

Language Preservation and Cultural Identity Among Bagobo Klata Students: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

This qualitative descriptive phenomenological study investigated the risk of language attrition and cultural erosion among Bagobo Klata students at Sirib National High School, exploring how they navigate identity within a multilingual environment dominated by Bisaya, Filipino, and English. Guided by Stuart Hall's Cultural Identity Theory, I used a purposive sampling method to select 10 indigenous student samples to examine their personal struggles, linguistic choices, and cultural negotiation via semi-structured interviews and Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. The findings revealed five major themes, highlighting a decline in native language competence and distinct emotional and social consequences from the language shift, alongside resilient ties to cultural preservation. Ultimately, the preference for dominant languages demonstrates how mainstream communication subtly displaces indigenous mother tongues. This continuous identity struggle underscores an urgent conclusion structured institutional support and community-led programs are vital to protect and revitalize the Bagobo Klata heritage.

Keywords: Bagobo Klata, identity, revitalization, multilingualism, preservation, Davao City,

Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The Problem and Its Scope

The growing prevalence of dominant languages has led to the slow extinction of numerous indigenous languages, jeopardizing their preservation and the cultural identities of Indigenous Peoples (IP). As communities embrace languages seen as offering better educational, economic, and social prospects, younger generations frequently use their native languages less, leading to language shift and a decline in cultural traditions. This situation is especially alarming because language serves as an essential vehicle for culture, conveying traditions, values, historical narratives, oral literature, and indigenous wisdom across generations (Goel, 2024).

Consequently, preserving languages necessitates intentional actions to guarantee that native languages endure and evolve within evolving social circumstances (Annet, 2024). Park (2023) states that multilingualism has grown more prevalent as socio-political, religious, and economic factors prompt communities to embrace more dominant languages. In the same vein, Charamba and Marupi (2023) highlighted that although a shift in language may enhance access to education, commerce, politics, and social engagement, it frequently hastens the replacement of indigenous languages, putting numerous native tongues in jeopardy of disappearing or diminishing.

In a global perspective, specifically in Bangladesh, indigenous language loss has contributed to changes in ritual practices, storytelling traditions, and social interaction patterns (Karmaker, 2025). Research on ethnic communities indicates that ceremonial expressions and culturally specific knowledge are increasingly expressed in Bengali rather than in indigenous languages, thereby reducing the symbolic depth of these practices (Chakma & Sultana, 2024). Similarly, in Papua New Guinea, which has the highest linguistic diversity in the world, with over 800 languages, younger generations are increasingly using Tok Pisin (an English-based creole) or English instead of their ancestral tongues (Rumawak, 2025).

In the Philippine context, the decline in the preservation of indigenous languages is similarly attributed to the dominance of Tagalog and English (Paredes et al., 2023). This leaves little room for mother tongues to be spoken. The decline of indigenous languages has similarly been experienced in the local context, as reported by Almario (2023). This decline occurs as communities increasingly adopt Tagalog and

English, leaving the ancestral languages behind.

In Davao City, many indigenous youths, specifically the Bagobo Klata, are exposed to highly urbanized, multilingual environments where Bisaya, Filipino, and English dominate schools, media, and social interaction. As a result, many Indigenous People (IP) youth increasingly prefer dominant languages over their native tongues. While this shift may provide academic and social convenience, it also creates severe tensions in cultural identity and language preservation. Research tracking language change in the southern Philippines reveals that indigenous learners face immense Chara pressure to code-switch or abandon their native dialects in public domains to avoid social stigmatization and overcome communication barriers within predominantly non-indigenous school settings (Barcibal et al., 2023; Tacio, 2025).

Although previous studies have examined indigenous language decline, there remains limited research exploring the lived experiences of Indigenous students in multicultural environments where dominant languages are widely used. As highlighted by Lumayas and Brazil (2026), while existing studies provide valuable insights into Indigenous education, there remains a need to examine the lived experiences of Indigenous learners in specific local contexts. In particular, understanding how Indigenous students negotiate the use of dominant languages while preserving their native language and cultural identity remains an important area for further study. Addressing this gap, the present study explores the lived experiences of Indigenous students and examines how the use of dominant languages influences their efforts to preserve their indigenous language and maintain their cultural identity.

