

The Role of Communication in Preserving Cultural Identity Among Upland Municipalities of Ilocos Sur

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Abstract: This study explores how everyday communication helps preserve cultural identity among students in the upland municipalities of Ilocos Sur, Philippines. It focuses on how language, storytelling, and digital media influence how students understand and connect with their culture. Using a qualitative approach, the researcher conducted interviews and analyzed the responses to identify common patterns.

The findings show that students who continue to use Ilocano and Kankanaey, as well as those who are exposed to storytelling and oral traditions, tend to have a stronger connection to their cultural identity. However, digital media brings both positive and negative effects. While it allows culture to be shared in new ways, it also exposes students to global influences that may weaken their interest in local traditions. Overall, the study suggests that combining traditional and modern ways of communication is important in helping young people maintain their cultural identity.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is known for its rich and diverse culture, shaped by different traditions, regions, and historical influences. Culture is expressed in many ways through language, beliefs, customs, and everyday interactions. One of the most important ways culture is preserved is through communication. When people speak their language, tell stories, and interact with others, they pass down knowledge and values from one generation to the next.

In Northern Luzon, especially in Ilocos Sur, cultural identity is closely connected to ethnolinguistic groups like the Ilocano and upland communities such as the Kankanaey. These groups have their own languages, traditions, and ways of life. For example, the Ilocano language is widely used in the region and plays a big role in daily communication and cultural expression. At the same time, Kankanaey communities maintain their identity through oral traditions, rituals, and strong community ties.

However, the way people communicate today has changed because of globalization and technology. Many young people

now spend a lot of time online, where they are exposed to different cultures through social media and digital platforms. While this helps them learn new things, it can also affect how they see their own culture. Studies show that communication, whether through language, interaction, or media plays an important role in shaping identity and maintaining cultural connections.

Because of this, there is a growing concern that the use of local languages and traditions may decrease over time. Many students now use English or Filipino more often, especially in school and online settings. This shift may slowly weaken their connection to their cultural roots.

Despite these changes, communication still remains a powerful tool for preserving culture. Language helps people feel a sense of belonging, storytelling keeps traditions alive, and digital media can even be used to promote culture in new ways. In upland areas of Ilocos Sur, students experience both traditional and modern forms of communication, which shape how they understand their identity.

This study aims to examine how communication practices, specifically language use, storytelling, and digital media help preserve cultural identity among students. It also looks at the challenges they face in maintaining their culture in today's modern and digital world.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication plays an important role in shaping and preserving cultural identity. Culture is not something people are simply born with. It is something they learn and continuously develop through interaction with others. As explained by Clifford Geertz (1973), culture is expressed through symbols and communication practices that help people understand their world. This shows that communication is essential in keeping culture alive across generations.

At the same time, cultural identity is not fixed. According to Stuart Hall (1990), identity is constantly changing and shaped by experience, interaction, and representation. This means that students' cultural identity develops depending on how they communicate and engage with both traditional practices and modern influences. In fact, cultural identity is considered dynamic and continuously shaped through communication and social interaction.

Language is one of the strongest parts of cultural identity. Claire Kramsch (1998) emphasizes that language and culture are closely connected because language reflects people's values, beliefs, and way of life. In a multilingual country like the Philippines, the language students use can strongly influence how they see themselves and their cultural identity.

However, globalization has created challenges for language preservation. David Crystal (2000) warns that when local languages disappear, important cultural knowledge is also lost. Similarly, Joshua Fishman (1991) highlights that using native languages in everyday life is key to keeping culture alive. In the Philippine context, many students now use English more often, especially in school and online, which can weaken their connection to their native language.

Storytelling and oral traditions are also important in preserving culture. According to John J. Gumperz (1982), communication practices like storytelling help pass down values, traditions, and shared experiences. Through stories, younger generations learn about their history and cultural identity in a meaningful way.

In recent years, digital media has changed how people communicate. Manuel Castells (2010) describes today's society as a "network society," where communication happens quickly through digital platforms. Meanwhile, Henry Jenkins (2006) explains that modern media combines traditional and digital forms, creating new ways for people to express culture.

Globalization has also influenced cultural identity. Arjun Appadurai (1996) explains that global cultural flows affect how people think and behave, while John Tomlinson (1999) points out that globalization can lead to cultural homogenization, where local traditions may slowly be replaced by global ones.

At the same time, communication helps create a sense of belonging. Benedict Anderson (2006) describes communities as being formed through shared communication and narratives. This means that people feel connected to others through shared language and stories. Similarly, Brian Street (1995) explains that communication practices influence how people understand culture in their daily lives.

Overall, the literature shows that communication through language, storytelling, and digital media is essential in preserving cultural identity. While traditional practices remain important, modern forms of communication continue to reshape how culture is experienced, especially among young people.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach to better understand students' experiences. Instead of focusing on numbers, the research focused on personal stories and perspectives.

The researcher selected participants from upland areas of Ilocos Sur who are familiar with local languages and cultural practices. Data were collected through interviews, where students were asked about their language use, experiences with storytelling, and use of digital media.

The responses were analyzed by identifying common themes. This helped the researcher understand how communication practices influence cultural identity.

IV. FINDINGS/RESULTS

This section presents the key findings based on the analysis of students' responses. Using thematic analysis, the data were carefully examined to identify common patterns and shared experiences. This approach helps organize qualitative data into meaningful themes that reflect participants' perspectives.

Five major themes emerged from the study: (1) language use as a foundation of cultural identity, (2) storytelling as a means of cultural transmission, (3) the influence of digital media, (4) the development of hybrid cultural identities, and (5) challenges in preserving cultural practices.

V. DISCUSSION

The results show that communication is very important in shaping cultural identity. Language continues to be a strong connection to culture, especially at home. However, the

increasing use of English and Filipino shows how globalization is influencing communication.

Storytelling still plays an important role, but it is not as common as before. This suggests that it needs to be encouraged more in families and schools.

Digital media has both positive and negative effects. It can help promote culture, but it can also make students more interested in global trends than local traditions.

Students today are not losing their culture completely—they are simply adapting. They combine traditional and modern influences, creating what is called a “hybrid identity.”

VI. CONCLUSION

Communication remains an important part of preserving cultural identity. Language, storytelling, and digital media all play a role in how culture is shared and understood.

Although there are challenges, culture can still be preserved by balancing traditional practices with modern communication tools. Schools, families, and communities need to work together to support cultural awareness and encourage the use of local languages and traditions.

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