

FROM TRADITION TO TRANSITION: THE IMPACT OF EDUCATION ON CULTURAL RESILIENCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL ADAPTATION AMONG SAMA BADJAO IN BATANGAS CITY

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Abstract

The Indigenous Peoples of the Philippines have been instrumental in shaping the nation's cultural identity. They have nurtured and sustained vibrant traditions, languages, and ways of life that reflect a deep connection to the natural world. In the face of colonization, modernization, and the demands of contemporary development, these communities have shown remarkable resilience in preserving their heritage while continually adapting to a changing environment. This study sought to explore how education influences the cultural resilience and environmental adaptation of the Sama-Bajau in Batangas City. This study sought to explore how education influences the cultural resilience and environmental adaptation of the Sama-Bajau in Batangas City. It encapsulates how education influences the cultural identity, resilience, and aspirations of the Sama Badjao in Batangas City, as well as how they sustain and adapt their traditions and livelihoods in response to environmental and social changes. The conclusions reflect the transformative role of education as both a tool for empowerment and a means of cultural preservation, emphasizing its significance in shaping the community's integration and progress in a modern setting. Lastly, this study recommended to integrate inclusive and culturally responsive education programs that recognize Sama Badjao heritage, language, and learning styles to promote cultural pride and participation in schools.

Keywords – *indigenous people, cultural resilience, environmental adaptation*

Introduction

The Philippines is home to a rich diversity of Indigenous Peoples (IPs), whose traditions, languages, and cultural practices significantly contribute to the nation's national identity. These communities have long preserved unique systems of knowledge, social structures, and sustainable ways of living that reflect their close relationship with nature. Despite modernization and globalization, many indigenous groups continue to demonstrate resilience in preserving their heritage while adapting to changing environmental and social conditions. However, they also face persistent challenges such as poverty, displacement, discrimination, and limited access to culturally responsive education (UNDP, 2023).

Among the recognized Indigenous groups in the Philippines are the Sama Badjao, commonly referred to as "sea nomads." Traditionally, they lived in coastal and maritime environments, relying on fishing, diving, and sea trade as primary sources of livelihood. Their way of life was deeply connected to the sea, where cultural traditions, family structures, and economic survival were centered. Over time, however, armed conflict,

environmental degradation, economic hardship, and social exclusion forced many Sama Badjao families to relocate inland and settle in urban communities. In Batangas City, growing populations of Sama Badjao have established communities in Barangay Wawa and Barangay Malitam (Rappler, 2024).

The transition from a sea-based lifestyle to an urban land-based environment has brought significant adjustments to the Sama Badjao community. These changes affect not only their traditional livelihood but also their cultural identity, practices, and relationship with the environment. Rituals associated with the sea, oral traditions, and close-knit communal living are challenged by the realities of urban settlement. In this context, education becomes an important factor in shaping how they preserve their heritage while adapting to modern society.

Education is widely recognized as a pathway toward empowerment, economic mobility, and social inclusion. For Indigenous communities, however, education may also become a challenge when formal schooling fails to recognize their language, customs, and lived experiences. Republic Act No. 8371, also known as the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997, guarantees the right of Indigenous Peoples to culturally appropriate and inclusive education. Despite this legal protection, many indigenous learners still encounter barriers such as discrimination, low participation, and limited culturally responsive programs (Miole, 2024).

Studies have shown that culturally inclusive education positively influences the confidence, participation, and identity formation of Indigenous learners. De Juan (2018), in a study involving Sama Badjao learners in Bohol, found that educational approaches integrating local knowledge and culture significantly improved learner engagement. Similarly, Hipolito (2024) emphasized that preserving Indigenous cultural practices is closely linked to educational and community-based interventions that promote intergenerational learning and cultural continuity.

This study explores how education influences the cultural resilience and environmental adaptation of the Sama Badjao in Batangas City. Specifically, it seeks to understand how education affects the preservation of their cultural practices, their adjustment to urban life, and their perceptions of identity, aspirations, and future opportunities. It also examines whether schooling serves as a tool for empowerment or a challenge to cultural continuity.

Although several studies have examined Indigenous Peoples' education in the Philippines, most focus on rural or ancestral communities. Limited research has been conducted on displaced Indigenous groups such as the Sama Badjao living in urban settings. Existing studies have highlighted how indigenous learners experience marginalization, low academic performance, and exclusion in schools that lack cultural integration (Geyrozaga & Dungog-Cuizon, 2021). This study addresses that gap by examining the lived experiences of the Sama Badjao in Batangas City.

The findings of this research may provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and local government units in designing programs that promote both Indigenous identity and educational inclusion. Ultimately, the study supports the development of culturally responsive educational systems that empower the Sama Badjao while preserving their unique heritage in a rapidly changing society.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design using the phenomenological approach to examine the impact of education on the cultural resilience and environmental adaptation of the Sama Badjao in Batangas City. Qualitative research is appropriate for studies that seek to understand human experiences, perceptions, and meanings based on the participants' own perspectives. Since the focus of this study was to explore the lived experiences of the Sama Badjao in relation to education, identity, and adaptation, phenomenology was considered the most suitable method. This approach allowed the researcher to gain deeper insights into how participants interpret and give meaning to their experiences in both cultural and educational contexts.