1.1. Research Questions

This phenomenological study sought to investigate, understand, and describe the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples (IP) students at Sirib National High School regarding language preservation and cultural identity. Specifically, it aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples (IP) students (Bagobo Klata) at Sirib National High School in preserving their native language and cultural identity within an environment where dominant languages are commonly used?
2. How do Indigenous Peoples (IP) students (Bagobo Klata) describe their experiences of selecting and using dominant languages (Bisaya, Filipino, and English) in their educational and social interactions?
3. How do Indigenous Peoples (IP) students (Bagobo Klata) perceive the influence of language use on the development, expression, and maintenance of their cultural identity?

1.2. Theoretical Lens

This study was anchored on Stuart Hall's Cultural Identity Theory (1990), which posits that cultural identity is not a fixed, static essence but an ongoing process of becoming shaped by social contact, language, and lived experiences (Hall, 1990). This theoretical lens was directly aligned with the conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1, which mapped the specific process of Language Preservation and Cultural Identity Among Bagobo Klata Students. As shown in this figure, the text highlighted that an individual's sense of self is negotiated through external factors, namely Dominant languages, the School Environment, and Peer Interaction.

Moreover, in line with Hall's (1990), theory, the diagram traced how these contextual influences shaped the students' Language Experiences, which in turn inform their Cultural Meaning-Making and subsequent Identity Negotiation. Ultimately, this conceptual flow culminated in the construction and preservation of cultural identity, reflecting Hall's assertion that identity is constantly reconstructed within specific contexts. By integrating this framework, the study achieved an Enhanced Understanding of how Indigenous students preserved their language and constructed their cultural identity within a multicultural environment, demonstrating how the Bagobo Klata youth actively navigated and expressed their heritage while confronting the pressures of dominant social and educational systems.

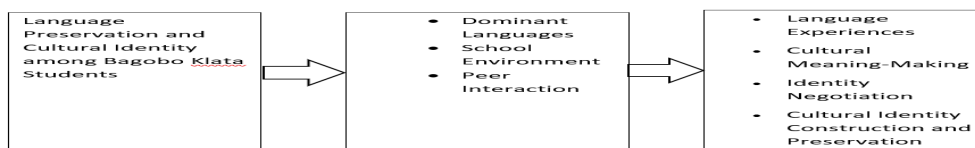


Figure 1. Conceptual Lens of Language Preservation and Cultural Identity Among Bagobo Klata Student

described the research design, sample, and sampling technique, research instrument, data-gathering procedure, data-analysis technique, and trustworthiness that guided the research process. These methodological components were carefully selected to ensure that the study systematically explored the lived experiences of Bagobo Klata students regarding language preservation and cultural identity while maintaining the credibility, trustworthiness, and ethical integrity of the research.

1.3. Research Design

In this study, I adopted a qualitative descriptive phenomenological approach to gain a deep understanding of and reflect on the lived experiences of Indigenous students regarding language preservation and cultural identity. I aimed to explore the personal, everyday experiences of Indigenous Peoples (IP) students at Sirib National High School as they navigated educational and social environments dominated by Bisaya, Filipino, and English.

Through this approach, I sought to intimately connect with how the participants themselves perceived and felt about their language use and cultural identity in their daily lives. I focused on describing these unique lived experiences from their viewpoint, uncovering the common meanings and shared patterns that naturally emerged from their personal narratives. To interpret these rich stories, I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, which allowed me to carefully identify the central themes that captured the essence of their collective journey toward language preservation and cultural identity.

1.4. Research Locale

I conducted this study at Sirib National High School, located in Barangay Sirib, Calinan District, Davao City, Philippines. I chose this specific locale because approximately 57.6% of its student population consists of Indigenous Peoples (IP) learners, making it an appropriate setting for exploring the lived experiences of indigenous students. Additionally, its highly multilingual environment, where Bisaya, Filipino, and English predominate, serves as a critical setting where Bagobo Klata students actively navigate the daily pressures of linguistic assimilation and cultural identity preservation.

1.5. Sample and Sampling Technique

I involved ten Bagobo Klata students from Sirib National High School who possessed lived experiences related to language preservation and cultural identity. I considered this sample size appropriate for a phenomenological study to generate the rich, detailed experiences necessary for meaningful thematic analysis. To ensure data relevance, I established specific inclusion criteria requiring that participants self-identify as Bagobo Klata, be currently enrolled at the school, and have experienced the use, preservation, or decline of their indigenous language and cultural practices. Conversely, I excluded students outside this ethnolinguistic group to isolate the unique challenges of this specific community.

