



CULTURAL ACCOMMODATION OF THE MIGRANT IGOROTS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the accommodation and integration of traditional Igorot cultural practices among members of the Kankana-ey community residing in Ramon, Isabela, with particular emphasis on selected life-cycle practices such as courtship, marriage, conception, birth, baptism, healing, and mourning or death. Specifically, it aimed to determine whether these traditional practices are still accommodated in the lowland setting, to assess the extent of their accommodation, to identify mechanisms through which migrants retain and transmit their cultural traditions, to analyze community perceptions regarding cultural integration, and to examine the implications of these findings for Social Science education, particularly in teaching cultural heritage.

Using a qualitative-descriptive research design, data were gathered from selected participants through written responses, interviews, and focus group discussions. Participants were purposively selected based on their cultural affiliation, length of residency in Ramon, Isabela, and familiarity with traditional practices. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret participants' responses and identify recurring cultural patterns related to accommodation, adaptation, and transmission of indigenous traditions.

Findings revealed that traditional Igorot cultural practices continue to be accommodated in the lowland community, although the degree of accommodation varies across cultural practices. Marriage and mourning traditions remain strongly preserved through the continued use of indigenous music, rituals, and communal participation, while courtship, conception, birth, and healing practices have undergone partial modification due to modernization, institutional healthcare systems, and religious influences. Cultural transmission remains active through family-based instruction, storytelling, and participation in community ceremonies, although reduced youth engagement presents emerging challenges to long-term preservation. Participants generally expressed positive perceptions toward the integration of their cultural traditions within the lowland environment and emphasized the importance of maintaining cultural identity despite adaptation to new social contexts.

The study further revealed important implications for Social Science education, highlighting the need to integrate indigenous cultural heritage into localized and culturally responsive teaching practices. Schools play a critical role in strengthening cultural awareness, promoting intercultural understanding, and supporting the transmission of indigenous knowledge systems among younger generations. The findings of the study contribute to ongoing efforts to preserve indigenous traditions while promoting inclusive cultural education in multicultural learning environments.

KEYWORDS: Igorot cultural practices, Kankana-ey community, cultural accommodation, cultural transmission, indigenous knowledge systems, lowland migration, cultural integration, cultural heritage education, Social Science education

INTRODUCTION

Culture is the core of human identity and unity. It is how people express their beliefs, traditions, and ways of living. Heritage and rituals passed on from one generation to another form the grand picture of history and the meaning of life for various communities. UNESCO emphasizes that cultural diversity must be safeguarded and promoted because it plays a crucial role in fostering unity, supporting collective action, and strengthening sustainable and inclusive development (UNESCO, 2024).

Culture is dynamic and flexible. It is strengthened or weakened when individuals migrate, interact, and share their lives with others. In the present world, movement of people has increased, and cultural interaction has shaped the relevance, survival, and transformation of many traditions (UNESCO, 2022).

The Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 4 on Quality Education and Goal 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities, highlight the importance of heritage and cultural understanding. When education includes local knowledge and traditions, learners become aware of their roots and appreciate their cultural foundations (Camiring-Picpican et al., 2023).

Multicultural approaches help students understand and respect the diversity around them. By examining how traditions change, evolve, or continue in new surroundings, educators and communities can strengthen respect for cultural identity and promote inclusive social development (Flores et al., 2023).

The Philippines is home to a wide range of ethnolinguistic groups, each with its own traditions, languages, and values. Among these groups are the Igorot communities from the Cordillera region who have preserved their unique cultural



heritage across generations. They are known for their strong sense of community, deep respect for nature, and ancestral traditions that guide many aspects of their social and cultural life (Britannica, n.d.). Historically, the Igorots settled in the mountainous terrains of Northern Luzon, cultivating rice terraces and maintaining rituals that expressed gratitude, harmony, and respect for both the living and the dead (Britannica, n.d.). Their distance from colonizers allowed them to retain much of their indigenous identity.

