

Culturally Responsive Teaching: Strategies of Teachers Handling Sama Dilaut (Badjao) Learners

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Abstract: This phenomenological study explored the culturally responsive teaching strategies, challenges, and coping mechanisms of teachers handling Sama Dilaut (Badjao) learners at Matina Aplaya Elementary School. Seven (7) teachers participated in the study, sharing their experiences through in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis revealed three key culturally responsive teaching strategies: Integration of Sama Dilaut culture in lessons, Language accommodation and bilingual approach, and Creating an inclusive classroom environment. These strategies were found to enhance learner engagement, validate cultural identity, and foster mutual respect in diverse classrooms. The study also identified two critical coping strategies teachers employed to address implementation challenges: Bilingual instruction to overcome language barriers and Community collaboration to bridge resource and attendance gaps. To strengthen these efforts, the study recommends providing specialized professional development training for teachers, Developing and distributing standardized bilingual materials and Adopting flexible attendance policies. These findings underscore the need for systemic support to institutionalize culturally responsive practices. By implementing these measures, schools can transform isolated efforts into sustainable, equity-driven education that empowers both Sama Dilaut learners and their teachers., fairness, and personal responsibility, ultimately creating a more supportive and respectful school environment for everyone.

Keywords: *Culturally Responsive Teaching, Strategies of Teachers, Sama Dilaut Learners.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is an approach to education that embraces and respects the varied cultural backgrounds of students. It promotes inclusive, equitable teaching practices that respond to learners' unique experiences. For Sama Dilaut (Badjao) learners, whose cultural identity is closely tied to their traditions and way of life, CRT provides an essential foundation for addressing their distinct learning needs. This study explores how teachers apply CRT in their classrooms, focusing on strategies that support inclusion, foster mutual respect, and enhance academic outcomes for Badjao students. By delving into teachers' experiences, the research seeks to add to the growing understanding of how culturally responsive methods can create meaningful educational opportunities for marginalized groups.

On a global scale, Appel (2023), citing Morrison et al. (2019), explains that culturally responsive pedagogy, often referred to as culturally relevant teaching, has gained ground internationally as a means of addressing educational inequality.

Despite its expansion, there's still a pressing need for localized research and context-specific frameworks in various parts of the world.

In the United States, Cuffee (2020) reported that CRT has a positive influence on student engagement and overall classroom dynamics. The findings from her study revealed that when teachers use culturally responsive strategies, students tend to be more involved and invested in their learning. In contrast, Australia has seen limited progress in this area. Many educators face challenges in managing diverse classrooms and often feel underprepared due to gaps in their initial teacher training. Appel (2023) pointed out that Australian teachers are in need of targeted professional development to better navigate culturally diverse environments.

In Austria, Glanzer (2023) found that school principals recognize the importance of CRT and are open to integrating it into their schools. However, successful implementation hinges on government backing and a genuine commitment from educators to reflect on and adapt their teaching methods. This

is especially crucial for creating supportive spaces where culturally diverse and marginalized students feel safe and respected.

Turning to the Philippines, Eduardo and Gabriel (2021) emphasized the significance of the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997, which commits the state to preserving the unique cultural expressions of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and ensuring their full participation in areas such as education and health. The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) plays a central role in protecting and advancing these rights.

Further support comes from DepEd Order No. 35, series of 2015, which introduces the Indigenous Peoples Education Curriculum Framework. This policy promotes the use of culturally relevant teaching methods that align with and enrich indigenous learning practices. Complementing this is the MATATAG Curriculum, which reinforces inclusive education as a core value of the K to 12 Basic Education Program. DepEd Order No. 10, series of 2024, highlights the importance of integrating culture-based instruction alongside other teaching strategies.

Despite these frameworks, challenges remain. In Nueva Ecija, Mercado (2020) observed that many teachers struggle with limited knowledge about indigenous cultures when designing culturally responsive lessons. The scarcity of culturally appropriate teaching materials further complicates efforts to preserve native languages and effectively transmit cultural heritage.

Aligned with the goals of CRT, Maguate et al. (2024), referencing Kilag et al. (2024), noted that incorporating multilingual education principles into the MATATAG Curriculum shows a strong commitment to inclusivity and cultural sensitivity. By valuing students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds and encouraging the use of mother tongues in instruction, the curriculum aims to empower learners, strengthen community ties, and support the preservation of indigenous languages.

In the Davao Region, particularly in the Lupon West District, Saldaña and Nebria (2023) stressed that cultural responsiveness remains a crucial need in a nation as diverse as the Philippines. However, many teachers continue to face difficulties in addressing cultural differences in the classroom. Issues such as racism and cultural misunderstandings persist, causing some Indigenous families to hesitate when it comes to enrolling their children in formal education.