To select these participants, I used purposive sampling to identify individuals with the specific characteristics and experiences needed to address the research questions. This technique allowed me to ensure that the selected participants could provide rich and meaningful insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

1.6. Data Gathering Technique

Before conducting the study, I obtained the necessary ethical and institutional approvals. I secured ethical clearance from the Society for Moral Integrity and Legal Ethics (SMILE) Ethics Review Committee of Holy Cross of Davao College (HCDC), an endorsement from the Dean of the Graduate School, permission from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), and approval from the Principal of Sirib National High School. After obtaining these clearances, I invited the participants, explained the study's purpose and procedures, and obtained their informed consent and assent. I also informed them that participation was voluntary and that the interviews would be audio-recorded with their permission.

I conducted face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews in a quiet and private setting within the school. Each interview lasted approximately 25 to 30 minutes and was guided by open-ended questions that encouraged participants to freely share their lived experiences regarding native language preservation and cultural identity. At the end of each interview, I provided light snacks and a small token of appreciation to thank the participants for their time and participation.

After completing the interviews, I transcribed all audio recordings verbatim to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the participants' responses. These transcripts served as the primary data for the thematic analysis while **preserving the participants' original narratives.**

2. RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings on how indigenous students experience cultural identity and language preservation, highlighting five major themes generated from the participants' accounts: the Dominance of Mainstream Languages in Communication, Declining Indigenous Language Competence, Language Blending and Identity Negotiation, Emotional and Social Consequences of Language Shift, and Cultural Identity Preservation Through Language. These themes reflect a clear trend in which the widespread use of dominant languages weakens mother-tongue proficiency and affects students' emotional and social connections. Despite these challenges, the participants continue to view their indigenous language as a vital part of their identity and remain deeply committed to preserving it.

Dominance of Mainstream Languages in Communication

As I look into the daily lives of the participants, it becomes deeply evident how the heavy presence of mainstream languages shapes their everyday communication. Within the walls of the school and during interactions with peers, dominant languages like Bisaya, Filipino, and English have woven themselves into the fabric of their routine conversations.

*Mas gusto nako gamiton ang
dominanteng pinulongan kay mas mapahayag
nako kung unsa gyud ang akong gustong isulti.
(I prefer using the dominant language because
it allows me to express what I really want to
say." (Q1-L3-PN1-P2)*

This linguistic shift is not merely a random choice but a practical necessity driven by the immediate need for social integration and mutual understanding among classmates and teachers.

School-Based Language Influence. Participants described how the school environment encourages the use of dominant languages. Participant explained that they had become comfortable using the dominant language because it was commonly used by classmates and teachers, and stated:

Sama namo, Ma'am, naanad na mi nga mogamit dominanteng pinulongan, labi na kung kauban ang akong mga klasmeyt ug mga magtutudlo. (Like us, Ma'am, we've gotten used to speaking the dominant language, especially with my classmates and teachers)."
 (Q1-L22-23-PN1-P1)

Similarly, participant 3 shared that English was often preferred during presentations because it was more widely understood, saying:

Kasagaran, mas sayon para nako nga mag-English kung naay presentasyon sa eskwelahan kay mas kasabot man gud ang akong mga klasmeyt ug mga magtutudlo. (I often felt it was easier to speak English in school's presentations because most of my classmates and teachers understand it better). (Q1-L2-4-PN3-P1)

These

accounts suggest that school practices and academic expectations encourage the use of dominant languages, making them the primary medium of communication.

