

Cultural Interface in Action: A Case Study of Philippine Indigenous Educational Policy

Giselle Lugo Miole

The University of Tokyo and United Nations University, Japan

Abstract

This study explores the development and implementation of the Indigenous Peoples' Education (IPEd) policy in the Philippines, which institutionalizes the practice of cultural interface by combining Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems in the Philippine curriculum. Using actor-centered institutionalism as an analytical framework, this study investigates the motivations and processes behind the Philippine Government's strategy of employing an interfacing model in policy and curriculum development. Through in-depth expert interviews and policy documents analysis, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of IPEd's development and stakeholder involvement. The findings reveal that IPEd shifted from assimilationist approaches to an interface model of education, recognizing Indigenous peoples' representation and rights to education, and participation in national policy development. The implementation of the IPEd policy necessitates continuous dialogue and collaboration between the Indigenous communities and the state, emphasizing rights-based approach to ensure meaningful inclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems. This study contributes to the ongoing agenda of inclusive education for Indigenous peoples at the national policy level.

Keywords: cultural interface, educational policy, Indigenous peoples, inclusive education, rights-based approach

Interest in Indigenous knowledge systems has grown significantly in recent years, despite a long history of disregard and marginalization of Indigenous peoples (Nakata, 2011; Nesterova, 2020). Such growing interest is due in part to global commitments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Although UNDRIP remains to be a non-legally binding resolution, it recognizes the importance of Indigenous knowledge and emphasizes its relevance in policymaking, including Indigenous education.

In addition, Indigenous knowledge is increasingly recognized for its strong affinity with knowledge management, inclusivity and diversity (Battiste, 2002; Funk & Woodroffe, 2023; Grande, 2018; Nesterova, 2020). The discourse on Indigenous knowledge and linkage with inclusive education is gaining greater attention and recognition, spearheaded by UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) and Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Inclusive Education (UNESCO, 1994, 2000). Currently, the linkage is also relevant to ongoing global commitments highlighted in the Education 2030 Incheon Declaration, which commits for Sustainable Development Goal 4 for Quality Education and Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2015).

Despite these advancements, scholarship on Indigenous knowledge and inclusive education remains under-addressed, overlooking the vital role and agency of Indigenous communities as actors in policy development. This oversight also emphasizes the importance of revisiting how methodologies such as Nakata's (2007, 2010) cultural interface, are applied at the institutional level. Scholarly literature also lacks discussions of policy development experiences from the Global South, underscoring the need to include such case studies. Understanding these applications is crucial for advancing the discourse on inclusive education and ensuring meaningful inclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems in the national education curriculum.

The Indigenous Peoples' Education (IPEd) policy is a pioneer initiative of the Philippine Government under the Department of Education (DepEd) that institutionalizes the interfacing of Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems into the national basic education curriculum. The policy reform aligns with Nakata's concept of cultural interface within educational policies, demonstrating a critical inclusionary approach rather than the incorporation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems. The IPEd policy serves as a concurrent national strategy of the Philippine Government to fulfill the global commitment of EFA, which aims to recognize and reconcile the educational needs and aspirations of Indigenous peoples and cultural communities within the national curriculum through the interface approach.

Building on this, using the case study of the Philippines, this study shows why and how a Global South state in the Asia-Pacific adopt an Indigenous education policy as its nationwide strategy for interfacing Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems in national education. It seeks to investigate the motivations and processes behind the Philippine Government's strategy to employ interfacing model in institutional policy and curriculum development. This paper reviews the overall development and implementation of IPEd policy,

followed by highlighting pertinent policy implications and lessons learned from the policy experience.

Literature Review

Indigenous Education

Scholars emphasized the strong link between Indigenous education, knowledge systems and heritage. Jacob and colleagues (2014) define Indigenous education as “the path and process whereby individuals gain knowledge and meaning from their Indigenous heritages” (p. 3), highlighting its lifelong, reciprocal nature and spiritual dimension (p. 3-4).

Indigenous education consists of diverse forms, such as participatory learning in Sub-Saharan African schools (Shizha, 2014), language revitalization in New Zealand’s Maori programs (Boshier, 2014), and Australia’s Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages Framework (Australian Government, 2018). Multicultural education is practiced in Papua New Guinea’s Abelam community, blending ancestral knowledge with global orientations (Scaglione, 2014), and Peru’s Somos Incas (Porter, 2014). Taiwan’s policies aim to “preserve” Indigenous cultures (Nesterova, 2019a, 2019b). Environmental education, tied to land is practiced in Kenya’s Maasai communities (Hoare et al., 2022) and the Indigenous Environmental Network among Native Americans (Indigenous Environmental Network, n.d.).

Despite these varied practices, much of the scholarship focuses on curriculum content rather than reasons for its national inclusion. Discussions often link Indigenous education to oppression, imperialism and Western colonialism (Smith, 2021). Scholars classify Indigenous education as inherently critical due to its resistance to Western models (Archibald, 2006; Freire, 1970; Funk & Woodroffe, 2023). The exclusion and marginalization of Indigenous education within Eurocentric systems is well-documented (Battiste, 2002; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Jacob, Liu, et al., 2014; Nakata, 2007). Therefore, understanding Indigenous education requires acknowledging its historical context and the issues surrounding colonial influence. Thus, it is essential to discuss its history and include it in global policy and academic dialogues.

Global Indigenous Education Policies

International Commitments

The formal recognition of Indigenous peoples’ right to education began with the 1993 Draft Declaration of Indigenous Peoples, later evolving into UNDRIP in 2007. Article 14 of UNDRIP affirms Indigenous peoples’ right to establish and control their educational systems in their languages and cultural methods, and recommends states support to address these educational needs (UN, 2007).

