

Indigenous Peoples' Core Curriculum in the Philippines

Mr. Schedar Jocson (University of the Philippines)

The language situation in the Philippines is very politicized, and there is a great difference between speakers of marginalized languages and dominant languages. This study aims to evaluate the existing structures in place, such as the Bureau for Alternative Learning's Basic Literacy Program for Indigenous Peoples, as well as talk about the fledgling Indigenous Peoples Core Curriculum.

In over 500 indigenous peoples (IP) communities, there are over 160 languages. Many are under threat of being lost due to internal and external factors. Because communities are marginalized, many put aside their culture and language in order to integrate. There are a number of bodies aimed at preserving and safeguarding the IPs, such as the National Commission for Culture and Arts. There are over 2.5 million IP children, many of whom live in remote areas where schools offer limited services. The existing basic education curriculum instills a holistic national identity without taking into account the differences among communities. Drop-out rates are high and although annual funding and grants for education are increasing every year, the number of recipients in proportion is getting smaller, suggesting that the money is being lost, misspent or worse.

The Department of Education curricula do not respond to the specific needs of IP children and those provided by NGO or other bodies are not recognized. An IP Core Curriculum with 13 generic modules aims to develop basic literacy learning materials and functional literacy modules taking into account cultural integrity, cultural domains and self-governance. The medium of instruction is a huge problem. Students are afraid to speak Filipino and English, because they're afraid others will laugh. There is a pressure to speak as fluently as possible. On the other hand, those who graduate from IP schools have to take accreditation test in which the national basic education curriculum is used.

Currently the IP core curriculum is available in eight languages. While the materials are a good start, they are not readily available to all communities and there are some issues with translation and cultural translation as well as the accuracy of some visual representations. Materials must take into the account the poetics of every language and appreciate the difference in spoken language and written language. This study recommends strengthened interagency participation in cultural preservation, development of IP education to address the differences among communities, evaluation of existing literacy materials provided by the Department of Education and their constraints and use of the IP core curriculum for cultural preservation alongside the rapid development some communities are experiencing.