Preference for Dominant Language Use. Participants perceived dominant languages as practical and efficient for communication saying:

Mas sayon man gud nga mogamit ug pinulongan nga kasabotan sa tanan kaysa sa among kaugalingong pinulongan. (It's easier to use a language that everyone understands rather than your own).
 (Q2-L5-6-PN4-P1)

Similarly, participant 7 reported feeling more comfortable speaking Bisaya because it is widely understood:

Kung Binisaya akong gamiton, komportable ko nga mosulti kay masabtan man ko sa akong kaistorya. (In using Visayan, I feel comfortable speaking because I am understood by the person I am talking to). (Q1-L34-35-PN7-P1)

These accounts demonstrate that dominant languages are preferred because they facilitate smoother communication and broader social interaction. Participants noted that using Bisaya, Filipino, or English allows them to communicate more effectively with classmates, teachers, and community members. The widespread use of these languages in educational and social settings reinforces their preference in everyday interactions. As a result, indigenous languages are used less frequently, contributing to a gradual language shift among students.

Declining Indigenous Language Competence

A deeply concerning theme that emerged from the interviews is the gradual, painful fading of the participants' ability to speak, understand, and confidently use their native language. This decline is heavily tied to the lack of opportunities to practice the language, a quiet abandonment at home, and the overwhelming presence of dominant languages in their environments.

Loss of Native Language Competence. Participants reported losing fluency and understanding of their indigenous language, saying:

Giingnan ko nila, 'Ikaw mismo, dili gani kabalo mosulti sa imong kaugalingong pinulongang IP. (You yourself don't even know how to speak your own IP language). (Q2-L5-8-PN6-P1).

Also, participant 2 shared that Bagobo was no longer spoken at home

Sa among balay, wala na gyud koy madungog nga negasulti ug Bagobo. (No one speaks Bagobo at home anymore). (Q2-L18-PN2-P1):

The data reveal that limited language transmission directly contributes to the decline of indigenous language competence.

Language Use Difficulties. Participants experienced challenges expressing themselves in their native language:

Lisod para nako nga ipasabot og klaro ang akong gusto isulti kung gamit ang akong inahan nga pinulongan. (I find it difficult to explain my thoughts clearly in my native language). (Q1-L3-4-PN2-P1):

Participant 8 also described difficulty communicating with a tribal leader because of limited proficiency:

Dili na kaayo ko kahibalo mosulti sa among pinulongan. (I don't know the native language as much anymore). (Q2-L78-80-PN1-P3):

These experiences indicate that reduced proficiency limits confidence in using indigenous languages.

Language Blending and Identity Negotiation. Participants described mixing languages and struggling to maintain linguistic identity saying :

Tungod kay naanad na ko sa Binisaya, Tagalog, ug English, makalimot na ko sa ubang mga pulong sa Bagobo. (Because I'm used to Bisaya, Tagalog, and English, I forget other terms in Bagobo). (Q2-L11-13-PN4-P1)

Similarly, participant 2 reported that relatives noticed changes in the way they spoke :

Makaingon sila nga sagol-sagol na akong mga gisulti ug dili na sama kaniadto. (They feel my words are mixed and not like before). (Q2-L69-70-PN2-P1):

These findings suggest that language mixing reflects the ongoing negotiation between indigenous and dominant linguistic identities. In my observations, participants frequently described combining their native language with Bisaya, Filipino, or English in daily communication. Through my analysis, I found that this practice demonstrates how indigenous students adapt to multilingual environments while maintaining connections to their cultural heritage. However, my evaluation also highlights the challenges they face in preserving linguistic purity amid the increasing influence of dominant languages.

Emotional and Social Consequences of Language Shift

The retreat of the indigenous language is not just a change in speech patterns; it carries a heavy emotional and social toll for the youth. In sharing their experiences, participants laid bare raw feelings of sadness, insecurity, shame, and disappointment. They also detailed the quiet tensions and distance this linguistic shift creates within their own families.

Emotional Response to Language Shift. Participants expressed sadness and concern regarding language loss saying :

*Nasubo ko gamay kay mao man
to ang akong kaugalingong
pinulongan. (I felt a little bit of sadness
because that is my language). (Q3-
L32-35-PN1-P1);*

Another Participant 2 likewise shared saying :

*Makapasubo gyud. Tungod sa
among paggamit sa dominanteng
pinulongan, dili na namo mapadayon ang
pagpreserbar sa among kultura. (It makes
me sad. By speaking the dominant
language, we fail to preserve our culture).
(Q3-L20-PN2-P1)*

These disclosures reveal the emotional burden associated with language shift. Participants expressed

feelings of sadness, shame, and regret as they experienced difficulties using their native language. Such emotions reflect the personal and cultural challenges that accompany the gradual loss of indigenous language competence.