The UN has played a key role in addressing Indigenous issues, especially education at the international level. The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) emphasized the importance of Indigenous education for preserving languages, ancestral domains and lands, and recognizing traditional lands and natural resources (UNPFII, 2003). The forum has also highlighted the importance of culture, being “a major part of the survival of Indigenous peoples” (UNPFII, 2003).

UNDRIP, albeit a non-legally binding resolution, aims to “correct” historical injustices and respond to educational marginalization (Battiste, 2002; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; May & Aikman, 2003). Scholars view Article 14 of UNDRIP as enabling other fundamental rights through education, including political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights (Hohmann & Weller, 2018).

At present, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in 2015 further aligned with UNDRIP, expanding Indigenous education rights to include inclusive access to all education levels (UN DESA, 2016b, 2016a). Article 14 also mandates state actions in partnership with the Indigenous communities (Hohmann & Weller, 2018).

Despite these advancements, UNDRIP’s non-legally binding nature makes its provisions optional, hindering progress in fulfilling Indigenous educational rights. International bodies often use non-binding declarations like UNDRIP for diplomatic reasons, affecting governmental adoption, particularly in the education sector, where marginalization persists (Jacob, Cheng, et al., 2014; Nesterova, 2023).

Educational Policy Experiences Around the World

Establishing policies that directly or indirectly address Indigenous education at the national level remains a primary strategy for governments to protect and fulfill the educational rights of Indigenous peoples. Many of such policies aim mostly at revitalizing languages and fostering multiculturalism (Cortina, 2017b; Nesterova, 2019a; Shwed et al., 2018). Some policies also emphasize on assimilationist practices or more on the attendance of Indigenous students in mainstream schools (Gordon, 1965; Hohmann & Weller, 2018; Leite, 2014). Other policies also practice a so-called segregation where governments establish boarding schools, separating Indigenous schools from the mainstream school systems (Cole, 2011; May & Aikman, 2003; A. Smith, 2009). The following presents selected policy experiences reviewed around the world that show nationwide educational policies that address educational needs of the state’s Indigenous peoples.

In current literature, Australia is often highlighted as a key example of a state actively involved in Indigenous educational policies due to the government’s ongoing initiatives aimed at addressing the educational concerns of its Indigenous peoples. Australia released the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy in 2015 which aims to address the educational needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The strategy strongly

emphasizes on the following priorities: (1) attendance and engagement of the Indigenous students; and (2) inclusion of Indigenous languages. It also aims to provide support to the Indigenous learners the pathways to tertiary education through vocational and technical education and encourages inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the Australian Curriculum (Australian Government, 2017, 2021).

Another country that is often highlighted in current literature for nationwide policies is Australia's neighboring country, New Zealand. Known for its Māori communities across the country, New Zealand has long been launching language revitalization policies since the 1970s by formalizing the use of Māori language in formal, informal and nonformal settings (Archibald, 2006; Boshier, 2014). In addition, the country enables *Kura Kaupapa Māori* program where children are taught Māori language and lifeways. Tocker (2015) notes that the restructuring of New Zealand's Department of Education enabled a policy space for such program to be established.

In North America, policies such as affirmative action in the US prioritizes scholarships and admissions for Native Americans (Robotham, 2011). However, these policies often overlook the specific cultural and educational needs of the Native American students. In Canada, the policy practice of boarding schools, including First Nation residential schools, has historically been prevalent (Battiste, 2002; A. Smith, 2009; Watson, 2014).

In Latin America, many countries strive to improve the equity and equality of education for Indigenous children by advancing Indigenous languages and culturally relevant education (Cortina, 2017a). This effort is driven by the regionwide Intercultural Bilingual Education (EIB) model, which aims to promote and reclaim Indigenous languages and cultures (Herrera, 2017). Cortina (2017b) argued that reforms in pre-service and in-service teacher education, as well as Indigenous language instruction, have supported EIB's implementation in Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru. However, many policies do not directly address Indigenous peoples and lack specific protocols for effectively integrating Indigenous perspectives into curricula.

Many initiatives in Asia focus on strengthening and revitalizing languages, including indirectly addressing languages of the region's Indigenous peoples (Hogan-Brun & O'Rourke, 2019). For instance, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) released the ASEAN Charter that promote respect for the languages in the region. These include integrating bilingual education and some provisions to introduce Indigenous languages and cultural histories in the curriculum, as highlighted in Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines (Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat, 2017; Sercombe, 2019).

Overall, despite significant policy developments and experiences, many policies still present blanketed and generalized aims of improving the quality education to enhance the inclusion of Indigenous peoples with the oversaturation on addressing Indigenous languages. However, there is lack of scholarly discussion on Indigenous representation in policy process, as well as

the implementation of a rights-based approach and the development of specific policy practices that realize cultural interface at the institutional level.

Cultural Interface

Scholars have argued that Western and Indigenous models were historically seen as irreconcilable (Russell, 2005; Verran, 2005). However, recent efforts have aimed to bridge these methodologies and philosophies. Non-Indigenous, typically Western and Eurocentric models, have dominated, prompting a paradigm shift towards inclusive integration. Nakata's (2007, 2010) work on cultural interface is pivotal in this discourse, advocating for nuanced interplay between Indigenous knowledge systems with non-Indigenous dominant scientific thought. This approach fosters meaningful engagement and recognizes Indigenous knowledge bearers (Nakata, 2007, 2010). Today, including Indigenous knowledge in national curricula empowers Indigenous learners, affirming their identities and addressing historical marginalization for a more culturally responsive and inclusive educational experience.

Despite these advancements, there remain knowledge gaps in the current discourse of Indigenous educational policy. Firstly, there is a lack of discussion on rights-based policy process, which is crucial to ensure the substantive inclusion of Indigenous perspectives, rather than symbolic and performative approaches. Secondly, there is a need for specific protocols and tools that facilitate cultural interface. While the concept of cultural interface is well-established theoretically, practical guidelines and tools for its implementation are underexplored. Finally, the participation of Indigenous peoples in the policy process is often under-addressed, particularly in policy experiences in the Global South. With these in mind, this study aims to address such gaps by highlighting the case of the Philippines' current national Indigenous educational policy.