The participants of the study were selected members of the Sama Badjao community residing in Barangay Wawa, Batangas City. A total of fifteen (15) participants who were eighteen years old and above were chosen through purposive sampling. This sampling technique was used to ensure that the respondents possessed relevant experiences related to the objectives of the study. Participants were selected based on the following criteria: they self-identified as Sama Badjao, had educational experience either through current schooling or previous attendance, and were willing to share their insights and experiences. Both male and female participants were included to provide diverse perspectives regarding education, culture, and adaptation.

The primary research instrument used in this study was a researcher-made semi-structured interview guide. The questions were open-ended to allow participants to freely express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. The interview guide focused on important themes such as the influence of education on cultural identity, preservation of traditions and language, livelihood adaptation, educational challenges, and future aspirations. To ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument, it was reviewed by the research adviser and selected research experts. Their recommendations were carefully considered and incorporated to improve the clarity, relevance, and cultural sensitivity of the questions.

Before the conduct of data gathering, the researcher secured formal approval from the Graduate School Dean, research adviser, and concerned barangay officials. After obtaining permission, the researcher personally approached the participants and explained the purpose, significance, and procedures of the study. Informed consent forms were distributed and signed by the participants before the interviews began. The participants were assured that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

The interviews were conducted in a respectful and culturally sensitive manner to establish trust and encourage honest responses. With the participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy of responses. The researcher also took field notes to document non-verbal cues, observations, and contextual details during the interview sessions. Follow-up questions were asked whenever necessary to clarify responses and gather richer information.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by using codes or pseudonyms instead of the participants' real names. All gathered data were kept secure and used solely for academic purposes. The researcher ensured that the dignity, beliefs, and cultural identity of the participants were respected at all times.

For data analysis, the study utilized thematic analysis following the phenomenological framework of Moustakas. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and read several times to gain familiarity with the data. Significant statements related to the research objectives

were identified and organized into meaningful categories. These categories were then grouped into common themes that reflected the lived experiences of the participants. The themes were interpreted to determine how education influenced the cultural resilience and environmental adaptation of the Sama Badjao community.

Through the use of qualitative phenomenological research, purposive sampling, interviews, and thematic analysis, the study was able to generate in-depth findings regarding the experiences of the Sama Badjao in Batangas City. The chosen methodology ensured that the voices of the participants remained central in understanding the important role of education in preserving culture and supporting adaptation in a changing environment.

Finding and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings of the study based on the interviews conducted with selected members of the Sama Badjao community in Batangas City. The discussion focuses on how education influences their cultural resilience and environmental adaptation. Through thematic analysis, several recurring themes emerged from the participants' narratives. These themes reflect the significant role of education in preserving cultural identity, promoting adaptation to urban life, improving livelihood opportunities, and strengthening future aspirations.

One of the major findings of the study is that education serves as a bridge between cultural identity and modern integration. Participants revealed that schooling helped them understand the value of their traditions while learning how to adjust to life in the city. Many respondents expressed that education taught them to appreciate their roots and become proud of their identity as Sama Badjao. They shared that although they are now living in an urban setting, they continue to practice their customs, language, and beliefs within their homes and community. This finding supports the view of Kim and Layman (2021), who stated that education can function as a space where indigenous learners reconcile traditional identity with modern social expectations. It also aligns with Hipolito (2024), who emphasized that culturally grounded education strengthens cultural continuity.

Another important finding is that education empowers the Sama Badjao community by improving their confidence and social dignity. Historically, the Sama Badjao have experienced discrimination, exclusion, and negative stereotypes. Several participants stated that before attending school, they often felt ashamed or hesitant to interact with others. However, through education, they learned communication skills, self-confidence, and awareness of their rights. This enabled them to participate more actively in community activities and social interactions. Education therefore becomes a tool for social inclusion, helping marginalized groups gain recognition and dignity within the broader community. This confirms the findings of Baker et al. (2022), who noted that education gives marginalized groups the language and confidence to advocate for themselves.

The study also found that education contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage through intergenerational learning. Parents and elders continue to teach younger family members traditional songs, stories, language, and values, while children bring home knowledge gained from school. This creates a two-way exchange of learning between generations. Participants emphasized that while schools provide formal knowledge, the home remains the center of cultural teaching. This finding is consistent with Yembuu (2021), who explained that formal education and indigenous learning systems can complement one

another in preserving cultural identity. Likewise, Williams et al. (2024) argued that reciprocal learning between elders and youth strengthens community resilience.