In our own school, cultural diversity is clearly visible, especially in classes with Sama Dilaut (Badjao) learners. Teachers encounter significant obstacles in building inclusive classrooms and applying culturally responsive methods, mainly due to their limited knowledge of the learners' language and

cultural background. This study aims to explore the strategies teachers use and the challenges they face in integrating CRT into their lessons. The findings aim to inform future policies that will support educators in adopting effective, inclusive approaches for teaching Indigenous learners, ultimately contributing to more equitable and culturally sensitive classrooms.

II. METHOD

In this section, the overview of the procedures and methods used by teachers handling Sama Dilaut (Badjao) learners in implementing culturally responsive teaching in their lessons are presented. To gather the information required to address the research issues, the qualitative phenomenological research design was used in this study. In a phenomenological study, informants engaged in discussions regarding their observations and lived experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation.

In-depth interviews served as the primary data collection method for this phenomenological study. These interviews allowed for deep, reflective conversations with seven (7) teachers in Matina Aplaya Elementary School, each with at least three (3) years of teaching experience. The use of well-structured, open-ended questions, coupled with active listening and thoughtful probing, enabled participants to share their lived experiences regarding the culturally. According to Dunwoodie, et.al (2023), citing Denzin & Lincoln (2000), interviews offered participants the opportunity to express their emotions, biases, viewpoints, aspirations, and attitudes toward various phenomena encountered in the workplace or other organizational settings. In addition, classroom observational sessions were conducted to see in person how teachers handling Sama Dilaut (Badjao) learners implement culturally responsive teaching and documentary analysis support the validity of the findings.

Moreover, this study employed purposive sampling in selecting the participants. It is a nonprobability sampling method where participants were intentionally selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives. This approach was widely used in qualitative research to gather in-depth data from information-rich cases that could provide meaningful insights. According to Nikolopoulou (2023), purposive sampling was particularly effective in exploring unique or complex phenomena when the researcher had prior knowledge about the population, ensuring the selection of cases that aligned with the study's purpose.

Further, adherence to the ethical guidelines set forth prior to the conduct of this study. Since, this investigation involved human participants, specifically teachers who handle Sama Dilaut (Badjao) learners, it is imperative to safeguard the dignity, rights, and welfare of these educators while respecting the cultural context of the students they teach, as their

perspectives are crucial for understanding the culturally responsive strategies they employed.

As the researcher for this study, I facilitated the interviews and discussions, employing carefully designed research questions and probing prompts to explore the phenomenon through the lens of the participants' lived experiences. With the participants' consent, the interviews were recorded to accurately capture all relevant information. Subsequently, significant themes were drawn, elucidated key insights derived from the data. This analytical approach, referred to as Thematic Content Analysis (TCA), was characterized by the identification of themes that encapsulated the narratives present within the data sets. As articulated by King (2004) in Dawadi (2020), Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) process necessitated meticulous reading and re-reading of the transcribed data to reveal these underlying themes.

In addition, this phenomenological study specifically implemented methodological triangulation, which was the process of using multiple methods of data collection. The analytical procedures employed to examine the data obtained from instructor participants are grounded in the framework established by O'Connor and Gibson (2003), which underpins the systematic and thorough methodologies utilized.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter provides a detailed analysis of qualitative data, outlining the procedures used to identify and categorize emergent themes from in-depth interviews with teacher-participants. Culturally responsive teaching strategies for Sama Dilaut (Badjao) learners involve adapting pedagogical approaches to honor their unique cultural identity, language, and lived experiences. These strategies emphasize inclusive practices that bridge classroom learning with students' community knowledge, traditions, and socioeconomic realities. In this study, the themes that emerged from the narrations of participants on their culturally responsive teaching strategies for Sama Dilaut (Badjao) learners were the following:

➤ *Integration of Sama Dilaut Culture in Lessons*

The integration of Sama Dilaut (Badjao) culture in lessons ensures that education is meaningful and relevant to learners by bridging classroom content with their lived experiences. The study unveiled that teachers effectively integrate Sama Dilaut (Badjao) culture into lessons by contextualizing subject content with the community's lived experiences. For instance, in Math and Science, educators use culturally relevant examples such as fishing, boat-building, and marine ecosystems, making abstract concepts more relatable. This aligned with culturally sustaining pedagogy explicitly calls for schooling to be a site for sustaining, rather than eradicating, the cultural ways of being of racially and culturally diverse communities of color (Rivera, 2024). Yi-Huang Shih (2024) stressed that integrating topics, examples, and materials that reflect a variety of cultural

backgrounds, including the traditions, histories, and perspectives of the students are presented in the classroom.