The Philippine Indigenous Educational Policy

The Philippines presents an interesting case study since it is among the pioneers from the Global South to practice innovative approaches to Indigenous education. It is crucial to emphasize that the country has enacted the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA), 10 years before the enactment of UNDRIP. IPRA is the legally binding law that formally recognizes the rights and self-determination of the Indigenous peoples and cultural communities (Legal Assistance Center for Indigenous Peoples' Rights et al., 1999; the Philippine Government, 1997). IPRA also facilitated the establishment of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), which remains to be contested and critiqued for its genuine representation of the Indigenous peoples in the Philippines (Almeda et al., 2024; Ambay, 2016). Apart from NCIP, the Indigenous peoples voice their calls and complaints through limited seats under the House of the Representatives, social movements via massive protests and lobbying with the cooperation of local non-governmental organizations and the UNPFII (Miole, 2022, 2024).

With the establishment of IPRA, the country has passed a law enacting the Indigenous Peoples' Education Policy Framework and Curriculum (IPEd) (Department of Education, 2011). IPEd is the cornerstone initiative of the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) which features the application of cultural interface that goes beyond the dichotomy between the state-prescribed mainstream and Indigenous special needs education approaches (Victor & Yano, 2015). The so-called interface model has attempted to combine national curriculum and mapped Indigenous educational practices that DepEd had conducted a few years before the enactment. In other words, the overall goal of IPEd is the interfacing policies of Indigenous knowledge systems and practices and DepEd perspectives into the curricula of public schools, particularly those schools which community members called for the aspirational needs of an education that is culturally responsive and recognizes their identity and heritage. With this chosen case, this study sheds light on the Philippine government was able to reconcile Indigenous peoples' educational needs through IPEd in the Global South context.

Methods

This study addressed the following research questions: (1) Why was the IPEd policy developed? and (2) How was it implemented? To answer these questions, this study employed qualitative research methods to gain in-depth insights into the motivations and processes behind the development of IPEd, as well as the application of cultural interface into the policy.

Data Collection

In-depth expert interviews were conducted with policymakers, DepEd officials, particularly within the Indigenous Peoples' Education Office and other individuals directly involved in the development, formulation and implementation of the IPEd policy. These interviews aimed to uncover motivations, challenges and strategies employed by key policy actors in the development and implementation processes. In this study, 5 participants were selected via purposive sampling technique and snowball sampling in recruiting further participants. Interviews were transcribed and coded via NVivo, a qualitative research software for organizing and managing interview data.

Table 1

List of Participants

Participants (Ps)	Gender	Role/Position
P1	F	IPEd policy actor and IPEd Office head
P2	M	IPEd policy actor, curriculum designer and implementer
P3	F	IPEd monitor and evaluator; collaborated with P2
P4	F	IPEd curriculum designer, monitor and evaluator from Department of Science and Technology (DOST)
P5	M	Historian; IPEd curriculum evaluator

To support the interview data, policy documents were collected from DepEd offices following the Philippine Government's protocol on Electronic Freedom of Information (FOI). Documents were analyzed using content analysis from the coded data in identifying key themes and patterns related to the development and implementation of the IPed policy. Analysis was then furthered using theoretical framework such as the actor-centered institutionalism.

Data Analysis

This study utilized actor-centered institutionalism (ACI) by Scharpf (2018). ACI is an interaction-oriented policy framework that studies public-interest-oriented policy that provides an organizing system which explains a social phenomenon (i.e., policy change) through observing Actors as a “proximate cause”, and Institutional Context as a ‘remote cause’ (Scharpf, 2018, pp. 30, 37; Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995, pp. 46-47). In this framework, the focus is on the three main elements: Actors, Constellations, and Modes of Interaction. But the framework begins with Problems, which pertain to challenges or barriers that are to be dealt with by Actors. Actors are those determined by shared orientations and capabilities. This study subdivided Actors into two groups: International Actors and Domestic Actors. Each Actor Group has its Constellations, or the strategies they have employed, and preferences over the outcomes. Lastly, to operationalize their Constellations, Actors were to employ Modes of Interaction or the modes that are shaped or largely influenced by institutional contexts. After Modes of Interaction is the Outcome, of the policy that was created from the policy process. Hence, for this study, the Outcome is the integration of indigenous knowledge in formal higher education. Such an Outcome is interlinked with the current Policy Environment that can influence the Problems in the future.

Findings

Formulation and Development of IPed

Overview

The development of IPed by DepEd involved several stages before it was enacted and implemented. It is important to note that it required a paradigm shift from practicing assimilationism to cultural interface. In the 1960s to 1970s, the Philippine Government's strategy towards the Indigenous peoples at that time was of a form of affirmative action with an assimilationist perspective. This was to get the Indigenous communities “integrated” in the dominant, non-Indigenous society (P6, personal communication, 2021). Older generations within the Indigenous communities tend to discuss how the former initiative Presidential Assistant on National Minorities (PANAMIN), an initiative under the Marcos dictatorship, provided scholarships for the Indigenous peoples to be “integrated” into the schools. PANAMIN was under the supervision of the Commission on National Integration of the Philippines, which is arguably the de fact precursor to NCIP. P1 remarked, “This is why

Indigenous peoples, particularly the elderly, shun away from the use of the term ‘integration’” (personal communication, 2022).