In recent decades, however, many Igorots have migrated to lowland provinces, including Isabela, in search of livelihood, education, and community opportunities. This movement has placed them in new social environments where different customs, lifestyles, and expectations exist. As a result, migrant Igorots have developed various strategies to sustain their cultural identity while adjusting to the norms of the lowlands. This process is best described as cultural accommodation. It refers to the ways individuals or communities modify or negotiate their practices so that traditions remain meaningful and functional in a new setting. Cultural accommodation does not require abandoning heritage. Instead, it allows indigenous groups to retain core beliefs while making practical adjustments that fit their present realities.

This process is visible among Igorot families residing in Ramon, Isabela, where cultural practices continue to be observed in modified or context-adjusted forms. Studies by Dulawan (2001) and Finin (2005) explain that changes in indigenous practices are not signs of cultural loss but of cultural resilience and innovation. They show how communities find ways to preserve their identity, even when living outside their traditional homeland. Although significant studies exist on Igorot groups in the Cordillera, there remains limited analysis of how migrant Igorots in lowland areas accommodate and sustain their traditions.

By studying cultural accommodation among the Igorot migrants of Ramon, Isabela, this research aims to provide deeper insight into how indigenous identity is maintained, reshaped, and strengthened in new environments. The findings will contribute to the understanding of Igorot cultural life and the broader discussions on migration and cultural continuity. Moreover, the study supports Social Science education because it offers concrete examples of how culture evolves in response to social change. Learning about Igorot cultural accommodation allows teachers to design lessons that promote cultural pride, sensitivity, and appreciation among learners.

The Department of Education's K to 12 and the new Strengthen K-10 curriculum emphasizes contextualized teaching and the integration of indigenous knowledge in learning materials (Camiring-Picpican et al., 2023, Hipolito, 2024). Research such as this supports these goals by providing teachers with locally grounded accounts that can enrich lessons about identity, heritage, and social development. This study offers two

significant contributions. First, it documents how cultural traditions are actively preserved and reinterpreted by indigenous groups who have settled outside their ancestral lands. Second, through the experiences of migrant Igorots in Ramon, Isabela, the research provides insights that can guide educators, cultural workers, and policymakers in designing community programs that are inclusive, respectful, and culturally grounded. It affirms the idea that culture is not preserved by isolation but through the continuous effort of communities to carry their identity as they move and grow in new places.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to explore how Igorot ritual practices are instilled and the cultural activities are accommodated into lowland culture in Ramon, Isabela, and examine their implications for Social Science education. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What traditional Igorot cultural practices are commonly accommodated in the community particularly in relation to:
2. Courtship
3. Marriage,
4. Conception,
5. Birth,
6. Baptism,
7. Healing, and
8. Mourning or death?
9. To what extent are their cultural practices accommodated?
10. How do Igorot migrants retain and transfer their cultural practices despite living in lowlands?
11. What are the perceptions of Igorot community members regarding the integration of their traditional practices into lowland cultural practices?
12. What are the implications of this cultural accommodation for Social Science education, particularly in teaching cultural heritage?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine how migrant Igorot community members in Ramon, Isabela accommodate and sustain traditional cultural practices within a lowland context. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study focused on participants' lived experiences, meanings, and cultural expressions related to courtship, marriage, conception, birth, baptism, healing, and mourning. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring cultural patterns and shared meanings. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved, ensuring depth and credibility of findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants and Sampling Procedure

Participants were selected from members of the Igorot community residing in Ramon, Isabela, particularly elders aged 60 years and above who possessed extensive knowledge of



traditional cultural practices and migration experiences from the Cordillera region to the lowlands. Purposive sampling was used to identify culturally knowledgeable participants based on criteria such as length of residency, involvement in community traditions, and familiarity with life-cycle rituals. Snowball sampling was subsequently employed to reach additional cultural bearers recommended by initial participants. Data collection proceeded until thematic saturation was reached, resulting in a total of sixteen participants.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in the Municipality of Ramon, Isabela, a lowland settlement area where migrant Igorot families have established long-term residence. Data were gathered from participants residing in selected barangays with established Igorot community presence, including Bugallon Norte, Bugallon Proper, San Antonio, and Purok ni Bulan. These locations provided an appropriate setting for examining how cultural traditions are accommodated outside ancestral territories.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide designed to explore the accommodation and transmission of Igorot cultural practices in the lowland setting. The instrument included questions on participants' demographic profiles, accommodated life-cycle rituals, mechanisms of cultural transmission, perceptions of cultural integration, and implications for Social Science education. The interview guide was validated by experts in Social Science education and indigenous studies to ensure clarity, cultural sensitivity, and content relevance. Open-ended questions allowed participants to narrate their experiences in depth and supported the emergence of culturally grounded insights.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, necessary permissions were secured from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples in accordance with Republic Act No. 8371 (Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997), as well as from local government and barangay officials. Community coordination was conducted with Igorot leaders and elders to ensure culturally appropriate engagement. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to interviews.