Language-Related Insecurity and Stigma. Participants described feelings of shame, insecurity, and fear of judgment:

Basin dili kasabot ang uban kung gamiton namo ang among lumad nga pinulongan. (Others might not understand if we use our native language). (Q2-L95-96-PN1-P3)

Another participant 7 explained saying :

These experiences indicate that limited language proficiency contributes to feelings of

Nadismaya gyud ko kay dili ko kabalo mosulti sa pinulongang Bagobo (I feel disappointed because I don't know how to speak Bagobo). (Q1- L63-PN7-P2)

insecurity.

Participants

expressed

concerns

about being

misunderstood and judged because of their inability to speak their native language fluently. Such feelings of insecurity may discourage the use of indigenous languages and further contribute to language shift among indigenous students.

Social Tension from Language Differences. Language shift affected participants' relationships with family and community members saying:

Nasubo akong lola kay wala na ko nagagamit sa among lumad nga pinulongan. (My grandmother was disappointed because I no longer speak our native language). (Q3-L22-23-PN4-P1)

Participant 3 similarly noted and said :

Tungod ani, mas napalapit ko sa akong mga higala nga nagagamit sa dominanteng mga pinulongan, pero usahay murag adunay gamay nga kalayo sa akong mga miyembro sa pamilya. (These shifts make me close to my friends who speak the dominant languages but sometimes create a slight distance with my family members). (Q2-L29-30-PN3-P1)

These findings suggest that language differences can create relational tensions within families and communities. Participants reported experiencing difficulties communicating with relatives and fellow indigenous community members who primarily use the native language. Such communication barriers may weaken social connections and contribute to feelings of exclusion from their cultural community.

Cultural Identity Preservation Through Language. Despite the overwhelming current of language shift, a beautiful thread of resilience runs through the participants' experiences. They fiercely view their indigenous language as a sacred anchor of their cultural identity, representing their ancestry, heritage, and deep-seated connection to their community.

Regarding community expectations, one participant shared:

Ang ilang gilauman kay kabalo pud unta Ko mosulti ana nga pinulongan. (Their expectation is that you should also know how to speak that way). (Q3-L6-PN8-P1)

This statement highlights how indigenous language proficiency is often regarded as an important marker of cultural belonging and identity within the community. Participants recognized that speaking their ancestral language is linked to maintaining connections to their heritage and cultural roots. The expectation to know and use the indigenous language reflects the community's desire to preserve its cultural traditions and collective identity. Consequently, limited proficiency in the native language may affect individuals' sense of belonging and connection to their Indigenous community.

Aspirations and Support for Indigenous Language Revitalization

In the final theme of their shared experiences, the participants shifted from sharing their struggles to expressing a collective hope for the future. Far from being indifferent, these indigenous youth harbor a deep longing to reclaim their linguistic heritage and are calling for robust institutional systems and educational initiatives to support language revitalization.

Educational Support for Language Preservation. Participants emphasized the need for schools to play a more active role in preserving indigenous languages. They viewed educational institutions as important spaces where indigenous students can develop language proficiency and strengthen their cultural identity, stated:

Unta hatagan mi nila og panahon nga tudluan ang mga lumad nga estudyante unsaon pagsulti ug Bagobo. (I wish they would give time to teach indigenous students how to speak their native language). (Q3-L30-31-PN2-P1)

Participant 8 similarly advocated for language instruction in schools:

Kay nagkalain-lain man ang mga estudyante sa among eskwelahan. Maayo unta kung naay mga seminar, language classes, o mga klase sa lumad nga pinulongan nga para sa mga estudyanteng IP. (Because the school is diverse. So maybe seminars, language classes, or dialect classes intended for IP students). (Q1-L119-120-PN8-P4)

Indigenous Language Education. Participants highlighted the importance of structured language education programs as a means of revitalizing indigenous languages. They suggested that seminars, language classes, and other learning opportunities could provide students with the knowledge and skills needed to communicate in their native language.

Participant 8 saying:

Siguro maayo unta kung naay mga seminar, language classes, o mga klase sa lumad nga pinulongan nga para gyud sa mga estudyanteng IP. (Maybe seminars, language classes, or dialect classes intended for IP students). (Q2-L120-PN8-P4)

Willingness to

Learn Native Language. Despite experiencing language loss, participants expressed a strong desire to learn and reconnect with their indigenous language. Their perspectives reflected an appreciation of the cultural significance of language and a commitment to preserving their ancestral heritage.

