

Embedding Culture in the Classroom: A Phenomenological Inquiry into Culturally Responsive Strategies of Araling Panlipunan Teachers

Raymart F. Sabayton¹, Zaiza Villarosa², Mhie B. Daniel³

Misamis University, Ozamiz City, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

In today's increasingly diverse and multicultural classrooms, culturally responsive teaching has become a key approach in fostering meaningful and inclusive learning experiences. This study explored how Araling Panlipunan (Social Studies) teachers integrate local culture, history, and values into their lessons as part of culturally responsive education. Using a transcendental-phenomenological design, the research focused on the lived experiences of 10 public secondary school teachers from Misamis Occidental, who were purposively selected for the study. Data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews that allowed teachers to share their insights and reflections freely. Thematic analysis revealed four themes: (1) use of community-based instruction; (2) integrating local festivals and celebration; (3) role-playing and simulation; and (4) fieldwork and immersion. The findings show that teachers demonstrate creativity and initiative in embedding cultural identity within their lessons. Still, the lack of instructional materials and institutional assistance often limits the effectiveness of these efforts. To strengthen culturally responsive instruction, the study recommends that the Department of Education develop localized teaching guides, provide continuous teacher training, and promote school-community partnerships. Teacher education programs should also include localization frameworks to prepare future educators for culturally grounded instruction.

Keywords: Araling Panlipunan, Contextualization, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Localization, Creativity, Qualitative Study

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the idea of culturally responsive teaching has gained growing importance in both academic discussions and classroom practice. Within the subject Araling Panlipunan (Social Studies), this approach plays a crucial role in shaping students' civic awareness, historical understanding, and cultural identity (Gregorio et al., 2024). The Philippines, being an archipelago rich in languages, traditions, and ethnic diversity, provides a natural setting for such an approach. By integrating local culture, history, and values into instruction, teachers can help students connect classroom learning with their own roots and strengthen their sense of national identity (Seludo & Murillo, 2023; Nataño, 2023).

The Department of Education (DepEd) has long emphasized this through its K to 12 Curriculum, which highlights contextualization and localization as essential strategies to make learning relevant and meaningful (DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2015). However, despite these policies, many schools still exhibit inconsistent integration of local content into their lessons (David, 2024). Teachers often face challenges such as a lack of localized materials, limited time due to a heavy curriculum load, and insufficient training in culturally grounded teaching strategies (Leviste et al., 2024; Tamana & Pagaddut, 2024). While many Araling Panlipunan teachers recognize the importance of incorporating indigenous knowledge and local narratives, they often struggle to balance these with standardized national content (Nuñez-Del Prado et al., 2025). As a result, students may develop only a fragmented understanding of how their community's story fits within the larger national narrative.

Previous studies have shown that the inclusion of localized content in instruction enhances student participation, comprehension, and identity formation (Pangilinan, 2021; Rizvic et al., 2020; Mapacpac, 2023). When students encounter their language, community, and traditions in the classroom, learning becomes more

engaging and relatable (Navalta, 2021; Lilang, 2024). In this way, Araling Panlipunan serves not just as a subject for learning facts, but as a venue for understanding how culture and history shape people's lives and contribute to nation-building (Awa-ao & Roperez, 2024).

This idea aligns with the global call for inclusive and transformative education (Ajie et al., 2024). In the Philippine setting, integrating local history and values promotes patriotism and critical thinking, allowing learners to view national issues through the lens of their own culture (Figueroa et al., 2023; Tamana & Pagaddut, 2024). However, the success of localized instruction often depends on the teacher's creativity, initiative, and ability to connect classroom content with community realities (Baliling, 2020; Lilang, 2024). Hence, it is vital to explore the real experiences of Araling Panlipunan teachers who practice this integration and to understand how they overcome the challenges it entails.

By examining these lived experiences, this study hopes to shed light on the everyday realities teachers face in promoting culturally grounded learning. Understanding their practices and challenges will help identify gaps in curriculum implementation, teacher training, and institutional support. This research also seeks to amplify the voices of teachers—those who play a vital role in preserving culture, nurturing identity, and making history meaningful to their students.

In doing so, this study contributes to the broader effort to decolonize education and make Philippine Araling Panlipunan instruction more inclusive, relevant, and culturally responsive.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to explore how Araling Panlipunan teachers integrate local culture, history, and values into their classroom instruction in support of culturally responsive teaching. Grounded in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Constructivist Learning Theory, the study investigates teachers' instructional practices and experiences in implementing localized content.