Data were gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions using the validated interview guide. Interviews were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim. Data collection followed an iterative process in which emerging insights guided subsequent interviews until thematic saturation was achieved. As part of ethical practice, findings were shared with community representatives to support knowledge return and validation.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following systematic coding and categorization of interview transcripts. The analysis involved familiarization with the data, identification of meaningful segments, generation of initial codes, and grouping of codes into broader thematic categories reflecting patterns of cultural accommodation and transmission. To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation of interview and focus group data was conducted, and selected participants participated in member checking to validate interpretations. The resulting themes provided a comprehensive narrative of how migrant Igorot community members sustain and adapt their cultural practices within the lowland context of Ramon, Isabela.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

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Profile of the Participants

Sixteen participants from the Kankana-ey migrant community in Ramon, Isabela participated in the study. Most respondents were aged 61 years and above (68.75%), while the remaining participants were aged 45–60 years (31.25%). The equal distribution of male and female participants ensured balanced gender representation of cultural perspectives. In terms of educational attainment, 75% were high school graduates and 25% were elementary graduates, indicating that participants' cultural knowledge was largely shaped by experiential and community-based learning rather than formal schooling.

Most participants (87.5%) had resided in Ramon for more than twenty years, suggesting long-term exposure to lowland socio-cultural conditions and sustained engagement with processes of cultural accommodation. All respondents identified as belonging to the Kankana-ey ethnolinguistic group, ensuring cultural consistency in the interpretation of ritual practices discussed in the study. Overall, the demographic profile confirms that participants possessed both cultural authority and lived migration experience necessary for examining indigenous cultural accommodation in a lowland context.

Accommodation of Traditional Igorot Cultural Practices in the Community

Findings revealed that traditional Igorot cultural practices continue to be accommodated among migrant Kankana-ey families in Ramon, Isabela across seven major lifecycle areas: courtship, marriage, conception, birth, baptism, healing, and mourning or death. However, the degree of accommodation varied depending on the compatibility of practices with contemporary institutional systems and intercultural interaction.

Courtship practices remain partially preserved through continued observance of *tungtongan* (family consultation), *day-eng* (traditional serenade), and *gisgisto* (acts of service). These practices demonstrate the persistence of kinship-based relational negotiation as a foundation of marital decision-making. However, participants noted that traditional courtship spaces such as the



dap-ay and *ebgan* have largely been replaced by technology-mediated communication, reflecting procedural simplification rather than disappearance of values.

Marriage practices emerged as the most strongly accommodated traditions. Ritual elements such as *singet*, traditional attire (*baag* and *wanes*), *gangsa* performances, *supon* gifts, and distribution of *watwat* continue to function as visible expressions of indigenous identity and communal solidarity. At the same time, participants explained that marriages involving lowland partners often follow simplified lowland structures due to financial practicality and logistical convenience, demonstrating adaptive ceremonial negotiation rather than cultural abandonment.

Practices related to conception were among the least accommodated traditions. Earlier consultation with elders and ritual specialists such as the *mammadto* is now rarely observed. Reproductive decisions are increasingly shaped by individual choice and biomedical consultation, reflecting broader shifts in family planning norms.

Birth-related traditions remain moderately accommodated through the continued observance of *kaykayab* celebrations and ancestral naming practices (*tawid*). However, **clinical childbirth** has largely replaced traditional delivery methods due to health considerations, illustrating selective symbolic retention alongside institutional adaptation.

