Indigenous Peoples and the Right to Education: The Dumagat Experience in the Provinces of Nueva Ecija and Aurora, in the Philippines

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Abstract
The Philippine historical accounts show that Indigenous Peoples (IPs) in the Philippines have long been suffering from discrimination and lack of access to Education. The IPs comprise about 10% to 20% of the Philippines’s 102.9 million total populations. The Philippine educational system’s neo-colonial background creates injustice on some cultural minorities who can attend school. For this matter, the study measures the perceptions of the Dumagats on their rights to Education. It focuses on the Dumagat communities in the provinces of Nueva Ecija and Aurora in the Philippines. By using the simple binary quantitative tool, the qualitative method of research, the application of Indigenous research methods, and critical pedagogy as analytical lens, the study found that (a) the implementation of the Philippine policies on the rights to Education as reflected on the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997 is more of a tokenism; (b) the enjoyment of the right to Education of IPs is hindered mainly by poverty; (c) English remains the widely used medium of instruction in most IP curricula; and (d) the IPs’ limited knowledge on specific provisions of IPRA related to the access to Education and culture is short of the policy ideals. The above findings necessitate change agents to start a process of pedagogical liberation. The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) personnel and IP teachers can play a vital role as change agents and may act to correct the historical injustices on IPs’ rights and welfare.

Keywords
Indigenous Peoples, right to education, Philippines, Dumagats, critical pedagogy

Introduction
“We, Indigenous Peoples, cannot dream of a professional career. We are disadvantaged by the policy of using English as the medium of instruction in Higher Education Institution (HEI). The absence of an entrance examination tailored fit to our socio-cultural milieu and experiences among HEIs prevents us from entering and experiencing university life. Today, all HEIs are using examination instruments based upon majority cultural experiences and standards of which we are not fully aware we will surely fail in the exam something has to be done”. (Interview with Emmanuel B. Domingo, June 16, 2019)

The right to Education is internationally and globally recognized to bring about changes in the world and among individuals (Mandela, n.d.; United Nations, 2017). It is a right not only of those who can afford to pay for a good education but by anyone regardless of the language or religion, whatever the color of skin and circumstances of birth or social origin, notwithstanding opinions, political inclinations, and economic condition. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in December 1960 sponsored the Convention Against Discrimination in Education purposely to eliminate and prevent discrimination in Education.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) regenerated the rights of Indigenous Peoples’ (IPs) scholarship, which covers the Declaration’s scope, applicability, and implication on national law on Indigenous rights (Mansell, 2011; Newcomb, 2011;
The right to education of IPs/Indigenous Cultural Communities (ICCs) is also promoted and protected in the Philippines. Numerous laws, statutes, and policies were forged to make Education accessible to vulnerable groups such as the IPs. This indicates that the Philippines is aware of the needs of its marginalized communities and are creating policies that are responsive to it, especially in the aspect of social rights, with the right to Education being among it.

Gabriel and Mangahas (2017) cited the findings of McLean (2010) that the Philippines is among the first countries in Asia that recognized the distinction of IPs and the state of their existence. Such recognition was provided in the 1935 and 1973 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines in the form of “integration” to the mainstream which later on was transformed into “recognition” upon the ratification of 1987 Philippine Constitution. It specifies that the State should include among its concerns the promotion of social justice, and that it should also safeguard the well-being of the people and their economic security. Similarly, the 1973 Philippine Constitution considered, the interests of cultural minorities in state policies (McLean, 2010).

The issuance of Presidential Decree No. 1414 provides protection to IPs who wish to be part of the Philippine society mainstream, at the same time it allows those who would maintain its culture and tradition to separate from the majority, a sort of exception to the “equal protection clause” or integration policy of the state (Fernandez, 1983).

The Philippines is composed of various ethnic groups including the Dumagat tribe. They mostly live along the Pacific coast of the province of Aurora. According to Guia (2012), the Dumagat people residing in Luzon are of the Agta Negrito group; one of the identified and recognized tribes in the Philippines. In the past, the Dumagats lived in coastal areas, particularly in the Aurora and Quezon provinces. They were rulers of their own land. But urbanization set in and Filipino homesteaders pushed the Agtas into the mountains, dispersing them into smaller groups, in the process. Today they are classified as semi-nomadic as they seldom stay in one place. Some of their tribe often look for better habitation. Only in recent years did they learn to settle in one area.

The term Dumagat may have been derived from the word “Gubat” (forest) and “Hubad” (naked). But the more logical origin of the term would be “Taga-dagat” which means “living near the sea” or “sea gypsies.”

According to Gabriel (2017), tourism may be one of the major reasons why the Dumagats were forced to leave the seashores and retreat into the mountains and near riverbanks, away from regular community establishments such as schools—to live in peace. Hence, today, the Dumagats are one of the many IPs/ICCs seemingly deprived of their right to Education.

IPs are significant groups of people in communities. When properly “recognized” and given positive attention through holistic Education, they could be useful toward national development.

There is a lack of a definitive, universal description of “indigenous” but Cobo (1983) mentioned that IPs are those having their historical continuity developed within their own territories.

When referring to Education, the term Indigenous generally pertains to the first or original inhabitants of a later colonized group by a group of powerful people who imposed their own culture and language on the original inhabitants (Reyhner & Singh, 2015).