Another major theme that emerged is education as a pathway to environmental awareness and adaptation. Since the Sama Badjao traditionally lived in marine environments, relocating to an urban setting required them to adjust to new environmental realities. Participants explained that schooling taught them about sanitation, waste management, cleanliness, and environmental responsibility. They also noted that their traditional respect for nature remains strong, although it is now expressed in different ways. Instead of focusing only on the sea, they now understand the importance of caring for land, water, and air in urban communities. This finding supports the study of Dewi et al. (2025), which found that combining indigenous ecological values with environmental education enhances adaptive capacity. It also reflects the Climate Change Commission (2024), which emphasized the value of indigenous knowledge in environmental resilience.

The findings further revealed that education promotes social integration and a sense of belonging. Many participants shared that they once felt isolated after moving to Batangas City. Language barriers, poverty, and prejudice made them feel excluded. However, sending children to school helped families establish connections with teachers, classmates, and local residents. Through school activities and daily interactions, they gradually felt accepted as part of the community. Education therefore serves not only academic purposes but also social functions by reducing prejudice and fostering mutual respect between different cultural groups. This supports Gonjo et al. (2025), who explained that schools can become spaces of intercultural dialogue and belonging.

Another significant finding is that education improves livelihood opportunities and economic mobility. Traditionally dependent on fishing and sea-based work, many Sama Badjao families had to seek new sources of income after relocation. Participants stated that education helped them learn practical skills such as reading, writing, budgeting, and communicating with employers or customers. Some younger members now aspire to become teachers, office workers, or professionals. Others use traditional skills such as handicrafts and beadwork for income generation. This finding supports Martins et al. (2024), who emphasized that education increases employability and economic independence among marginalized groups. It also aligns with Ayalu et al. (2022), who found that education contributes to long-term livelihood security.

The study also found that education reinforces future aspirations among Sama Badjao youth and families. Many participants expressed hope that their children would complete schooling and achieve stable careers. Parents viewed education as a means to provide a better future than the hardships they previously experienced. Learners themselves described dreams of becoming professionals who could support their families and help their community. This finding is similar to the study of Talikan et al. (2024), which found that indigenous learners remain motivated by aspirations for family upliftment and community progress.

Despite these positive impacts, participants also acknowledged existing challenges. Some reported financial difficulties, discrimination in schools, limited learning materials, and adjustment problems due to language and cultural differences. These barriers continue to affect school participation and academic success. This supports Geyrozaga and Dungog-Cuizon (2021), who found that indigenous learners often experience marginalization and low academic performance in schools lacking cultural integration. Jocson (2021) likewise

noted that indigenous students face limited access to quality and culturally relevant education.

Overall, the findings of the study reveal that education has a transformative impact on the Sama Badjao community in Batangas City. It strengthens cultural resilience by helping preserve traditions, language, and identity while also equipping community members with the skills needed to adapt to urban life. Education promotes confidence, dignity, livelihood opportunities, environmental awareness, and social inclusion. However, for education to fully serve indigenous communities, schools and policymakers must implement culturally responsive and inclusive programs that recognize the unique realities of the Sama Badjao (Miole, 2024).

Conclusions

This study examined the impact of education on the cultural resilience and environmental adaptation of the Sama Badjao community in Batangas City. Based on the findings, education plays a significant role in helping the community preserve its cultural identity while adapting to the demands of an urban environment. It has become more than a means of academic learning; it serves as a tool for empowerment, inclusion, and long-term development.

The study revealed that education strengthens cultural resilience by encouraging the Sama Badjao to value their traditions, language, beliefs, and heritage. While modernization and relocation have introduced major changes in their way of life, the participants continue to preserve important aspects of their culture through family teachings, community practices, and intergenerational learning. Formal education, when culturally responsive, supports rather than weakens these efforts by promoting self-worth and pride in indigenous identity.

Moreover, education has helped the Sama Badjao adapt socially, economically, and environmentally to life in Batangas City. Through schooling, they gained communication skills, confidence, and knowledge necessary for interacting with wider society. Education also opened opportunities for better livelihood, employment aspirations, and practical life skills that contribute to economic mobility. In addition, participants developed broader awareness of environmental responsibility, allowing them to adjust from a sea-based lifestyle to an urban setting while maintaining their traditional respect for nature.

The study further showed that education fosters social inclusion and belonging. Many participants who once experienced discrimination and exclusion now feel more accepted through school participation and community engagement. Education enabled them to challenge negative stereotypes and prove that they are capable contributors to society.

However, the research also identified continuing barriers such as poverty, discrimination, limited resources, and lack of culturally sensitive educational support. These challenges indicate that while education has strong transformative potential, greater efforts from schools, government agencies, and communities are needed to ensure equitable access and meaningful learning experiences for indigenous learners.

In conclusion, education serves as a bridge between tradition and transition for the Sama Badjao community. It allows them to preserve their roots while preparing for the future. Their experiences demonstrate that cultural identity and modernization do not have to be opposing forces. When education values diversity, respects indigenous knowledge, and

promotes inclusion, it becomes a powerful foundation for resilience, adaptation, and sustainable progress.

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