Before the IPRA law was enacted, the Indigenous peoples in the Philippines were not considered “Indigenous peoples” at all, but they were considered the colonial ways of categorizing them such, for instance, *taga-bundok* or mountain dwellers. Thus, IPRA, being the domestic legal framework, considered instrumental in prompting further changes in policy, including reforming the education sector through IPEd. Focusing on education, Sections 28, 30, and 31 of the IPRA law pertain to educational needs of the Indigenous peoples. Most of which stipulates the obligation of the state to provide equal access to various opportunities of the Indigenous peoples through the educational system and allow them the means to conduct their own education as well as providing education in their own respective languages. Under Section 46 of IPRA, NCIP operates in offices, among which include the Office of Education, Culture and Health, which is responsible to oversee, promote and support education implementation of community schools, both formal and informal (The Philippine Government, 1997).

The formal policy development process of IPEd can be traced beginning with DepEd's Order 42 titled, “Permit to Operate Primary Schools for Indigenous Peoples and Cultural Communities” in 2004. This was among the first formal implementation of IPRA following the enactment of IPRA in 1997.

In 2005, with the continuous call from the Indigenous movements sector for a more relevant education, DepEd organized National Assembly on Indigenous Education, a massive conference that started facilitating multisectoral dialogues. These include Indigenous representatives, including the elders and council members of the communities, along with civil societies and advocates of Indigenous peoples.

In 2008, DepEd established the Indigenous Peoples’ Technical Working Group to address educational issues for Indigenous peoples as part of the Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (BESRA), and the EFA 2015 National Action Plan. In 2009, DepEd organized a consultative consortium with Indigenous elders, community members, civil society organizations, and educators to shape the IPEd policy. This also initiated a nationwide survey of Indigenous educational practices, supported by international donors and NGOs. P1 and P2 highlighted the importance of involving school heads, administrators, principals, and superintendents in developing the IPEd policy. P2 noted, “We have to do the top-down approach first because we believe the heads are influential to the teachers” (personal communication, 2022). DepEd combined top-down and bottom-up approaches, influencing teachers to include Indigenous knowledge systems while consulting with Indigenous communities for content and competencies.

Over two years, DepEd engaged in extensive consultations with Indigenous groups across the country. This led to the issuance of Department Order 101 in 2010, introducing the Indigenous Peoples’ Alternative Learning System (ALS) program under BESRA's 2010-2012

accountability plans. In 2011, after gathering insights from these consultations and validations from elders, DepEd released Department Order 62, formally adopting the national IPEd policy.

The policy development continued beyond this point. In 2014, the Episcopal Commission of Indigenous Peoples, in collaboration with DepEd, released a report highlighting the need for a culturally responsive curriculum. This report spurred DepEd to conduct training and develop a national curriculum more attuned to the needs and aspirations of the Indigenous peoples in the Philippines. Consequently, in 2015, DepEd issued IPEd Curriculum, under Department Order 32.

International Factors

It is worth noting that apart from the pre-existing legal framework that facilitated the establishment of IPEd, international factors also played vital roles in enabling the policymakers to pave the way for its foundations. One of the factors includes international commitments such as the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. This Statement was the first ever of its kind to spearhead the universal norms of inclusive education in the 1990s (UNESCO, 1994). Before becoming a signatory member of the Statement in 1994, the Philippines also had pre-existing legal framework that could influence the signation. These include the Accessibility Law in 1982 (Jocson & Buenrostro, 2024; Santos, 2014) and the amendment of the Constitution in 1987.

Another factor is the EFA principle promoted by UNESCO, as well as the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education. Ten years after the Jomtien Declaration, the World Education Forum adopted the Dakar Framework for Action in April 2000, which specifically aimed to ensure that by 2015 all children, including those from ethnic minorities, have access to free, quality primary education (UNESCO, 2000). The Philippines adopted the Asia-Pacific Regional Framework for Action and became a signatory in 2000. However, this framework did not specifically address Indigenous peoples. In compliance, DepEd released the Philippine EFA 2015 National Action Plan As a compliance, in 2006, DepEd, through National EFA Committee, released a 28-page report entitled, “Functionally Literate Filipinos: An Educated Nation: Philippine EFA 2015 National Action Plan”. In 2009, DepEd created the Regional Committee on EFA to translate the Action Plan into regional languages, review programs to ensure complementary school and non-school approaches and coordinate funding for projects.

International bodies and entities such as the UN system have also directly informed the Philippine Government in shaping the educational reform. These include the state’s active participation at UNPFII; being a signatory member of UNDRIP; and having Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, a Filipino Indigenous leader representing the UN Special Rapporteur for Indigenous Peoples. Tauli-Corpuz also established what could be among the pioneering Indigenous organizations in Asia, Tebtebba Foundation (also known as Indigenous Peoples’ International Center for Policy Research and Education).

Lastly, educational cooperation via official development assistance (ODA) has also become instrumental in policy reform. Before becoming the IPEd's office head, P1 served as a consultant under the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAid). AusAid formed a team that provided technical assistance to DepEd's ongoing initiative on Indigenous education. In 2011, AusAid launched the Philippines Response to Indigenous Peoples' and Muslim Education Program (PRIME), which aimed to prompt reforms in the policy and improve the quality education of Indigenous peoples and Muslim communities in the Philippines. PRIME has also become a significant tool towards advancing the IPEd curriculum that was released in 2015 (P1, personal communication, 2022).

Domestic Factors

Apart from legal frameworks and international factors, domestic factors played a significantly vital role in formulating the IPEd policy. These include proactive government initiatives such as initiating consultations and survey mapping, partnerships and collaborations with the Indigenous peoples and communities (P2 and P3, personal communication, 2022). P2 also mentioned that to do such initiatives, DepEd had to “put in the right people from the start and P1 is one such person.” (personal communication, 2022). This is because P1 is from an Indigenous Igorot descent, having born and raised in Benguet, a province in Northern Luzon, and having been exposed to AusAid's educational cooperation.