This historical definition of “indigenous” prompted institutions to implement policies that will protect the rights of IPs and ensure that their culture and traditions are preserved. The integrity of this protection, however, at times, remains to be questionable as they are constantly challenged by adapting to mainstream culture.

The rights of the IPs/ICCs to Education were made prominent in the 1987 Philippine Constitution. Various constitutional provisions grant the IPs the rights to Education along these lines:

(a) to establish and control their education (b) to receive protection of the State without discrimination; and (c) a mandate for the state to take measure to ensure children of indigenous peoples to have access to Education using their own language and culture. (The 1987 Philippine Constitution)

To this end, the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997 was enacted. It further recognizes the state’s obligations to ensure the continuity of the unique cultural expression of IPs/ICCs by assuring their full participation in the activities and endeavors toward health, education, and other areas of services making them responsive to the demands of their unique communities. However, the study of Eduardo (2017) showed that there is a limited mechanism to promote awareness among IPs on the framework of IPRA of 1997.

The IPs deserve holistic Education. Education that represents their beliefs, feelings, principles, and general ideas that share a family resemblance (Forbes, 2003; Hare, 2010). According to Hare (2010), Education that focuses on the whole person both cognitive and affective. In this connection, an IP education is described by Section 28 of the IPRA of 1997, as one that provides comprehensive system of education relevant to the needs of the children and young IPs/ICCs through the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP).

The concern of IP education is both global and international in scope. IPs are mostly deprived of access to quality education. The current curriculum of education programs is incapable of addressing the special needs of the IPs/ICCs. Despite the reality that very few Indigenous students can do well in the education methods that do not consider the uniqueness of Indigenous culture, the system of Education still assumes universality of application, disregarding the distinctive nature of IP students’ cultural orientation and social experiences.
To address the issue, the Education International (EI), including the Working Group on Indigenous Populations and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (WGIPPFII), passed resolutions that recognize the peculiarity of the IP culture and language in terms of Indigenous Education. It highlights the need to enrich and protect Indigenous cultural heritage and identity.

As EI commits to the promotion of IP rights to self-determination, preservation of their cultural identity, and the right to learn through the use of their own language, it likewise acknowledges the vital role of educators, education support personnel, and other organizations in the sector of Education in ensuring that their commitment is realized.

Despite the issuances and resolutions ensuring protection of the right to Education of IPs, literature on IP rights to Education reveal cases of violations. In Australia, for instance, access to Education was denied to aboriginals but which was afforded to non-Indigenous Australians before the 1960s (Burridge et al., 2012). Largely based on the ideology of Social Darwinism, the history of Indigenous Education in Australia is one fraught with injustice, discrimination, marginalization, and limited access (Universities Australia, 2011, p. 9) thereby creating distrust of the education system.

To achieve the best academic outcome for IP students, the design of academic programs must consider the following academic concerns: (a) educational practices to be responsive to Indigenous knowledge, practices, and culture (Lewthwaite et al., 2014); (b) devaluing of Indigenous teachings and low graduation and enrollment rates (Dupere, 2016; Lake, 2011); (c) poor quality of Education (Hughes & Hughes 2012); (d) teachers’ culture, curriculum, and instructional strategies used in conflict with a child’s home culture (Huffman, 2010); (e) use of curriculum and instructional practices built on the cultural and linguistic background of Indigenous students (Castagno et al., 2008); and (f) preservation of native language as a means to achieve academic success (Willeto, 1999).

In the Philippines, instructors are usually encouraged and advised to be creative in their methods of teaching to effectively connect with IPs/ICCs and respond to the demand of Section 30 of the IPRA of 1997 which states that equal access to various cultural opportunities to the ICCs/IPs must be provided through the mechanisms of the educational system. This includes scholarship grants, rights to use their language, and methods appropriate to their cultural orientation.

Under the Governance Act for Basic Education otherwise known as Republic Act 9155, the Alternative Learning System (ALS) was established to give an opportunity for out-of-school children, the youth, and even the adult population to have basic Education. The Philippine government, through the Department of Education (DepEd), also welcomes change and responds to the needs of IPs/ICCs. The DepEd crafted the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Curriculum Framework in recognition of the right of IPs to culturally rooted and responsive basic Education (DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2015). It aims to give guidance to educational institutions and programs as they work with Indigenous communities in making them understand the K-12 Curriculum based on each IP community’s social and educational context. In the new curriculum, a Mother Tongue– Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) is implemented which considers the vernacular languages of the students. This reinforces and supplements the Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs) and Indigenous Learning Systems (ILS). It is likewise necessary for the IPEd to institutionalize partnerships between IP communities and the respective schools/learning programs that cater them. This can be attained by conducting sustainable community dialogues/engagements which could ensure the active participation of IP communities in the inclusion of their IKSPs and ILS in the Basic Education Curriculum. Thus, consistent with IPRA of 1997 and UNDRIP.

Despite these developments, there remain a lack of educators proficient in the language of IPs/ICCs, as majority of Mother Tongue–based subjects cover only local dialects and languages but not actually the language of the Indigenous natives. Another problem is that majority of subjects being taught in educational institutions require the use of English terms in the absence of an ethnic equivalent for the foreign words which are primarily English words.