➤ *Language Accommodation and Bilingual Approach*

The study revealed that teachers employ multilingual strategies to support Sama Dilaut (Badjao) learners by integrating Sinama alongside Bisaya, Filipino, and English in daily instruction. This aligns with the concept of translanguaging. Gatil (2020), referencing Canagarajah and Wurr (2011), explained that translanguaging enables language learning and language use to happen at the same time. Individuals pick up a language as they actively use it in real-life situations. While interacting, they begin to understand the structure of others' speech, make sense of the patterns, and adjust their own language based on those observations. Educators adapt classroom language through bilingual commands like "Kibing tulong" for "Please pass," translated key terms, and culturally familiar materials such as Sinama stories, songs, and visual aids. This approach not only aids comprehension but also affirms students' linguistic identity, fostering a sense of belonging, which Cummins (2000) as cited in Sandoval (2022) emphasized as essential in supporting identity and academic performance.

➤ *Creating Inclusive Classroom Environment*

The study revealed that teachers employ multiple strategies to create an inclusive environment for Sama Dilaut learners, with a strong emphasis on collaborative learning and cultural representation. Participants consistently highlighted the use of cooperative group work and peer interactions as central to fostering belongingness, where Sama Dilaut learners share their language and cultural experiences alongside non-Sama Dilaut peers. Teachers intentionally structured activities to ensure equal participation, blending groups to promote knowledge exchange while respecting individual limitations. These practices reflect the culturally responsive teaching framework. Caingcoy et.al (2022), citing Gay (2010), characterized CRT as a pedagogical approach that values and incorporates students' cultural backgrounds into all aspects of teaching and learning. It highlights the importance of acknowledging the cultural heritage of various ethnic groups as legitimate and influential factors in shaping students' dispositions and behaviors.

Meanwhile, teachers face significant challenges when implementing culturally responsive teaching strategies. To address these obstacles, teachers employ coping strategies. The following are the theme developed from the coping strategies of teachers handling Sama Dilaut (Badjao) learners in implementing culturally responsive teaching strategies.

➤ *Bilingual Instruction to Address Language Barriers*

The study highlighted that bilingual instruction plays a vital role in helping Sama Dilaut (Badjao) learners tackle the language barriers they often encounter with mainstream languages like Filipino and English. Teachers pointed out how

crucial it is to translate key concepts into Sinama, utilizing resources like bilingual word walls and code-switching among English, Filipino, Bisaya, and Sinama during their lessons. These approaches align with Cummins' theory of linguistic interdependence, which suggests that nurturing a learner's first language can aid in picking up additional languages (Cummins, 2000, as cited in Sandoval, 2022). Larombe and Escote (2024) highlighted that teachers should be skilled at translating lessons from English into the native language of IP students to make learning more relatable.

➤ *Community Collaboration to Address Gaps*

The research showed that working together as a community is crucial for tackling the educational challenges faced by Sama Dilaut (Badjao) learners. Teachers are making a concerted effort to engage parents and elders, creating learning environments that respect and reflect their culture. This supports the notion that inclusive education should be deeply rooted in community involvement, as highlighted by Santiago (2021) who cites Gonzales (2005). Teachers collaborated with community elders to bring traditional knowledge into their lessons, using cultural artifacts and oral storytelling to enhance what students learn in the classroom. These efforts not only helped to close cultural gaps but also built trust between schools and the Sama Dilaut community. This is in line with Ashrafova's (2024) research, which underscores that inclusive education relies on developing relational trust with indigenous communities.

Further, the study identifies key insights to enhance culturally responsive teaching for Sama Dilaut (Badjao) learners by bridging classroom practices with their cultural identity, language, and lived experiences. From the lived experiences, challenges and coping strategies of study participants, insights are presented as actionable recommendations to improve the implementation of culturally responsive teaching strategies benefiting Sama Dilaut (Badjao) learners. In particular, the insights drawn include: Providing Specialized Professional Development Training for Teachers, developing and distributing standardized bilingual materials and adopting flexible attendance policies.

Overall, the findings of the study aligned with the Fund of Knowledge Theory of Moll (1992) and the Critical Pedagogy of Freire's (2001), emphasizing the value of learners' cultural backgrounds and promoting inclusive, transformative education. The integration of Sama Dilaut (Badjao) culture into lessons reflects the Fund of Knowledge Theory, which recognizes the home and community experiences of learners as essential resources for meaningful instruction. Through community collaboration and cultural inclusion, teachers tap into the rich knowledge systems of the Badjao, bridging home and school learning.

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