Another important factor at the domestic level is inter-departmental partnership. DOST is among the major and recurring collaborator closely working with DepEd on enhancing inclusivity and quality of Indigenous education. This is because Indigenous epistemologies, knowledge and practices call for the need for a culturally responsive curriculum and that science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects in classes for Indigenous education are often left underexplored. P4, being a curriculum designer for science education under DOST Science Education Institute, provided training for teachers and faculty staff, following the “Teaching Science to Indigenous Peoples” program of DOST and DepEd (personal communication, 2022). P4 also narrated that the project aims to capacitate teachers in science education that are culturally relevant to the learners. Apart from science education, mathematics is also being tested for IPEd implementation. P3 noted to use ethnomathematics lens in interfacing both Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives. Using beadwork from Lumad people in Mindanao, P3 and her team engaged with the Indigenous students and inquired on the use of beadwork as part of their personal pastime and use such activities in learning mathematics. Thus, with the use of tangible items that are familiar with the Indigenous learners, the learning experience could become more effective and easier to learn.

The Indigenous sector's collective social movements as well as their lobbying and campaigns have also become instrumental in pressuring the Philippine Government in paying careful attention to recognizing their educational needs. P5, an IPEd evaluator and historian, mentioned that the Philippine Government worked hand in hand and maintained close

connections with the Indigenous elders and council members for research and consultations (personal communication, 2021).

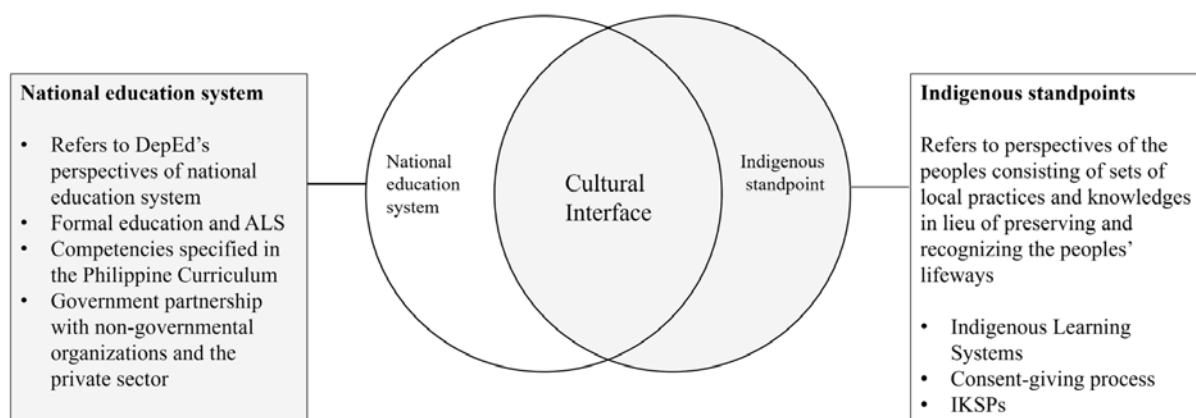
Lastly, it is also important to note that the timing of such initiatives coincided with the ongoing peace process in Mindanao, which faced armed conflicts and skirmishes, as well as land grabbing, militarization for decades (Fernandez et al., 2019; Strachan, 2015). Mindanao also composed of the highest number of Indigenous populations in the Philippines.

Cultural Interface Implementation in the IPEd Program

Cultural interface in the IPEd context simply means interplay of perspectives between the national education system prescribed by DepEd and Indigenous knowledge systems and practices (IKSPs) (see Figure 1). P1 narrated that it is the major national strategy of the IPEd policy and without it, the strategy would not make any more sense. She narrated that it's an interface of DepEd's perspectives and the community's perspectives.

Figure 1

DepEd's Cultural Interface Diagram. Illustrated by Author.



On one side, the national education system refers to DepEd's perspective of the national or education system prevalent in the country (interchangeably known as the "mainstream" education). On the other side is the Indigenous standpoint, which encompass the traditional and cultural educational practices and knowledge of Indigenous peoples (e.g., IKSPs). Cultural interface model, in this case, represents an interplay of both educational knowledge systems, aiming to combine the formal educational structure with the unique cultural and educational practices of Indigenous communities. This pedagogical approach seeks to create an inclusive education model that respects and incorporates Indigenous knowledge within the broader educational framework.

The rationale behind the use of the term "interface" in the policy strategy of DepEd was not because of Nakata's (2007, 2010) known work of cultural interface, but because of its frequent use in the Philippines' policy language on themes of combining or blending. P1 (personal

communication, 2022) explained that recently in national policymaking, the term “interface” has emerged. For instance, in the context of “interfacing of policies” or combining of policies – it often appears in government language, especially when two agencies are to collaborate, leading to discussions about the interface of their respective policies. “It seems to be more of a policy-level language... given the terminologies, ‘interface’ seemed the most appropriate to us at that time” (P1, personal communication, 2022). Participants noted that the term is the most fitting among the terminologies currently in use because of its applicability to both policy and implementation. Before interface, they initially considered using “integration”. However, with ‘integration,’ there is an implication that what is being integrated is secondary to what is dominant, hence there is a sense of hierarchical tendencies. P1 further narrated:

“There's sometimes an implication that what is being integrated is secondary to the dominant system, and it's just being inserted into it. That's the usual connotation of integration. And we didn't want that to be our standpoint. We are approaching it from the perspective of dialogue, where the systems in conversation are viewed as being on equal footing. So, between 'integrate' and 'interface,' 'interface' is the more appropriate term because, at least for now, it carries the notion that the national education system and other systems, like the knowledge systems of Indigenous communities, are on the same level” (personal communication, 2022).