Most Philippine historians would contend that the neo-colonial orientation of the Philippine educational system is a component of the overall masterplan of the colonial masters to create a nation of people holding high regard to whatever is American (Caoli-Rodriguez, 2007; Maligalig et al., 2010; Tullao et al., 2003) which left imprints on the present educational philosophy, structures, designs of programs, and processes incongruent to IP cultural beliefs and practices.

The colonial mentality embraced by the greater Filipino majority posed a challenge to Indigenous culture, forcing the latter to struggle for independence and self-determination (Decena, 2004; La Torre & Catalina, 2016). The neo-colonial strategy of the colonizers has both economic and political purposes (Horvath, 1972; Sayed & Agndal, 2020). The Filipinos, by thinking like Americans, would always like and love American products thereby converting them into instant consumers of finished American products; a strategy of capitalist ideology (Constantino, 1976). This desire for anything American is sometimes referred to as the “Coca Colonization” derived from the famous brand of American soda, Coca Cola (Nagata et al., 2011). Moreover, the “benevolent assimilation” policy of President William McKinley of the United States issued in 1898 was made not only to contain resistance against American rule but also to create a mentality that regard American culture as superior than any of the native cultural orientations in the Philippine Islands (Holm, 2013). This has made American life as part of the Filipino measure of success both in life and Education. The great “American dream,” so to speak, became a part of Filipino psyche and ambition.
The shaping of American colonial mentality among Filipinos finds its way in educational programs, curriculum designs not suited to the need of ICCs (Buenaventura, 2014; Halagao, 2010). The use of English language as medium of instruction in the tertiary level of Education, the emphasis on teaching science and technology, the integration of American values and way of life, and scholarship grants to Filipino teachers to learn in the West are all efforts to convert the critical but nationalistic and independent Philippine narratives into American “assimilation” through Education (Cullinane, 2009; Jenks, 1914; Lash, 2018). These are all willingly embraced by the U.S.-sponsored government officials in the guise of “civilizing” and “developing” the Philippine archipelago. This has left imprints on the philosophy, structures, orientation, and designs of the present Philippine educational system, alienating in the process the IPs whose culture, way of life, and socio-economic and political orientations are left untouched by the American cultural, political, and economic campaigns (Asian Development Bank, 2002; Ty, 2010). Standing outside a society that has completely integrated into a foreign system is the struggle that IPs/ICC’s face, for self determination lies in the recognition, acknowledgement and respect of their culture and traditions. Unless the educational system considers the uniqueness of their culture, customs and traditions, theirs will continue to be a struggle towards independence.

Despite established state policies, the right to Education has not been fully realized for most IPs and a critical education gap exists between IPs and the general population. This impression creates the presence of incongruence between the policies on Education in the Philippines and its implementation—a knowledge gap which the researcher would like to fill in.

Considering the scenario presented, the study argues that poverty, the insufficient knowledge of the IPs on their rights to Education, the failure of the government to implement existing policies on IP Education, and the lack of agents of transformation all serve to reinforce chains that keep the IPs/ICC’s marginalized, inferior, and victims of oppression and domination. Therefore, the study posed the following research questions:

**Research Question 1:** How may the profile of the respondents be described in terms of educational attainment?
**Research Question 2:** How may the level of awareness of the respondents on their right to Education under the IPRA of 1997 be measured?
**Research Question 3:** How do the respondents learn about their rights to Education and the IPRA of 1997?
**Research Question 4:** What policy recommendations could be provided to enhance the delivery of educational services to IP/ICC students.

The major components of the article are as follows: The first introduces the colonial nature of education system in the Philippines based on historical accounts. The second contains discussion on the methodology and research design as well as the Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed as the major analytical lens through which the data gathered were interpreted. The third is the result and discussion. Guided by the facts gathered from the ground, it discusses and explains the effect of poverty to the right to Education of the minority group; the seeming cultural invasion within the framework of the right to Education; the limited IP awareness on certain aspects of their right to Education and the need for change agents to end their marginalization in the aspect of their right to Education. The last and final part is the summary, conclusion, and recommendation.

**Method**

**Research Locale**

The study locales are the municipalities of Gabaldon in Nueva Ecija, and Dingalan in the province of Aurora which is a 2-hr drive from Cabanatuan City, in the province of Nueva Ecija, through an improved national highway. The vast food resources provided by the mountains and the marine ecosystem of Dingalan influenced most of the Dumagats to settle in the peripheries, riverbanks, coastal, and island of the aforesaid towns. They eventually learned to mingle with the mainstream population and adapted the latter’s way of living.

The Dumagats’ source of livelihood is fishing, farming, and hunting. Recently, due to the flourishing tourism industry in the area, some worked as tourist guides and boat operators (Figure 1).

**Scope and Delimitation**

The study mainly focused on the municipalities of Gabaldon in the Nueva Ecija Province and Dingalan in the Aurora Province where majority of the Dumagat tribe members reside. It sought to assess the implementation of IPRA law, specifically in terms of awareness and availability of education services for IPs by the government (both Local and National).

Respondent Dumagats included only those original settlers who are biologically of Dumagat tribe origin. Hence, the study excluded the tribe members of mixed origins.

The study was done from October 2017 to July 2018.