MATERIAL, METHODOLOGY, AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Material of the Study

A guide question was used for the interview to obtain information from the participants. The questions were translated into the local language to facilitate greater comprehension and intercommunication among all participants. The interview consisted of an introduction as well as a set of opening, core, and closing questions. Open-ended questions and narrative response formats were used to elicit more detailed narratives from the participants during the in-depth interview. A focus group discussion took place and the discussion guide was followed, encouraging participants to share their thoughts and ideas. The researcher took notes throughout the discussion and observed and recorded participant behavior in their journal. A voice recorder was used to enable the researcher to listen back to the focus group events. The discussion typically lasted for approximately 1 hour, depending on the flow of the conversation.

Methodology

This study employed a transcendental phenomenological design (Husserlian) to explore the essence of how Araling Panlipunan teachers integrate local culture, history, and values into classroom instruction; researchers bracketed prior assumptions (epoché) and gathered lived-experience data through in-depth, semistructured interviews with ten purposively sampled junior and senior high teachers in selected public and private schools across Misamis Occidental (each with ≥ 3 years' experience), using an expert-reviewed interview guide with open-ended opening, core, and exit questions. After securing institutional approvals and informed consent, face-to-face interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and uploaded to HyperRESEARCH for coding; analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic approach (familiarization, coding, theme generation, review, definition, and reporting) using both deductive and inductive coding. Ethical safeguards—voluntary participation, right to withdraw, confidentiality via participant codes (P1–P10), and secure data storage—were observed throughout.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on culturally responsive teaching emphasizes that integrating local culture, history, and values into the curriculum strengthens learners' identity and enhances meaningful learning. Garcia (2021) highlights that contextualized and localized instruction allows students to see their own realities reflected in lessons, making Araling Panlipunan more relevant and empowering. This is supported by experiential learning theory, where Kolb (2015) explains that students construct deeper understanding through active participation, reflection, and real-world engagement. Strategies such as storytelling, dramatization, and community immersion help transform Araling Panlipunan from a memorization-based subject into one that is dynamic, interactive, and rooted in lived experience.

However, literature also shows that effective localization faces challenges related to resources, documentation, and learner mindset. Del Mundo and Servano (2017) underscore that many teachers struggle with the lack of localized materials, leading them to rely on oral traditions or personal research for cultural content. This lack of institutional support results in varied and inconsistent implementation. Additionally, student engagement plays a crucial role; as Llenares and Arcangel (2021) note, learners may either appreciate or undervalue local content depending on how it is presented and connected to their identities. These studies collectively suggest that successful localization is both pedagogical and cultural, relying on teacher initiative, supportive materials, and students' cultural pride to make Araling Panlipunan a meaningful bridge to heritage and civic identity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One of the strongest themes that emerged from participants' experiences is their consistent use of contextualized, localized teaching in *Araling Panlipunan*. Teachers emphasized that grounding lessons in students' real-life experiences and community settings makes learning more meaningful and relatable. Instead of relying only on textbooks, they incorporate local culture, history, and values to help students connect what they learn in class to their own lives. This approach does more than make lessons enjoyable—it also fosters a sense of pride, belonging, and cultural identity. Teachers noted that when students see their community reflected in the curriculum, they become more curious, engaged, and appreciative of their roots. This connection transforms *Araling Panlipunan* from a subject often seen as memorization-heavy into one that is alive, relevant, and empowering. Two important subthemes illustrate how this practice is carried out in the classroom: (1) the use of community-based examples, and (2) the integration of local festivals and traditions.

Use of Community-Based Examples

Teachers reported that using examples and materials drawn from their own communities is one of the most effective ways to make lessons relatable. By linking historical or civic topics to familiar local events, personalities, and settings, students develop a deeper understanding of abstract ideas. For instance, one participant shared that when discussing timelines or national history, they include the story of their own city or province—highlighting local heroes, landmarks, and important community events that shaped their area. Another participant described how students are asked to create hand-drawn maps of their barangays, complete with landmarks, natural features, and cultural spaces. This not only improves their geographic awareness but also strengthens their connection to place.

Teachers also design tasks that encourage students to interview elders or explore community archives to collect local stories and photos. These activities help learners see the relevance of *Araling Panlipunan* in their daily lives and nurture critical thinking as they analyze how local stories link to national narratives. As one participant explained:

“When we talk about historical events, I include the story of our own town—its landmarks, notable people, and events that shaped who we are as a community.” (P10)

Another shared:

“For geography lessons, my students draw maps of their barangay and identify natural and man-made landmarks. It’s a fun way to connect the subject to their surroundings.” (P4)

By doing so, teachers turn the classroom into a space where history is not distant or abstract—it becomes personal, familiar, and relevant.

Integration of Local Festivals and Traditions

Another meaningful way teachers localize instruction is by integrating local festivals, customs, and traditional practices into their lessons. Teachers observed that discussing cultural celebrations and rituals helps students see how these events reflect shared values, history, and social relationships within their communities.

For example, one participant described a classroom project where students researched and presented their town's annual festival, exploring its historical roots and social significance. This activity allowed learners to recognize how national culture connects with local identity.