The given narrative above shows the careful yet proactive decision of the government via DepEd to reconsider the wording and shift to “interface” which they deemed more appropriate and conducive in the policy and implementation actions of the national strategy. As highlighted previously, integration has been tarnished by historical background in the Philippines, as the use of the term integration was utilized for an assimilation policy in the country through affirmative action strategies such as providing scholarships to the Indigenous peoples to be “educated” to be “integrated” into the society.

Another important aspect to note in the narrative is the perspective of dialogue mentioned. This means that they did not choose the wording of “interface” alone as a sole department but took into consideration the accounts of the Indigenous communities they have reached out to. Thus, the practice of IPed’s interface necessitates an iterative process of dialogues between the government and the Indigenous communities for the educational experience to be more nuanced and well-delivered.

Points of Interface

The IPed curriculum is in the premise on the process of interface between the Indigenous learning system (ILS) of the community and the national education system’s curriculum. The policy states that the scope of Indigenization and localization is determined by DepEd together with the community (DepEd, 2015, p. 14). It encourages both parties to understand each other’s systems and give directions to the process of interface (see Table 2).

Table 2
Points of Interface

Indigenous cultural communities' Standpoint	Points of Interface	DepEd Standpoint
Indigenous Learning Systems	Perspective Interface <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples to their culture, IKSPs and ILS 	Formal education / school system and Alternative Learning System
IKSPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of the right of Indigenous peoples to participate in national development. 	Competencies specified in the curriculum
Consent-giving process	Policy Interface <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IPEd Framework • Rights-based approach 	Government partnership with civil society / private sector

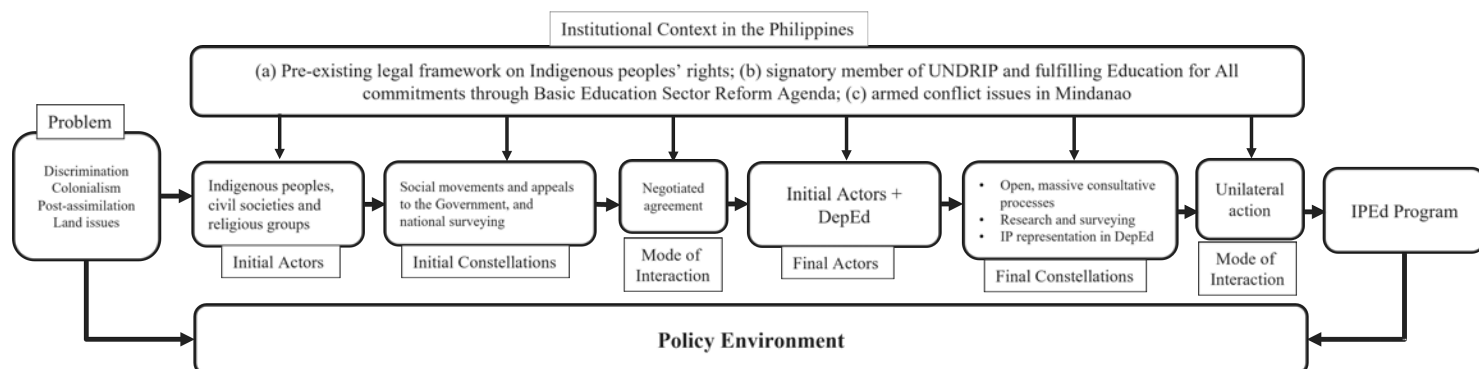
The points of interface are twofold: the level of perspective and the level of policy. At the level of perspective, the points are: (1) recognition by both parties of the rights of Indigenous communities to practice, promote, and develop their culture, IKSPs, and ILS; and (2) recognition by both parties of the right of Indigenous communities to participate in national development. The first point highlights cultural integrity which must be upheld through interface in the inclusion of IKSPs and ILS in the national education system. The second point emphasizes participation in national development. Here, both DepEd and the Indigenous communities regard the Indigenous peoples' role in nation-building and appreciate the need for culturally responsive education.

At the level of policy, the provisions are multi-fold which refer mostly to the policy statements as prescribed in the IPEd policy. These include principles of inclusion, participation, and empowerment; IKSPs; teacher support in Indigenous areas and communities; and appropriate institutional systems.

Actor-Centered Institutional Policy Formulation

It is argued that the policy formulation of IPEd as a national strategy went through a process of actor-centered institutionalism (ACI). According to Scharpf (2018; see also Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995), ACI movements only occur through public interest-oriented fashion of policy change. Thus, in this section, the analysis is outlined through borrowing the ACI framework provided by Scharpf, modified based on the findings, and describes the policy change and development of IPEd program (see fig. 2).

Figure 2
ACI Process for IPEd Policy Formulation



The core entities of this analysis include Problems, Actors, Constellations, Modes of Interaction and Outcome. The peripheral entities are Institutional Context and Policy Environment. The policy formulation was analyzed through ACI framework as exhibited above. The core entities are Problem, Actors, Constellations, Modes of Interaction and Outcome (Miolo, 2022).

Problem

The Philippines faces significant Indigenous issues. These include discrimination, exclusion, and the effects of post-assimilation policies like PANAMIN. Indigenous peoples have voiced their lack of access of education, highlighting these ongoing problems.

Initial Actors

Initial actors included the Indigenous peoples, civil societies and non-governmental organizations. They were the ones that raised awareness and promoted social movements to pressure the government to address the problem.

Initial Constellations

These are strategies to appeal to the Philippine Government involved forming coalitions, organizing protests, and advocating for educational reform. Indigenous communities led the push to include DepEd, believing that education could prompt paradigm shifts. This unified movement, along with global commitments to UNDRIP and EFA, led DepEd to recognize Indigenous education policies.

Final International and Domestic Actors

International actors, such as the UN and ODA partners such as AusAid influenced the Philippine Government. Domestic actors include the IPEd Office, NCIP and various

government partners such as DOST. DepEd played a key role in partnering with organizations and Indigenous communities to enrich the curriculum, influenced by early EFA implementation.