**Research Design**

The study used the Descriptive Survey Method. This involved data collection to test and analyze hypotheses or provide measurable answers to questions. Kumar (2014) states that this method can systematically describe a situation, a problem, or a phenomenon. It can detail a service or program, or provide information or describe the attitude toward an issue. Simple random sampling (SRS) was likewise used to identify the
respondents to avoid bias on the representation of the total population as it is one of the simplest forms of collecting data from the total population; hence, each member has an equal opportunity of being chosen as a part of the sampling process.

**Data Gathering Procedure**

There were 30 qualified respondents. Originally, 50 respondents were considered through SRS but only 30 actively and willingly participated. The data gatherer secured Free Prior and Informed Consent from the Provincial Director of the NCIP-Nueva Ecija Provincial Office before conducting the study. Data were gathered through a questionnaire-checklist as shown in Online Appendix A. It is the main instrument used, aided by an interview, focus group discussion (FGD), and observation. The questionnaire-checklist and interview questions were translated in the vernacular through the aid of a fellow Dumagat who is an employee of the NCIP. In the questionnaire-checklist, four options were offered to the respondents wherein responses and descriptors could be selected (see Tables 1 and 2).

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**Table 1.** Response Mode on the Awareness on IPRA Law of 1997 and Degree of Availability of Educational Services/Programs.

| Index | Semantic differential | Verbal description |
|-------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 4     | - Highly Aware        | - Has full knowledge |
|       | - Very Available      | - It is always and completely available/conducted regularly |
| 3     | - Moderately Aware    | - Mostly aware or has knowledge but not complete |
|       | - Moderately Available| - Most of the time it is available but not every time/conducted occasionally |
| 2     | - Slightly Available  | - Has little knowledge |
|       | - Not at All Aware    | - Most of the time, it is not available or conducted every once in a while |
| 1     | - Not Available       | - Has no knowledge at all |
|       |                       | - It does not exist/never conducted |

*Note. IPRA = Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act.*

**Table 2.** Descriptors on the Level of Awareness and Degree of Availability.

| Limit of Index | Semantic differential |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| 3.26–4.0       | - Highly Aware        |
|                | - Very Available      |
| 2.51–3.25      | - Moderately Aware    |
|                | - Moderately Available|
| 1.76–2.50      | - Low Awareness       |
|                | - Slightly Available  |
| 1.00–1.75      | - Not at All Aware    |
|                | - Not Available       |

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**Figure 1.** Research locale.

*Source. Google Map.*
**Reliability of instrument.** Twenty Dumagats, who are not part of the study, from the Municipality of Gabaldon, Nueva Ecija, were tested for the questionnaire-checklist. The Cronbach’s alpha value of .8 indicates the reliability of the instrument used.

**Statistical tools.** The data were treated using frequency, mean, ranking, and percentage. The statistical tools used include survey questionnaires with binary type questions. The low level of literacy of the respondents prompted the researchers to use enumerator and binary response options. FGD was likewise conducted to triangulate the data which came from observations and interviews. The same participants to the FGD were engaged in storytelling with the researchers. Open-ended interviews were done with the parents of the respondents to get their opinions and perceptions of the educational services provided by the government. Personal observation and immersion were undertaken in June 12–18, 2019, to check the existence of educational facilities in the area as well as their proximity or distance from the participants’ residences and their cultural practices.

**Theoretical Framework**

Critical pedagogy is the frame of analysis used in the study. It was popularized by Paulo Freire arguing that Education, especially teaching, must challenge the students to analyze patterns of social and political power distribution and inequality within society that has an impact on the educational system and the teaching-learning process. Students and teachers alike should learn to challenge the status quo in Education which favors the elite and the powerful to the disadvantage of the marginalized and underprivileged class. It is a philosophy and social movement in Education that gives importance to cultural context toward a successful teaching-learning engagement.

The focus of analysis is social justice and human rights. It is hinged on the perception that the goal of Education is to free the students from the oppressive political structures of the educational system by developing critical consciousness of the real world in relation to the exercise of their rights to Education.

The objective is to end the “anti-dialogical” elements, as Freire called it, of educational imposition, manipulation, division, and cultural invasion. The system propagates and perpetuates, resulting in more oppression and inequality. By fostering a “dialogical” learning environment, one in which the teacher and the student learn together and stand alongside each other to organize the critical mass and engage into political activism, the status quo is challenged, leading to system transformation, total human liberation, and the learner’s self-actualization.

Culture-Based Education (CBE) theory is another theoretical frame of the study. It reflects and validates a community’s culture by promoting its values, perception of the world, and language. Harvard professor Jerome Bruner (1996) noted that culture helps shape the way we construct and conceive the world, ourselves, and our powers. He further states that culture is an important ingredient to understanding and thinking. One cannot understand mental activity unless it is anchored on the cultural orientation of the learners (Bruner, 1996).

The aforesaid theories share similar points of view on Education; hence, it clearly points the epitome or model of Education appropriate to IPs. The study of the Dumagats is the focus of this article and is one way of analyzing how the cultural orientation of the IPs greatly affect their capacity to absorb learning and assimilate with the teaching-learning process characterized by the elements of neo-colonial Education.