Participant 5 expressed interest in learning Bagobo Klata saying :

Mas maayo unta kung mas dako ang paghatag og importansya sa pagkat-on sa pinulongang Bagobo Klata. (It would be better if there was more focus on learning the Bagobo Klata language). (Q1-L11-PN5-P1):

Limited Support for Language Learning. Participants also described challenges associated with the limited availability of language learning opportunities. They noted a decline in the transmission of traditional language within families and communities, making it more difficult for younger generations to acquire their native language.

Participant 6 observed that language learning opportunities have become scarce and stated :

Wala na ang among mga katigulangan nga unta sila ang motudlo namo sa among lumad nga pinulongan. (The ancestors who were supposed to teach us are gone now). (Q1- L20-PN6-P1)

This finding suggests that the decline in intergenerational language transmission has reduced opportunities for younger generations to learn and practice their native language. Consequently, participants recognized the need for stronger educational and community support to sustain indigenous language learning

and preservation.

4. Discussion

This chapter presents a comprehensive discussion of the five major themes that emerged from the lived experiences of Bagobo Klata students: Dominance of Mainstream Languages in Communication, Declining Indigenous Language Competence, Language Blending and Identity Negotiation, Emotional and Social Consequences of Language Shift, and Cultural Identity Preservation Through Language. By anchoring these findings in Stuart Hall's Cultural Identity Theory and the existing literature, this section examines how participants understand, negotiate, and preserve their cultural identity amid the influence of dominant languages.

Dominance of Mainstream Languages in Communication

The participants' shared experiences directly demonstrate that the overwhelming dominance of Bisaya, Filipino, and English in school environments and peer networks creates localized sociolinguistic domination. The findings reveal that dominant languages strongly influence the communication practices of indigenous students. Participants preferred these languages because they are widely used in schools, social interactions, and daily communication. This supports the observation that dominant languages occupy important roles in education and other major domains of society, making them more practical and accessible for communication than indigenous languages. As a result, students increasingly rely on mainstream languages, which may contribute to reduced use of their native language.

These findings are consistent with Espino et al. (2021), who emphasized that English and other widely used languages have become deeply embedded in educational and social institutions, shaping language use and communication practices across diverse linguistic communities. Similarly, Aiseng (2022) argued that language dominance emerges when one language consistently occupies greater visibility and communicative space than other languages within multilingual environments. Such dominance reinforces language hierarchies by positioning one language as the norm for communication while reducing opportunities for

minority languages to be used in everyday interactions. The study further emphasized that multilingual practices, such as translanguaging, can challenge linguistic dominance by creating spaces where multiple languages coexist rather than privileging a single dominant language.

Likewise, Shaumiwaty (2025) highlighted that English provides learners with access to extensive academic resources, educational opportunities, and global communication. The predominance of English in digital content, where more than half of web pages are written in English, further reinforces its status as the world's most widely used language in education and online communication. These findings help explain why participants perceived dominant languages as more useful and practical in their academic and social lives.

However, Alakbarova (2025) argued that the increasing use of dominant languages does not inevitably result in the erosion of indigenous languages. Instead, the promotion of bilingual and multilingual education enables learners to develop proficiency in dominant languages while maintaining fluency in their heritage languages. This perspective suggests that the challenge lies not in learning mainstream languages but in ensuring that indigenous languages receive equal institutional and community support so that linguistic diversity and cultural identity can be sustained.

Consistently, Fabro et al. (2024) argued that the use of Filipino in education does not necessarily weaken Indigenous identity when instruction is culturally contextualized. They emphasized that integrating Indigenous culture, local narratives, and community knowledge into Filipino instruction strengthens learner engagement while fostering cultural identity and a sense of belonging. This perspective suggests that the challenge lies not in the use of dominant languages themselves but in ensuring that classroom instruction recognizes and values the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of Indigenous learners.