Final Constellations

Scharpf (2018) describes Constellations as a combination strategy options and preferences. In this context, the Actors' Constellations consist of international commitments, social movements and educational cooperation projects. International actors influenced educational cooperation and norms such as PRIME's theory of Change by AusAid. Domestically, Indigenous peoples organized social movements and national coalitions. DepEd's strategy of involving Indigenous community members, with the support from NCIP and regional offices, proved effective due to their familiarity and capacity. The influence of EFA norms and an enabling institutional context in the Philippines heightened DepEd's focus on Indigenous education.

Modes of Interaction

Scharpf (1997) identifies four interaction modes. These are unilateral action, negotiated agreement, majority vote and hierarchical direction. IPEd formulation involved a mix of negotiated agreement and unilateral action. Initial Actors initiated dialogues and appeals, leading to a negotiated agreement. Subsequently, a unilateral action ensued as the government, influenced by international and domestic actors, proactively engaged Indigenous communities in the IPEd policy process.

Outcome and Policy Environment

The Outcome is the implementation of IPEd, representing a collaborative effort between Indigenous communities, DepEd and non-state actors such as civil societies and advocates. For the Policy Environment, this includes domestic and international influences. Domestically, factors include the legal frameworks like IPRA and BESRA and DepEd orders. Internationally, it involves global commitments such as UNDRIP and MDGs.

Institutional Context

Institutional Context sets the circumstances that form the policy setting, venue, or landscape which directly or indirectly affect and influence Actors in the process of policy formulation. There are two great groups: the Domestic and International institutional contexts. The key Domestic Context includes the Philippines' ongoing conflict and peace processes in Mindanao such as the Bangsamoro transition, and Indigenous peoples' massive movements. On the other hand, the International Context is the EFA agenda, MDGs and UNDRIP.

Discussion

The Need for Rights-Based Approach in Indigenous Educational Policies

Based on Figure 2, institutionalizing cultural interface requires interplaying Indigenous learning systems and national education systems through a rights-based partnership between Indigenous communities and relevant institutions. This approach fosters empowerment by considering rights as both legal entitlements for Indigenous peoples and obligations for the government. While Nakata's (2007) work on cultural interface has pioneered dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems, it lacks focus on the rights-based dimensions which are essential to Indigenous education.

Comparative examples from Australia and New Zealand highlight the importance of a rights-based framework. Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy in 2015 prioritizes rights of the Indigenous peoples to schooling, participation and the use of their mother tongue languages (Australian Government, 2017, 2021). Similarly, New Zealand language revitalization policies affirm the Māori right to access and use their languages (Archibald, 2006; Boshier, 2014). Both countries aim to treat Indigenous knowledge systems as equal to non-Indigenous systems. However, they encounter challenges of implementation at the national level. In contrast, the Philippines provides a unique policy design that goes beyond school participation and mother tongue language rights, including not only Indigenous knowledge systems but also Indigenous rights in the curriculum, as highlighted in Table 2.

Broadening the cultural interface discourse by incorporating Huaman's (2017) theory and practice of Indigenous rights education that can strengthen national programs like the Philippines' IPEd program. Institutionalizing cultural interface and Indigenous rights education at a national level ensures broader state recognition, moving beyond segregated Indigenous-led schools.

Beyond Non-Binding Resolutions and Generalized Aims

The non-binding nature of Indigenous educational policies presents a global challenge, as demonstrated in international commitments such as UNDRIP and in policy experiences from across various countries and regions. The literature reveals a high prevalence of state institutions focusing on language revitalization and increasing school participation. However, there is limited evidence of binding resolutions that emphasize rights-based, cultural interface approaches. For instance, while the US has a strong intention to prioritize scholarship programs and admissions for Native Americans (Robotham, 2011), assimilationist approaches persist, which minimizes Indigenous knowledge systems in the curriculum (Leite, 2014; Shwed et al., 2018). In Australia and New Zealand, strong commitments to Indigenous language support lack the binding resolutions needed to comprehensively address Indigenous education needs. Thus, the Philippine case illustrates how institutionalizing a cultural interface approach through policy can effectively prioritize Indigenous education in the national scale.

Institutionalized cultural interface has a potential to extend beyond grassroots customary level and can transcend into institutional and structural level of implementation, thereby informing for a more binding nature of Indigenous educational policies. Based on the Points of Interface (Table 2) revealed in the findings, DepEd's strategies are two-fold: localization and Indigenization. Localization is the surface-level of relating the learning content for an enhanced learning experiences for the students. It involves connecting the curriculum's learning content to local information and materials found within the learners' community (DepEd, 2015). Whereas Indigenization refers to the process of relating the content to the bio-geographical, historical, and socio-cultural context of the learners' community (DepEd, 2015, p. 26). Indigenization may also involve the enhancement of the curriculum framework, curriculum design, and learning standards of subject areas, guided by the standards and principles adhered to in the national curriculum. In the related literature review on Indigenous pedagogies particularly multicultural education, Smith and colleagues (2021) posit that Indigenization is a process of integrating Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, methodologies, and systems into various domains, including education. Thus, this suggests that Indigenization can be practiced within the top-down institutional spaces, not just in grassroot and bottom-up spaces.

Cultural interface does not only advocate for the intersection but also for a more careful integration and intersection of Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems, allowing for a space for meaningful engagements and recognition of Indigenous peoples and knowledge bearers (Nakata, 2007, 2010; Battiste, 2002; Battiste & Henderson, 2000). However, what needs to be further explored is its implementation at the national level and the possibility of being institutionalized nationwide. Thus, for an institutionalized cultural interface to occur, it requires not only the state institutions and Indigenous communities to come through and collaborate, but with the following essential premises: (1) the proactive inclusion of mid-space actors such as Indigenous representatives, civil society organizations, experts, knowledge bearers, representatives and (2) the strength of the political and legal policy framework.