CBE promotes the use of learning materials and rubrics of measuring performance that are inherently intertwined with the learners’ cultural orientation and social experiences in their ancestral domains. It focuses on the issues of identity, motivation, Indigenous knowledge, and self-worth as important dimensions in designing a teaching-learning plan for the Indigenous minority. The article also believes academic success for the Dumagats cannot be realized without considering their cultural makeup in designing educational activities and learning plan.

With these theoretical models of Education, a research paradigm was developed. Figure 2 shows the relationship of variables. The study considered that the knowledge of IPs of their rights, particularly on Education protected by IPRA of 1997, as well as the full implementation and support of the government on the Act would elevate the level of Education of Dumagats. This leveling up is their key toward eventual progress. Among the outputs of this study are recommendations for the benefit of the IPs.

**Results and Discussion**

The policies of the government to ensure the rights to Education of the IPs are intended to correct decades-old problem of colonial Education in the Philippines (Romero,
The policies are designed to make up for the historical injustices and discrimination that the IPs are experiencing. It is also the means employed by the state to pacify local resistance against government development intervention incompatible to their cultural and social contexts (Constantino, 1976). Through Education, the government’s goal of creating ubiquitous national consciousness and identity is realized but at the expense of the diverse cultural orientation of the IPs.

Despite the lack of opportunity for the Dumagats to enter higher education institutions, some of them reached secondary schools in the area. Poverty, access, limited awareness, and tokenism of government agencies are some of the reasons why the Dumagats seldom reach the tertiary level of Education.

The Right to Education and Poverty

The enjoyment of the exercise of the right to Education is a step toward total human liberation (Freire, 2000). In the Freirian thought, the raison d’être of libertarian Education is in the struggle for reconciliation. The difference between student and the teacher are reconciled as they realize that they educate each other, both are a source of learning to each other which speaks of a narrative character of Education. When both student and teacher are of equal footing, a dialogue that can change the “oppressed” consciousness and situation (a term used by Freire for any marginalized group lacking proper Education) can take place, leading to total human liberation.

In the current set-up, the imposition of the policy on Education is of Western origin, part and parcel of “benevolent assimilation” used by the United States to instill American consciousness among the Filipino students in the postcolonial era (Constantino, 1976). The imposition of the right to Education is challenged by the dehumanizing effects of poverty present in most ICCs. The IP/ICC students are challenged by the cost of transportation toward educational institutions, the necessity of board and lodging which again equals to financial matters, and the need for subsistence allowance on top of all these concerns. Adding to challenge is the discriminatory treatment of mainstream society (Adonis & Couch, 2017), whether consciously or unconsciously done, which are often encountered by student IPs attending regular schools or universities.

The challenges being experienced by the Dumagats are common to minority groups aspiring for Education to maximize their human potentials. The Igorots (another IP/ICC group in the Philippines), for instance, “struggle to attain tertiary level education.”

The demographic profile of the respondents presented in Table 3 confirms the above statement. The data gathered show that 17 or 56.67% of Dumagat respondents are elementary graduates. Six of them—or 20%—did not finish high school, while four or 13.33% completed high school, and three or 10% acquired only basic Education. These findings imply that all the respondents have reached primary and secondary levels of Education but none of them reached college level. The data likewise signify that very few Dumagats pursue higher Education.

Several interviews revealed that most of the respondents made it to the elementary level because of the accessibility of an education facility located near their (respondents) houses. Those who decided to study in high school had to walk more than 5 to 8 kilometers or ride a transportation vehicle to reach the nearest secondary school facility. In some areas of Dingalan, Aurora, secondary education facilities are situated in the town proper only. Those living in the island have to travel via traditional boat for around 1 to 2 hr to reach the town proper.

In addition, considering the distance, cost of transportation, and danger of travel, secondary students have to rent a boarding house for them to stay at until the end of the school year. Their parents visited them once in a while. During the interview, the respondents mentioned that in spite of the determination of the young Dumagats to fulfill their scholastic career, the expenses (transportation, rent of boarding house, subsistence allowance) appurtenant to earning a

| Distribution of Respondents by Educational Attainment | Educational attainment of respondents | Educational attainment of respondents’ parent |
|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Doctorate degree                                       | 0                                    | 0                                            |
| Master’s degree                                        | 0                                    | 0                                            |
| College degree                                         | 0                                    | 0                                            |
| College level                                          | 0                                    | 0                                            |
| High school graduate                                   | 4 or 13.33%                          | 0                                            |
| High school level                                      | 6 or 20%                             | 3 or 10%                                     |
| Elementary graduate                                    | 17 or 56.67%                         | 15 or 50%                                    |
| Elementary level                                       | 3 or 10%                             | 7 or 23.33%                                  |
| No Education at all                                    | 0                                    | 5 or 16.67%                                  |
|                                                        | 30 or 100%                           | 30 or 100%                                   |
The finding is contrary to Article XIV Section 1 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution which provides 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.

Likewise, Article XIV Section 18 (1) provides that

The State shall ensure equal access to cultural opportunities through the educational system, public or private cultural entities, scholarships, grants and other incentives, and community cultural centers, and other public venues.

The absence alone of an accessible education facility near ICCs and the serious need for teachers that can connect through the Indigenous language points to the poor implementation of the constitutional provisions for IPs in terms of Education.

