

Success Stories of Professional Dumagats

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Abstract

This study explores the narratives of professional Dumagat individuals from Infanta, General Nakar, and Burdeos, Quezon, focusing on their lived experiences and journeys to success. The study aims to: (1) identify the factors that motivate Dumagats to pursue higher education leading to professional careers; (2) examine the challenges and difficulties they encountered; (3) understand how they cope with these challenges; (4) explore how they manage obstacles throughout their journey; and (5) recognize how they represent themselves as professionals. Using thematic narrative analysis, the study found that the key motivating factors include personal ambition supported by family and community, love and responsibility toward family and community, and the pursuit of a better life to overcome poverty and discrimination. The research also highlights the challenges and adversities faced by professional Dumagats, as well as the strategies they employed to overcome them. Their experiences reveal resilience, determination, and a commitment to serving as role models for their communities. The findings provide insights for educators, policymakers, and community leaders on supporting indigenous populations in achieving educational and professional success.

Keywords: Dumagat; professional success; indigenous communities; social education; empowerment;

Nomenclature

NCIP	National Commission on Indigenous Peoples	IP	Indigenous Peoples
P1-P5	Participant 1 to Participant 5		

A	radius of R= 20 kilometer (1.5-hour travel of motorcycle from the nearest town)
B	position of Pos - Northern Slope of Sierra Madre mountains, near Agos or Tinipak river.

1. Main text

Introduction

Living in remote areas along the Pacific Coast, the Dumagats of General Nakar are one of the indigenous tribes that have remained largely untouched by modern civilization. Due to the inaccessibility of their communities, they have historically experienced isolation and limited access to education, leading to social marginalization and misconceptions about their way of life (2nd International Conference of Communication Science Research [ICCSR], 2018). According to a GMA News interview, a Dumagat individual stated, “It’s hard. We only have this forest to roam around. We cannot mingle with other people in the town. They look down on us like we are of no value because we know nothing.”

This study focuses on the success stories of professional Dumagat individuals in Infanta and General Nakar, Quezon. The term *Dumagat* is derived from the word *dagat*, meaning “sea,” as they are traditionally seashore dwellers who rely on marine resources for subsistence. They are descendants of Negritos or Pygmies and speak their own dialect, Dumaget, while also communicating in Tagalog due to interactions with lowlanders. Their major economic activities include rattan gathering, swidden farming (*kaingin*), indigenous fishing, and hunting (National Commission on Indigenous Peoples [NCIP], 2012).

Despite their resilience, the Dumagats face significant challenges. Mountainous terrain, limited medical access, low literacy levels, poor sanitation, and widespread poverty contribute to poor health outcomes, high maternal and infant mortality, and undrinkable water (cnnasia.org, 2019). Higher education is difficult to attain due to these socio-economic barriers, cultural practices, and discrimination. Many Indigenous children stop schooling because of insufficient funds for school supplies and sustenance (Hirai, 2015). However, education has the potential to improve economic conditions and develop entrepreneurial and cooperative skills within the community (Fiagoy, 2000).

Even well-educated Indigenous individuals often face discrimination in employment, as government recruitment processes tend to favor non-indigenous applicants with connections, limiting opportunities for qualified Indigenous candidates (Hirai, 2015; EED-TFIP, 2009).

This research aims to provide narrative accounts of professional Dumagats’ journeys to success, offering inspiration and motivation, particularly to Indigenous youth. These stories highlight resilience, perseverance, and cultural pride, demonstrating how the Dumagats overcome adversities, adapt to globalization, and preserve their identity while achieving professional success.

Review of Related Literature

Indigenous peoples worldwide remain among the poorest, most excluded, and disadvantaged sectors of society (Neish & Eversole, 2005). In the United States, American Indians and Alaska Natives continue to experience severe discrimination, racial prejudice, and unequal exercise of authority (Heart et al., 2011). Similarly, the Indigenous peoples of Canada face systemic challenges in education, with lower graduation rates compared to non-Indigenous peers due to socio-economic and geographic barriers (Gordon & White, 2014; Bellows, 2018; Olsen et al., 2017; McKeown et al., 2018). Although primary education completion rates for Indigenous students are relatively high, attainment declines at the secondary and tertiary levels, limiting opportunities for productive livelihoods (Rovillos et al., 2009).

Geographical isolation, strong community ties, family obligations, and long commutes often hinder Indigenous students from accessing post-secondary education (McKeown, 2018; Stone, 2016; Amell, 2016). Socio-economic status also significantly affects educational attainment; students from low-income families face financial difficulties that force them to drop out or engage in child labor (Battle & Lewis, 2002; Bohara, 2010).