Declining Indigenous Language Competence

The findings reveal a decline in indigenous language competence among participants, as many reported difficulties understanding, speaking, and expressing themselves in their native language. Reduced use of the indigenous language in daily communication appears to have contributed to the gradual loss of fluency and comprehension. This finding is consistent with Bastida et al. (2022), who noted that the

increasing use of dominant languages strengthens their position while indigenous languages gradually weaken and become at risk of being forgotten through language shift. Similarly, Imron et al. (2025) highlighted that the increasing preference for dominant languages perceived as more practical, modern, and socially valuable contributes to the marginalization of mother tongues, with fewer speakers using these languages in everyday life.

Additionally, participants' experiences of forgetting words and struggling to speak their native language reflect the consequences of weakened intergenerational language transmission. When indigenous languages are no longer consistently taught and practiced within families, language competence gradually declines. Alejan et al. (2021) emphasized that failure to pass the native language to younger generations directly contributes to language loss. In contrast, Mahiroh (2024) found that language proficiency and continuous exposure to English enhanced bilinguals' confidence and ease in communication, emphasizing that proficiency plays a crucial role in shaping language preference and language acquisition.

Furthermore, Erimbetova (2025), also highlighted that Bilingual individuals often develop a broader cultural perspective, as they can navigate multiple cultural contexts. This adaptability can strengthen cultural identity rather than weaken it. From a different perspective, Garcia et al. (2026) found that learners navigate a linguistic environment involving native Bisaya, Tagalog, and English, where transitioning across multiple languages creates cognitive demands that affect language performance.

Furthermore, According to EDCOM 2 Communications (2024), emphasized theoretical frameworks in education suggest that children in the early years of schooling can better comprehend the curriculum when taught in a language they already know and understand. This aligns with the perspective that utilizing a child's first language in instruction enhances understanding and learning outcomes. In the present study, however, participants experienced declining competence in their indigenous language, as limited opportunities to use and practice their native language contributed to difficulties in understanding, speaking, and expressing themselves fluently.

Emotional and Social Consequences of Language Shift

The emotional and social consequences of language shift were evident in participants' experiences of shame, sadness, insecurity, and social disconnection. Several participants expressed embarrassment when unable to speak or understand their indigenous language, particularly when interacting with fluent members of their cultural group. These experiences demonstrate that language is not merely a tool for communication but also a significant component of identity and social belonging.

Similarly, Little (2023) emphasized that heritage language experiences are closely connected to emotions and identity development, arguing that language learning and language loss are deeply emotional processes that influence how individuals understand themselves and express their sense of belonging. The study further highlighted that limited competence in a heritage language may affect an individual's ability to express their identity fully, reinforcing the close relationship between language proficiency and emotional well-being (Ticheloven et al., 2025).

Furthermore, language carries social power and influences how individuals position themselves within communities and cultural groups. These findings suggest that language shift may contribute to emotional distress and social tension among indigenous youth as they negotiate their cultural identity in multilingual environments. Supported by Munir (2025), who found that individuals experiencing language shift often felt detached from their cultural backgrounds and perceived themselves as losing touch with their heritage.

However, Nungay et al. (2025) reported that learning a new language enhanced students' emotional well-being by helping them overcome fear, develop confidence, foster a sense of belonging, and improve communication with others. Unlike the participants in the present study, whose declining competence in their indigenous language resulted in feelings of shame, insecurity, and social disconnection, the learners in Nungay et al.'s study benefited from increased opportunities to develop proficiency in the target language, thereby strengthening their confidence and social relationships.

Cultural Identity Preservation Through Language.

While their physical speech habits have shifted toward mainstream languages out of survival, the

participants' emotional and ideological allegiance to their heritage remains unbroken (Yang, 2023). The findings indicate that the indigenous language serves as an important marker of cultural identity among the participants. Despite experiencing a language shift, students continued to associate their native language with their ancestry, heritage, and sense of belonging to their indigenous community.

Consistent with Padernal (2025), who emphasized that preserving Indigenous languages is fundamental to sustaining cultural identity and heritage among Indigenous youth. The study found that despite the pressures of mainstream culture, media, and formal education, Indigenous youth continue to maintain their linguistic and cultural identity through family language use, community gatherings, storytelling, songs, prayers, and other traditional practices.