To be fair, additional interviews with the respondents further revealed that the local government unit provides aids in terms of transportation for students coming from other islands. However, the aid is not enough to ensure that the students from isolated areas can continue with their studies until tertiary level as other factors emerge to hinder the development. These are the same factors that prevented the parents from pursuing Education for them, too.

Table 3 also clearly presents that all the parent respondents did not graduate from secondary Education. Comparatively, both profiles show that most Dumagats finished primary Education. But some parents had no education at all. Interestingly, the data also show that there is improvement in terms of educational attainment of the respondents compared with their parents. However, improvement is far beyond what is expected considering the policy embodied in the IPRA of 1997.

Implicitly, the observation of Dupere (2016) is correct in suggesting that “the devaluing of Indigenous teachings and low graduation, and enrollment rates” are among the five educational challenges that Indigenous children are faced with globally.

It is worth noting how important Education is to IPs and ICCs. The statement of Atleo (2012) is correct that “Education is the key to aboriginal potential. Education remains a determinant of social and economic health and creates key links to our other priorities: governing capacity and sustainable economic development.” As more IPs are educated, the more they can appropriately govern in their communities, using systems that can preserve their culture and traditions while achieving economic development.

Education is a tool for enfranchisement and self-determination which the mainstream postcolonial educational philosophy in the Philippines fails to provide (Romero, 2020) but at the same time could be used as a means to promote, protect, and maintain Igorot Indigenous culture (Adonis & Couch, 2017).

Only by ensuring the IPs and ICCs receive Education that respects their uniqueness and caters to their special needs to change their dire situation can they flourish as a people and as a community that can walk with equal confidence as with mainstream society.

Table 4. Awareness and Level of Awareness of Dumagats on Their Right to Education Provided in IPRA of 1997.

| Awareness of their (Dumagats) right to Education provided in the IPRA of 1997 | Yes                          | No                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Total                                                                         | 30 (100%)                    |                             |
| Level of awareness of their (Dumagats) right to Education provided in the IPRA of 1997 | Weighted Mean | Description          |
| My right to complete, adequate, and integrated system of Education, relevant to my need | 2.71                        | Aware                       |
| My right to equal access to various cultural opportunities granted to the Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples (ICCs/IPs) through the educational system, public or private cultural entities through scholarships, grants, and other incentives | 1.54                        | No awareness                |
| My right to establish and control our educational systems and institutions by having an education of our own language, in a manner appropriate to our cultural methods of teaching and learning | 3.62                        | Highly aware                |
| My right to have access to all levels of Education of the State                | 2.71                        | Aware                       |
| My right to have access to all forms (formal, non-formal, and special) of Education of the State | 2.62                        | Aware                       |
| Overall weighted mean                                                          | 2.64                        | Aware                       |

Note. IPRA = Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act.
and violate the invaded freedom of expression. This phenomenon of cultural invasion is always an act of cultural “colonization” or destruction.

This concept is parallel to the data gathered and presented in Table 4, Part A, majority are aware of their right to Education as provided in IPRA of 1997, reaching a total of 23 or 76.67% for the “Yes” response. This implies that the Dumagats knew that they were being deprived of their right to Education. It also denotes that the present education system in their area does not fully realize the ideals of IPRA of 1997 but that despite this, the Dumagat respondents have made a slight progress toward achieving what they are entitled to in Education. Sadly, the story telling with the IPs revealed that they believe that the situation they are in is cyclical and that their children would suffer the same destiny.

Table 4 (Part B) also displays the ideals of IPRA 1997 with regard to Education and method of teaching. Results show that the respondents were highly aware of their right to “establish and control their educational systems and institutions by having an education and teaching learning process that is culturally adaptive of their own language, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning” with a weighted mean of 3.62. This means that they had full knowledge of this aspect; a right that is afforded to them since the enactment of IPRA in 1997. But it was only in 2015 when the DepEd crafted the IPeEd Curriculum Framework through DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2015. As previously mentioned, the Order provides guidance on educational engagements with Indigenous communities using the K-12 Curriculum which takes into account the vernacular languages of the learners with the implementation of MTB-MLE, and which reinforces the IKSP and the ILS.

Regrettably, although the respondents were not beneficiaries of the Order, they observed that their children are being schooled using a vernacular by the people in the mainstream known as Tagalog. Notably, none among the teachers were fluent in speaking the Dumagats’ dialect. This phenomenon is a form of oppression perpetrated through the use of language, a means to wage “cultural invasion” within the context of Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed. According to Emmanuel B. Domingo,

We, Indigenous Peoples cannot dream of a professional career. We are not only disadvantaged by the policy of the state of using English as the medium of instruction in Higher Education Institution (HEI). The absence of entrance examination tailored fit to our socio-cultural milieu and experiences among HEIs prevents us from experiencing university life. Today, all HEIs are using examination instrument based upon majority cultural experiences and standards of which we are not used to . . . we will surely fail in the exam . . . something has to be done. (Interview June 16, 2019).

The postcolonial approach to Education in the Philippines not only furthered the oppression of the learners but also created a dehumanizing effect on them as it unconsciously destroys their cultural heritage and living tradition (Romero, 2020). In fact, the study of Willetto (1999) prescribed that it is not necessary for students to lose their native tongue and culturally assimilate to the mainstream to achieve academic success, as assimilationist ideology maintains.