In the Philippines, over five hundred Indigenous People (IP) communities inhabit more than 7,100 islands (Neish & Eversole, 2005). Indigenous Peoples contribute significantly to Filipino culture, arts, music, and sustainable environmental practices, yet their survival, land rights, and traditional knowledge are increasingly threatened (Sharah et al., 2018; Rovillos et al., 2009). The Dumagat, particularly in Infanta and General Nakar, face additional challenges due to urbanization, infrastructure projects such as the Kaliwa Dam, and limited access to education, healthcare, and social services (CNN Philippines, 2019; Halcon & Galang, 2015).

Historical discrimination and low levels of schooling have limited Indigenous Peoples' socio-economic mobility and political participation (Gust, 2007; UNDP, 2004; Bayo & Arti, 2014). During the administration of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (2001–2010), policy changes further marginalized Indigenous communities by prioritizing national economic goals over IP rights, affecting trust in government and access to development programs (Bayo & Arti, 2014).

Indigenous students continue to experience bullying, stereotyping, and discrimination in schools, which affects academic performance and self-esteem (Reyes, 2018; Hirai, 2015; Sharah et al., 2018). Poverty, low literacy, and limited employment opportunities persist, with most Dumagat households relying on subsistence farming, rattan gathering, and small-scale labor (Candelaria et al., 2007; Hirai, 2015; Pocock et al., 2011).

Efforts to improve Indigenous education include government programs, university initiatives, and non-governmental projects. The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997 guarantees rights to ancestral domains, self-governance, social justice, and cultural identity (Neish & Eversole, 2005; Rey Ty, 2010; McNeish & Eversole, 2005). The Department of Education issued DepEd Order No. 42, series of 2004, permitting schools for Indigenous Peoples and Cultural Communities (Department of Education, 2004). Institutions such as the University of Southeastern Philippines established the Pamulaan Center for Indigenous Peoples Education, offering degree programs tailored to IP students and emphasizing cultural preservation (Calamba, 2005; Department of Education, 2015; Krakouer, 2015; Navas, 2016).

Community-based programs also support education for Dumagat youth. The Lyceum of the Philippines University (LPU) opened the Katutubong Paaralan ng Jose P. Laurel (later Ina Apolonia Community Library) to promote literacy and preserve socio-cultural heritage (Bolido, 2012; Halcon et al., 2015). The Paul K.

Fayerabend Foundation supports Agta Dumagat schools to ensure continuous intergenerational transfer of traditional knowledge and educational success (Ben – Proud to be AgtaDumagat, 2014).

Scholarships, peer support, mentoring, and culturally responsive programs are key factors in Indigenous student success (Molintas, 2004; Navas, 2016). Individual stories of achievement, such as Norman King (UP graduate), Lodima Dela Cruz Doroteo (first Dumagat teacher), and other Indigenous professionals, demonstrate that determination, strong desire, and educational support can overcome socio-economic and cultural barriers (ABS-CBN News, 2016; Philippine Star, 2018; Reyes, 2019). Success, as defined by goal attainment and social mobility, is closely linked to educational opportunities, resilience, and empowerment (Pidgeon, 2009, 2016).

These studies collectively emphasize the importance of education, social support, and culturally relevant programs in enabling Indigenous communities, including the Dumagat, to overcome historical marginalization and achieve professional success.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative narrative analysis using an inductive approach, an interpretive method widely applied in social sciences, including sociology, education, and organizational studies (McAlpine, 2016). Narrative analysis focuses on life histories and biographies, recounting how individuals make sense of events in their lives, positioning themselves as agents of their experiences. This design was chosen to capture detailed stories of Dumagats who achieved professional success, allowing an in-depth understanding of their experiences and challenges.

Narratives were collected through informal, conversational interviews, enabling participants to share their stories comfortably. Family members and neighbors occasionally contributed additional insights, enriching the data. This approach aligns with social constructivism, which posits that reality is socially constructed and interpreted differently by individuals within a community (Riessman, 2008). Open-ended questions guided interviews, facilitating participants' articulation of their experiences in educational and professional contexts (Creswell, 2007).

Participants and Sampling

The study focused on **five professional Dumagats** from Infanta, General Nakar, and Burdeos, Quezon. Participants were selected using **purposive sampling** based on the following criteria:

1. Must belong to the Dumagat indigenous group.
2. Must have completed a college degree.
3. Must be employed in their professional field, regardless of licensure or Civil Service eligibility.