This supports the view that heritage languages function as a medium through which individuals develop and maintain attachment to their cultural identity and community traditions. Zarei and Tagadiad (2024) emphasized that families often strive to preserve their heritage language because it serves as a reminder of their cultural roots and helps sustain their unique identity across generations. As also noted by Selleck (2023), maintaining the Heritage Language in the Family's Linguistic serves as the medium through which they hope their children will develop the same identity and build attachment and connection to the identity of their heritage community while upholding their cultural traditions, such as practicing to maintain their heritage language.

On the other hand, Lorenzini & Giuliv et al. (2021) highlighted that some works advocate for inclusive educational environments that welcome and validate linguistic diversity, proposing multilingual schooling models as pathways to equity. Consistent with Lorenzini and Giulivi (2021), they argued that multilingual educational environments should welcome and validate learners' diverse linguistic repertoires rather than focusing on a single heritage language. This perspective emphasizes linguistic inclusion and equity within multilingual classrooms, whereas the present study highlights the preservation of the Indigenous language itself as fundamental to maintaining cultural identity.

Aspirations and Support for Indigenous Language Revitalization

The findings reflect participants' aspirations for stronger support in indigenous language revitalization through educational programs and cultural transmission. Reginio et al. (2025) emphasized that oral traditions are crucial in keeping indigenous culture alive and that indigenous languages and oral histories serve as key vehicles for transmitting identity, spirituality, and governance. Furthermore, the authors noted that oral traditions risk extinction when elders are unable to pass on their knowledge to younger generations, highlighting the need for sustained educational and community-based language preservation efforts.

Similarly, Bustillo et al. (2024) found that many indigenous communities actively engage in language revitalization by developing language programs, incorporating traditional knowledge into education, and promoting language immersion activities. These initiatives help younger generations reconnect with their heritage, strengthen cultural identity, and foster a sense of belonging. In consistent to Ajani et al, (2024) underscores the profound significance of preserving and promoting indigenous knowledge, which extends beyond the cultural heritage of indigenous communities to impact their overall well-being. However, Daniels & Sterzuk (2022) also noted that language revitalization efforts are often constrained by limited institutional support, shortages of qualified teachers, and inadequate educational resources, which may hinder indigenous students' opportunities to learn their ancestral language.

In contrast, M. Li et al (2026) argued that urbanization, social dislocation, and cultural dislocation contribute to language shift by encouraging minority language speakers to adopt dominant languages to facilitate social integration and access economic opportunities. Moreover, Abingosa et al. (2025) argued that effective Indigenous language revitalization requires structured technological interventions and community-driven digital resources rather than relying solely on individual willingness or educational aspirations.

4.1 Implications for Theory and Practice

This study reinforces that Indigenous identity is not a static artifact of the past, but a fluid, continuously negotiated construct shaped by sociolinguistic power dynamics and institutional dominance. Theoretically, the findings expand Halls (1990) framework by revealing how language shift introduces

psychological tension where linguistic loss creates emotional detachment and insecurity, yet cultural allegiance persists despite structural displacement. In terms of practice, these insights highlight the urgent need for educational institutions and community stakeholders to move beyond passive support toward culturally responsive, multilingual pedagogy.

Moreover, to prevent further erosion of the Bagobo Klata language, policymakers and educators must integrate Indigenous knowledge systems, oral traditions, and community-driven digital learning tools directly into formal curricula ensuring that dominant language acquisition does not come at the cost of heritage language vitality and student well-being.

4.2 Future Directions of My Study

I recommend that future studies build on this research by exploring language preservation and cultural identity among Bagobo Klata youth in different schools and communities to provide a broader understanding of their linguistic experiences. I also encourage future researchers to conduct longitudinal studies that examine how language proficiency and cultural identity develop across generations and over time.

Furthermore, I suggest evaluating the effectiveness of school- and community-based interventions, such as Indigenous language programs, cultural immersion activities, intergenerational language-sharing initiatives, and digital language learning tools, in revitalizing the Bagobo Klata language. I believe that future research in these areas can provide valuable evidence for developing sustainable educational programs and policies that strengthen the preservation of Indigenous languages and promote the cultural identity of Indigenous communities.

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Appendix A. An example appendix

Authors including an appendix section should do so after References section. Multiple appendices should all have headings in the style used above. They will automatically be ordered A, B, C etc.

A.1. Example of a sub-heading within an appendix

There is also the option to include a subheading within the Appendix if you wish.