Table 4 also showed a very alarming situation as the respondents were not aware of their right to equal access to various cultural opportunities for the ICCs and IPs through scholarships, grants, and other incentives with a weighted mean of 1.54. The finding was corroborated by an interview in which most of the respondents mentioned that they know their right to Education but they do not fully understand specific rights such as those mentioned above. This fact does not only perpetuate dependency of IPs/ICCs from outside support to acquire Education but also “casts laziness which creates underdevelopment” (Freire, 2000).

This finding is alarming simply because it tends to deprive IP students of their rights arising from sheer ignorance. It also implies that their minds have been conditioned that the acquisition of Education is a privilege given only to a select few by the instrumentality of the State, through the system of political patronage prevailing in the Philippine social and political contexts (Romero, 2020). Furthermore, the lack of knowledge on the provision of access to cultural opportunities may be interpreted, as a “continuum of manipulation, division, invasion and cultural conquest” intended to impose anti-dialogical action that ensures pedagogical oppression of the minority (Freire, 2000).

As evidence to this result, none from the respondents availed of scholarship grants and other incentives offered by the government. Ideally and legally, the NCIP Office on Education, Culture and Health was formed to effectively implement Education, culture, and health-related rights as provided in the IPRA of 1997. The office is also mandated to administer scholarship programs and other educational projects for ICC/IP Higher Education.

All in all, the overall weighted mean of 2.64 in terms of level of awareness of their (Dumagats) right to Education provided in the IPRA of 1997 described as “Aware” implies that the respondents have awareness on their right to Education but it is limited only to the basic rights.

Limited Awareness on the Specific Rights to Education

The awareness of the Dumagats on their right to Education must be the subject of transformation into a liberating consciousness (Freire, 2000). It is something that the educational system should transform into total consciousness as the subject of learning experiences. The limited knowledge of their right to Education and the availability of government services on Education intensified the alienating effect of the educational policy of the State enshrined in the IPRA of 1997.
Table 5 illustrates that respondents believed that educational services or programs by the government are available in the area with a translation of 25 respondents or 83.33% answering “Yes.” The result of FGD showed that the respondents felt the effort of the government to provide them formal education despite its limitations. Meanwhile, the interview and observation exposed that the respondents’ basis in answering the question was limited only to the presence of elementary buildings and teachers which caused them to answer “Yes,” excluding other facilities that complete the ideals of the IPRA 1997 as the learning support that the IPs must receive from the State.

In addition, Table 5 shows the ideal or expected education services or programs to include their degree of availability. Evidently, formal basic education for the primary and secondary level is described as “available” with a weighted mean of 2.52. It means that the facility is available but is incomplete. Non-formal basic education (or the ALS), complete facility, and adequate equipment in the delivery of education services are described as “slightly available” with 2.41 and 2.25 weighted means, respectively. The results indicate that most of the time, the service is not available or very seldom conducted. Unfortunately, informal Education, seminars, symposiums, special Education (SpEd), qualified teacher for formal or non-formal Education, and teacher/s who could teach Dumagat students using the latter’s language is described as “not available” with weighted means of 1.4, 1.18, 1.14, 1.4, and 1.07, respectively. This result implies that education programs or activities did not exist or was never conducted. Hughes and Hughes (2012) said that, “poor education is letting Indigenous children down.” As history will point out, only a relevant and CBE for IP will succeed in shaping the future of Indigenous children who should grow to be competent adults who can protect their ethnicity yet still take their place in a world fast becoming a mere mimic of other developed nations.

Table 5 (Part A) illustrates that respondents believed that educational services or programs by the government are available in the area with a translation of 25 respondents or 83.33% answering “Yes.” The result of FGD showed that the respondents felt the effort of the government to provide them formal education despite its limitations. Meanwhile, the interview and observation exposed that the respondents’ basis in answering the question was limited only to the presence of elementary buildings and teachers which caused them to answer “Yes,” excluding other facilities that complete the ideals of the IPRA 1997 as the learning support that the IPs must receive from the State.

In addition, Table 5 (Part B) shows the ideal or expected education services or programs to include their degree of availability. Evidently, formal basic education for the primary and secondary level is described as “available” with a weighted mean of 2.52. It means that the facility is available but is incomplete. Non-formal basic education (or the ALS), complete facility, and adequate equipment in the delivery of education services are described as “slightly available” with 2.41 and 2.25 weighted means, respectively. The results indicate that most of the time, the service is not available or very seldom conducted. Unfortunately, informal education, seminars, symposiums, special education (SpEd), qualified teacher for formal or non-formal education, and teacher/s who could teach Dumagat students using the latter’s language is described as “not available” with weighted means of 1.4, 1.18, 1.14, 1.4, and 1.07, respectively. This result implies that education programs or activities did not exist or was never conducted. Hughes and Hughes (2012) said that, “poor education is letting Indigenous children down.” As history will point out, only a relevant and CBE for IP will succeed in shaping the future of Indigenous children who should grow to be competent adults who can protect their ethnicity yet still take their place in a world fast becoming a mere mimic of other developed nations.