Coordination with the **National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP)** facilitated the identification of eligible participants. Fieldwork was conducted in multiple Dumagat settlements:

- **Real, Quezon:** Barangay Lubayat and Barangay Tanauan
- **Infanta, Quezon:** Barangays Bolihan and Catambungan
- **General Nakar, Quezon:** Dinigman Settlement (Barangay Canaway), Lamutan Settlement (Barangay Lamutan), Tamala Settlement (Barangay San Marcelino), Cynthia Village (Barangay Umiray)

Research Instruments

Data were collected using multiple tools to ensure richness and triangulation:

- **In-depth interviews:** Open-ended and semi-structured interviews conducted in participants' homes or preferred locations, allowing informal, conversational dialogue.
- **Observations:** Conducted in communities, schools attended by participants during their primary years, and workplaces of participants when accessible.

- **Document review:** Supplementary data from family members, neighbors, and community records to validate and enrich participants' narratives.

Building rapport was crucial to gather authentic and comprehensive accounts, as participants were initially shy or reserved. Informal interactions, including sharing personal experiences, helped foster trust and deeper engagement.

Data Collection Procedure

Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent. Field notes captured contextual information, nuances of participants' expressions, and community interactions. Observations provided insights into participants' current environments, including educational and professional settings. Interviews were scheduled according to participants' availability, often in the afternoon after completing household chores, ensuring minimal disruption and maximum comfort. "The interview guide used in this study is presented in Appendix A."

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using **thematic coding**, following these steps:

1. **Transcription and Translation:** Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed and translated where necessary.
2. **Open Coding:** Initial examination of transcripts and field notes to identify key concepts and emerging patterns.
3. **Categorization:** Grouping codes into broader themes, capturing the participants' motivations, challenges, coping strategies, and self-representation as professionals.
4. **Synthesis and Interpretation:** Summarizing themes and constructing narrative accounts to generate insights about Dumagats' journeys to professional success (Dixon et al., 2016).

Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to highlight participants' lived experiences, emphasizing how they overcame socio-cultural, economic, and educational barriers to achieve success. "A sample transcript excerpt is provided on Appendix C".

Ethical Considerations

Participants' consent was obtained prior to data collection. Confidentiality and privacy were maintained throughout the research process, and participants were given the opportunity to review and clarify their narratives. The study adhered to ethical principles in conducting research with Indigenous communities, respecting cultural norms and values.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study explored the success stories of professional Dumagats in Quezon Province, particularly in Infanta, General Nakar, and Burdeos. Through in-depth narrative interviews and observations, the researcher documented the experiences of five Dumagat individuals who overcame poverty, discrimination, and limited access to education to achieve professional success.

The participants' journeys began with small dreams, whether completing a college degree or having enough food on the table. These aspirations were supported by family encouragement and assistance from others. Despite facing numerous challenges, including financial difficulties, food inadequacy, and societal discrimination, the participants persevered. They developed resilience, determination, and self-reliance, ultimately attaining professional status. Today, they serve as role models in their communities, providing inspiration and guidance to younger generations of Dumagats.

Conclusions

1. **Motivating Factors** – The primary motivator for the Dumagats was ambition. Even in remote areas with limited opportunities, their dreams guided them to pursue higher education and improve their lives. Support from family and community played a critical role in sustaining their motivation.
2. **Adversities and Coping Mechanisms** – The participants faced financial hardships, social discrimination, and limited educational resources. They coped with these challenges by remaining resilient, focused, and persistent, demonstrating strong problem-solving skills and a positive mindset.
3. **Personal and Professional Growth** – Through education and perseverance, the Dumagats not only achieved personal success but also contributed to their communities. They became providers, mentors, and role models, showing that Indigenous Peoples can thrive despite historical and systemic disadvantages.
4. **Community Impact** – Successful Dumagats actively support their communities, whether by teaching younger members, providing resources, or inspiring peers. Their achievements illustrate the transformative power of education and mentorship within Indigenous communities.

Recommendations

1. **Encouraging Dreams** – Parents, educators, and community leaders should support the aspirations of young Dumagats, regardless of the size of their dreams. Motivation and belief in their potential are key factors in achieving success.
2. **Educational Support Programs** – Schools and local government units may implement initiatives such as scholarships, career guidance, mentorship programs, and field trips to broaden students' perspectives and opportunities.
3. **Community and Family Engagement** – Programs to strengthen parenting practices and family support can enhance the motivation and resilience of young Dumagats. Parenting seminars and workshops may equip families to better nurture their children's education.

4. **Government and NGO Intervention** – The government and non-governmental organizations may provide additional support, such as dormitories for students living far from schools, scholarships for higher education, and programs that promote Indigenous knowledge and skills.
5. **Further Research** – Future studies may explore Dumagats' strategies for managing stress, trauma, and adversities, career development interventions, parenting practices, or the social and economic roles of professional Dumagats within their communities.

This study highlights that, with determination, community support, and access to education, Indigenous Peoples like the Dumagats can overcome systemic barriers and achieve success while preserving their culture and identity.

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