“Instead of only focusing on national festivals, I ask my students to research and present about our own local festival. They enjoy it because it’s something they can relate to and be proud of.” (P5)

Another participant noted:

“I asked students to interview their grandparents about life during Martial Law. Hearing personal stories gave them a real sense of what that period was like.” (P5)

Through these activities, students not only learn historical facts but also appreciate how culture and history shape community life. Teachers also invite local elders, artists, and cultural workers to share stories, songs, or artifacts, giving students authentic insight into their heritage.

The integration of local traditions into lessons supports the Department of Education's emphasis on contextualized and culture-based learning. As Navalta (2021) points out, such practices deepen cultural awareness and promote inclusion by making the curriculum reflective of students' lived realities. Likewise, Awao and Roperez (2024) note that teaching through local traditions strengthens cultural pride and encourages students to value their identity.

This approach has broader implications as well. In essence, contextualized and localized teaching turns *Araling Panlipunan* into more than just a history subject. It becomes a bridge that connects students to their culture, promotes active citizenship, and transforms the classroom into a living space for heritage and identity.

Role-Playing and Simulation

Many teachers reported using role-playing and simulation as creative ways to make lessons dynamic and memorable. In this strategy, students assume the roles of historical figures, local leaders, or even ordinary citizens from different periods of Philippine history. Through dramatization, they experience events and perspectives that would otherwise remain abstract.

For example, some teachers have students reenact local revolts, barangay assemblies, or cultural ceremonies. In doing so, learners gain a deeper emotional understanding of the characters and events they portray. This method also helps them develop communication and teamwork skills while fostering empathy and critical thinking.

As one participant shared:

“When my students reenact scenes from our town’s history, they don’t just memorize facts—they feel the emotions and understand the values behind those events.” (P3)

Another added:

“I use role-playing activities where students take on the roles of historical figures or leaders. It helps them appreciate how decisions made in the past shaped our community.” (P4)

Through these performances, students begin to see history as a human story, full of struggles, choices, and lessons. Teachers observed that learners are more active and enthusiastic when involved in dramatized activities, especially those that highlight their local heritage.

This approach aligns with Vygotsky's Constructivist Learning Theory, which emphasizes that learning occurs through interaction and experience. As Mapacpac (2023) also found, when students participate in simulations or dramatizations, they develop deeper comprehension and empathy—qualities essential to civic education.

Fieldwork and Immersion

In addition to classroom-based activities, teachers also use fieldwork and community immersion to extend learning beyond the classroom walls. This strategy allows students to experience cultural and historical realities firsthand by visiting heritage sites, interviewing elders, or observing community events.

Teachers explained that these experiences help students understand that history is not confined to textbooks—it exists all around them. Fieldwork projects may include heritage mapping, community walks, or documentation of cultural practices and landmarks. Through these tasks, learners take on the roles of researchers and storytellers, actively engaging with their own community's history.

As one participant noted:

“We organized a walking tour around town, and students documented the stories behind old buildings and monuments. They were amazed to learn how much history they pass by every day.” (P6)

Another teacher shared:

“After visiting the municipal hall and talking with local leaders, my students understood how governance really works at the local level. It made them more interested in civic participation.” (P8)

Fieldwork and immersion also encourage learners to appreciate the relevance of local governance, cultural preservation, and community development. Students often present their findings through journals, exhibits, or short documentaries—demonstrating both creativity and understanding.

Kolb's (2015) theory of experiential learning supports this practice, positing that learners gain more profound knowledge through concrete experiences followed by reflection. Similarly, Awa-ao and Roperez (2024) highlighted that immersing students in community-based learning bridges intergenerational understanding, as learners hear stories directly from elders and cultural bearers.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that integrating culture into Araling Panlipunan instruction is a deeply meaningful yet challenging process that requires intentional effort from teachers and strong institutional support. When lessons are localized and experiential, they become powerful avenues for shaping students' cultural identity, civic consciousness, and appreciation of their heritage. Despite this potential, teachers continue to face constraints such as limited resources, insufficient time, and inadequate institutional backing, which hinder consistent implementation. Ultimately, the findings affirm that culture-based education is not merely a teaching strategy but an essential component of nation-building, enabling learners to recognize their place in history and value their Filipino identity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen culture-based teaching, teachers are encouraged to sustain the use of localized and experiential approaches, collaborate with community knowledge bearers, and incorporate technology to enhance engagement. School administrators should provide material and financial support, offer capacity-building programs on culturally responsive pedagogy, and foster partnerships with local cultural institutions. The Department of Education is advised to develop localized teaching guides, integrate culture-based strategies into teacher training, and promote community mapping and oral history projects as instructional resources. Future researchers may explore other regions to compare localization practices, examine students' perspectives

on culturally responsive instruction, and design action research projects that develop localized modules or digital heritage materials for Araling Panlipunan.

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