Table 5. Presence of Educational Services/Programs by Government Agency.

| Presence of educational services/programs by government agency or any organization | Yes | No |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Total | 25 (83.33%) | 5 (16.67%) |

| Degree of availability of educational services/programs | Weighted Mean | Description |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Formal basic (primary and secondary) Education | 2.52 | Slightly available |
| Non-formal basic education (Alternative Learning System) | 2.41 | Slightly available |
| Informal Education | 1.4 | Not available |
| There are seminars and symposiums | 1.18 | Not available |
| There is a special education (SpEd) | 1.14 | Not available |
| Qualified teacher for formal or non-formal Education | 1.4 | Not available |
| Complete facility and adequate equipment in the delivery of education services | 2.25 | Slightly available |
| Teacher/s teach/es their Dumagat students in a language or dialect known to the latter | 1.07 | Not available |
| Overall weighted mean | 1.67 | Not available |

Table 5 illustrates that respondents believed that educational services or programs by the government are available in the area with a translation of 25 respondents or 83.33% answering “Yes.” The result of FGD showed that the respondents felt the effort of the government to provide them formal education despite its limitations. Meanwhile, the interview and observation exposed that the respondents’ basis in answering the question was limited only to the presence of elementary buildings and teachers which caused them to answer “Yes,” excluding other facilities that complete the ideals of the IPRA 1997 as the learning support that the IPs must receive from the State.

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Storytelling, interview, and observation showed that the respondents have no idea about informal education and SpEd programs. This signifies that education services in the places they live in are not complete or are limited. As opposed to this finding, Section 28 of the IPRA of 1997 clearly provides that there should be a comprehensive system of education that is relevant to the needs of the youth of IPs/ICCs through the NCIP.

The NCIP Office on Education, Culture and Health was established for the effective implementation of the education, cultural, and health-related rights as provided in the IPRA of 1997. Specifically, to administer all scholarship programs and other educational projects intended for ICC/IP beneficiaries.

Finally, the Overall Weighted Mean of 1.67 in Table 5, Part B, described as “not available” in terms of the Degree of Availability of Educational Services or Programs signifies that educational services do not exist or that the programs relating to Education were never conducted.

The Need for Change Agents: Praxis

The limited knowledge on the specific rights to Education of the IP/ICC calls for the need to have change agents for them to have a clear perception of their reality in relation to the access to Education provided by IPRA of 1997. This phenomenon is something that calls for a “revolutionary leader.” A leader who will listen, learn, and break the culture of silence with the IPs and drive them to a consciousness building dialogue instead of imposing upon them experiences and knowledge which he deems necessary to lead the IPs into total human liberation that true Education may bring forth.

The IPs’ source of information and knowledge of their rights is crucial to effective implementation of the policy. Knowledge and accurate perception of their reality in the realm of educational system and their right thereto are elements of
a. Through information dissemination of the barangay officials
b. Through the information dissemination by the teachers
c. Through the radio
d. Through the television
e. Through the newspaper
f. Through social media

Total

| Source of information                  | %    |
|----------------------------------------|------|
| a. Through information dissemination   | 4 or 13.33 |
| of the barangay officials              |      |
| b. Through the information dissemination by the teachers | 19 or 63.33 |
| c. Through the radio                   | 0    |
| d. Through the television              | 2 or 6.67 |
| e. Through the newspaper               | 0    |
| f. Through social media                | 5 or 16.67 |
| Total                                  | 30 or 100 |

Note. IPRA = Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act.

The issue of access to Education of the IPs is a global concern. In spite of numerous global initiatives to make Education accessible to IPs, much is to be desired in terms of observance and implementation in the Philippines.

The study is done to measure the perceptions of the Dumagats, a minority group, on their rights to Education. Using simple binary quantitative tools and qualitative approach to research and application of Indigenous research methods and critical pedagogy as analytical lens, the study found that the implementation of Philippine policies on the rights to Education, specifically the IPRA of 1997, is more of a tokenism rather than a complete transformation toward total human liberation.

Through the educational system, the concept of colonial mentality is strategically implanted in the Filipino psyche, creating ubiquitous national consciousness and identity while unconsciously disfavoring and neglecting the diverse cultural orientations of the IPs.

The study of the Dumagat IP groups in Gabaldon, Nueva Ecija, and Dingalan, Aurora, in the Philippines, revealed that the enjoyment of the right to Education is hindered not only by poverty but also by the mind-set of the IPs themselves who believe that there is no use fighting the old system that they have been used to as it is a vicious, never-ending cycle.

The challenges to IP/ICC students are associated with the cost of transportation, board and lodging, need for subsistence allowance, as well as the discriminatory treatment of mainstream society. The use of English as a medium of instruction in most IP curricula is a blatant disregard to the policies respecting IP culture. It is a form of cultural invasion within the framework of the right to Education. Furthermore, limited knowledge on the provisions of IPRA on the access to educational and cultural opportunities may be interpreted as a “continuum of manipulation, division, invasion and cultural conquest” intended to impose anti-dialogical action that ensures pedagogical oppression of the minority.

These findings call for change agents to start the process of pedagogical liberation. Somebody who could move the IPs toward reflection and action so that a higher level of protection and appropriate promotion of their rights to Education may be realized. NCIP personnel and teachers of IPs can play the role of change agents. By using dialogue and cooperation with the minority students, they can act to correct the historical injustices on IPs and help promote the IPs/ICCs rights and welfare.

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