firstly, the language barrier hinders their comprehension of certain lessons. Secondly, while IP learners are dedicated to completing their studies, some students lack the necessary resources for effective studying, such as study gadgets and cell phones. Meanwhile, the remaining students may possess electronic devices or mobile phones, yet their internet connectivity is either limited or unavailable in certain areas of their current whereabouts. All these factors serve as demotivates for individuals to persist in their educational pursuits. An author [15] discovered that in Southern Mindanao, Philippines, there is a lack of schools specifically designed for indigenous peoples (IPs) that employ teachers who are themselves IPs residing within the communities. Furthermore, there is no established curriculum tailored to the needs of IPs, like the community schools that are

operated and overseen by Non-Government Organizations (NGOs). Indigenous peoples were compelled to enroll in mainstream schools that adhere to a standardized curriculum overseen by the Department of Education (DepEd).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study determined the perspectives of the Ayta's of Tubo-tubo towards education. It also serves as the means of identifying the quality and adequacy of access to education in their location. The study employed the qualitative study design pegged on narrative inquiry. The study determined the perspective of the participants on education as influenced by the unique culture they possess. According to [31], narrative inquiry is a qualitative research approach that centers on understanding people's experiences through the stories they tell. It is rooted in the idea that humans make sense of their lives and the world around them by constructing narratives. These narratives shape their identities, actions, and how they perceive the world. The pattern of living among individuals contributes to the shared behavioral or cultural lifestyle of a specific sub-group of people. Qualitative study designs cater to deeper insights into real-world problems. The dwelt on the participants' experiences, perceptions, and practices. Most of it questions raised during the data-gathering period fall under the how or why level of questioning [32]. It can be done through observations and interviews. The study life as it happens and does not influence nor place changes in the natural setting of the source of data [33]. That gives the study insights as to how the participants think and react with the environment they are living at [34]. The study design is appropriate for the study as it revealed the beliefs, perspectives, understandings, views, norms, and practices of Aytas regarding education. The objective of the study is to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the collective understanding, beliefs, and practices of the Ayta community in relation to education.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Studies often show more females in higher education than males. It might be due to various factors, including social expectations or interests in specific fields. Oxford study Encyclopedias highlights that Indigenous females sometimes achieve higher test scores and have better school persistence compared to boys. It could indicate a trend of higher female enrolment [35]. The majority of the Aetas, specifically 60%, fell between the age ranges of 12 to 13 years old. Out of the total, seven individuals, which accounts for 23% of the group, were between the ages of 13 and 14. In contrast, only two individuals were in the age range of 15 to 16. The average age range for students in grade 7 is often between 13 and 14 years old, whereas for grade 8, it is typically between 14 and 15 years old. Therefore, two of the Aeta participants were older than the expected age for their grade level. Based on the accounts of these two individuals, their lack of interest in school led them to delay their schooling. It is one of the numerous factors that contribute to students lack enthusiasm in academics. Students may lack the ability to perceive the correlation between the knowledge they acquire in an educational setting and its relevance to their everyday lives. The perceived lack of relevance might greatly diminish their motivation in academic pursuits (Collegenp, n.d.). The distribution of students is such that 60% of them are enrolled in Grade 7, while the remaining 40% are in Grade 8. According to the interview, the majority of Aeta students who were enrolled were in grades 7 and 8, which is why they were included. Study revealed that the enrolment rate of Aetas tends to decline when they approach the upper stages of secondary education. The lower rates of participation in urban areas, specifically in the study's locale, can be attributed to a combination of generic factors, such as cost and transportation, as well as cultural factors, namely the concern of Indigenous parents about their children's cultural identity being supported and valued.

4. CONCLUSION

The result shows that most of the Aeta students interviewed are female, with a majority falling between the age range of 12 and 13 years old. The study suggests that Aeta girls are more likely to pursue education than males. Moreover, the study looks into how their heritage influences their view of pursuing higher education. A prominent theme is the tension between culture and the school curriculum. Aeta knowledge is passed down through generations through hands-on activities like hunting and collecting. However, schools tend to focus on the culture of the majority and may overlook that of the Aetas'. That gap can make it difficult for Aeta learners to see the value of formal education. Culturally responsive education pathways that incorporate Aeta knowledge systems are seen as a solution to the challenge. Furthermore, the study aims to gather information on how Aetas can access higher education despite the existence of legislation such as the Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA) that ensures their access to education and scholarships. The law recognizes the significance of culturally responsive education that incorporates Aeta knowledge systems within the curriculum. Nevertheless, study indicates that there is a deficiency in the execution of these rights. It is evident on their lack of awareness of the provisions given by government. Despite the existence of initiatives like as scholarships and ALS aimed at assisting Aetas in pursuing higher education, Aeta students continue to encounter financial limitations, cultural disconnection, and linguistic obstacles. That emphasizes the necessity for increased assistance in closing the gap between Aeta areas and higher education. Despite the challenges, Aeta students are motivated by a strong desire for improved livelihoods, both individually and for their communities. They perceive education as a means to attain economic prospects, enabling them to escape poverty and attain financial stability. Aeta students perceive education as a means to enhance their communities and champion their rights. Their objective is to acquire the knowledge and expertise necessary to become proficient leaders capable of exerting influence over policy decisions. Furthermore, certain students are driven by the desire to preserve and revive their cultural heritage. They hold the belief that pursuing higher education can provide them with the necessary skills to acquire knowledge about and pass on their cultural legacy to future generations. Observing the academic achievements of fellow Aetas in higher education acts as a strong motivation for younger generations. Many strategies are required to address the underrepresentation of Aetas in higher education. These should be based on the foundation of culturally responsive education. By incorporating Aeta culture and languages into primary and secondary education, these initiatives can promote cultural pride and illustrate the importance of education in the lives of the Aeta community. Moreover, focused outreach initiatives can bridge the gap between Aetas and higher education. These efforts, along with Aeta teachers or focal persons, can offer essential guidance and assistance throughout the academic path. Financial obstacles pose an additional challenge. Implementing an initiative to enhance scholarship programs exclusively for Aeta students, which includes providing financial support for living expenses in addition to tuition help, can substantially enhance their opportunities to pursue higher education. Conventional university schedules may not always match the requirements of Aeta students. To tackle that issue, one possible solution is to provide alternative learning pathways, such as offering night classes or weekend programs or mobile classes. Ultimately, celebrating the achievements of Aeta graduates within their communities is recommended. It demonstrates the value of education while motivating newer generations to pursue similar goals. By implementing these techniques, the educational landscape will become more inclusive, enabling the Aeta people to reach their maximum capabilities.

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