Current literature also reveals that oversaturation of existing Indigenous policies on generalized aims and focus on Indigenous languages. For instance, ASEAN does not impose binding resolutions due to the principle of non-interference among countries, thereby only recommending the ASEAN Charter that fosters respect for the languages (Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat, 2017; Sercombe, 2019). In contrast, the Philippines steered beyond broad language rights to considering the Indigenous peoples as a special matter nationwide.

It is important to note that laws and policies that embody institutionalization of cultural interface necessitate an iterative process of evaluating, implementing, and validating, with the conscious presence of Indigenous communities. The policy is itself imperfect and bound to have loopholes. It was even criticized for its tokenistic nature (P2 and P5, personal communication, 2023), but perhaps what needs to be done here is careful contextualization and proper implementation. The challenge therefore is the resources, technical support and assistance provided by DepEd regional offices and divisional units.

Indigenous Representation in the Policy Process

Current literature reveals the limited exploration of Indigenous peoples' representation in educational policy development, largely because significant inclusion is a recent occurrence. Examples include the establishment of ministries dedicated to Indigenous peoples such as the National Indigenous Australian Agency in 2019 and the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples in Brazil in 2023 (Australian Government, n.d.; Vilela, 2023). While policy circles have increasingly emphasized including Indigenous voices in policymaking in educational reforms, specific discussions on their roles in the policy process remain under-discussed. For instance, Māori leaders' involvement in language revitalization initiatives helped shaped programs such as the *Kura Kaupapa Māori* in New Zealand (Boshier, 2014). In contrast, the Philippines demonstrates a case of how Indigenous representatives helped shaped the development of the IPEd program. This section explores how Indigenous peoples can be effectively included in the policy process.

The proactive inclusion of mid-space actors is among the important aspects for an institutionalized cultural interface to occur. This is because of the nature of the initial and final actors. It is therefore important to consider locally grounded characteristics or threshold of the chosen policy actors, as learned from the case study. Thus, the recruitment process of who to deploy and utilize in terms of institutionalization of cultural interface is significantly crucial. Learning from the IPEd policy process, the government was able to recruit individuals and groups who have an extensive knowledge, experiences, and expertise of Indigenous education. Those who were behind the scenes of consulting and surveying across the country. Another important factor is the conscious effort, political and cultural will of the governmental mid-space actors to directly consult and involve the Indigenous peoples by dedicating a period of organizing massive orientation workshops and conferences. This was done because of the decentralized characteristics of the governmental units in the Philippines. With the support from NCIP regional offices, along with DepEd's own division offices, the ways to reach out to as many Indigenous communities as they could were instrumental in the policy process.

However, among the challenges for this is how the governments treat mid-space actors. If they are not well compensated or are given temporary contracts to work on the policy process and action, then it would only greatly affect the quality and standards of the institutionalization. So, it is suggested to maintain an enabling environment with substantial benefits enough for the mid-space actors to retain.

Implications

This study reveals that developing and implementing cultural interface through nationwide policy and curriculum is achievable, contributing to the discourses on inclusive Indigenous education. This approach proactively includes Indigenous voices and representation, incorporating their input into the public education system. Countries and educational institutions with strong, supported Indigenous movements and frameworks should adopt educational models that view Indigenous education not simply as integral, but as interfacial.

Embracing an interfacial perspective means recognizing Indigenous learning systems as equal to the dominant, national, non-Indigenous education system. The following are implications for policy and curriculum development, and educational leadership and practice.

For Policy and Curriculum Development

For policy and curriculum developers, it is strongly recommended to institutionalize Indigenous education programs on a national scale, including them within the framework of citizenship education. This national strategy should extend beyond Indigenous learners, allowing non-Indigenous learners in diverse localities to engage with and appreciate Indigenous communities and educational experiences they provide. Thus, Indigenous education aligns with and enhances citizenship education by contributing to nation- and identity-building efforts. Moreover, it is essential to involve Indigenous representatives (e.g., Indigenous teachers, elders of communities, advocates) in policy and curriculum processes, as they possess the knowledge and expertise critical to ensuring meaningful and sustainable inclusion. The principle of “nothing about them without them” highlights the importance of their active participation in shaping these initiatives.

For Educational Leadership and Practice

Educational administrators and practitioners are advised to consider implementing the following recommendations: (1) creation of Indigenous-led committees and working groups to guide the implementation of culturally relevant programs; and (2) the establishment of an overarching framework on the proactively includes Indigenous voices and agency in leadership and practice.

As with prior recommendations, efforts to achieve inclusive education for Indigenous communities should prioritize Indigenous-led initiatives, with comprehensive support for capacity building and training from relevant partners, including the governments and development donors. It is essential to ensure that Indigenous representatives are fully informed of their rights, particularly their educational rights. Such committees and working groups provide essential platforms for Indigenous voices and agency, allowing meaningful participation in administration and broader discursive circles, ultimately fostering positive societal change.

Establishing an overarching framework for proactive inclusion ensures that Indigenous education prioritizes agency and representation. These elements are fundamental to self-determination, a critical aspect of Indigenous rights worldwide. Policy and academic bodies are thereby recommended to consider the agency of the Indigenous peoples by granting them seats of representation in administrative and educational practices. In this way, the education sector becomes a crucial drive within Indigenous affairs, where inclusivity and empowerment can contribute to long-term, sustainable change.

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Author Affiliation Note

This study was conducted while the author was affiliated with Waseda University as a PhD candidate. The author is currently affiliated with the University of Tokyo and United Nations University as a postdoctoral research fellow.

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Corresponding author: Giselle Lugo Miole

Email: miole@g.ecc.u-tokyo.ac.jp