Baptism practices reflect strong integration between indigenous and Christian traditions. Participants reported that ancestral naming practices continue alongside church-based ceremonies, demonstrating cultural-religious hybridity rather than replacement.

Traditional healing practices such as *bunong* rituals and herbal treatments are less frequently practiced due to increased reliance on hospitals and licensed health professionals. Indigenous healing knowledge remains symbolically recognized but is now typically supplementary rather than primary.

Mourning and death practices emerged as the second most strongly accommodated cultural traditions. Ritual practices such as *paypay*, three-day wake observance, communal food preparation, and extended remembrance gatherings remain widely practiced. Although burial within family compounds is no longer permitted due to legal and community regulations, collective mourning traditions continue to reinforce kinship solidarity and identity continuity.

These findings indicate that lifecycle rituals remain important mechanisms through which migrant Igorot communities preserve cultural meaning while adapting to lowland institutional environments.

Extent of Cultural Accommodation

The extent of accommodation of traditional Igorot cultural practices varies according to the compatibility of rituals with legal frameworks, institutional systems, intercultural interaction, and settlement conditions in the lowland setting.

Courtship, conception, birth, and healing practices demonstrated weaker levels of accommodation due to the influence of modernization and biomedical health systems. Participants explained that traditional reproductive and healing practices have gradually shifted toward institutional healthcare services because of safety considerations and accessibility.

Marriage practices showed partial to strong accommodation. While traditional ceremonial markers remain visible, simplified wedding structures are often adopted when intermarriage occurs with lowland partners. Participants emphasized that lowland wedding formats are sometimes preferred because they are more practical and financially manageable.

Similarly, mourning practices demonstrated relatively strong accommodation despite structural adjustments in burial location. Legal restrictions have prevented backyard burial practices, yet extended wake gatherings and remembrance rituals continue to function as strong expressions of collective responsibility and kinship support.

Christian baptism practices also showed strong accommodation, illustrating how religious institutions can serve as spaces of cultural continuity when indigenous identity markers remain symbolically embedded within ritual participation.

Overall, the findings suggest that cultural accommodation follows a pattern of selective retention, adaptation, and transformation rather than cultural loss. Practices requiring ancestral spatial structures or ritual specialists weakened, while practices compatible with communal participation and institutional systems remained sustainable.

Cultural Retention and Intergenerational Transfer

Despite relocation to the lowland environment, migrant Igorot families continue to retain and transmit cultural practices primarily through storytelling, ritual participation, and community gatherings.

Participants consistently identified parents and elders as primary transmitters of indigenous knowledge. Storytelling remains a central mechanism through which children learn moral expectations, cultural values, and traditional practices. Ritual participation during weddings, wakes, and communal gatherings further strengthens experiential learning and identity formation among younger generations.

Community gatherings also reinforce collective cultural memory by providing shared spaces where traditions remain visible and meaningful across generations. Interestingly, participants



observed that traditional practices such as *gangsa* dancing sometimes attract interest even from non-Igorot community members, suggesting that cultural visibility extends beyond ethnic boundaries.

However, respondents emphasized that youth participation in traditional activities is declining due to competing influences such as digital technology, school responsibilities, and modern lifestyle priorities. While transmission efforts remain active within families, continuity increasingly depends on the willingness of younger members to engage with cultural learning opportunities.

These findings suggest that intergenerational transmission remains strong but vulnerable, highlighting the need for institutional support mechanisms that complement family-based cultural teaching.

Community Perceptions Toward Cultural Integration

Participants expressed overwhelmingly positive perceptions regarding the integration of Igorot cultural practices within the lowland community environment. Cultural accommodation was widely interpreted as a necessary adjustment that supports coexistence without weakening identity.

Respondents emphasized that lowland residents demonstrate appreciation for Igorot values such as cooperation, discipline, and *binnadang*. Cultural expressions such as *gangsa* performances during weddings, fiestas, and public celebrations were described as important opportunities for intercultural recognition and participation.

Participants further emphasized that adaptation does not signify cultural loss but rather transformation in form while preserving meaning. Many respondents reported feelings of pride when their traditions are appreciated by members of other ethnolinguistic groups, suggesting that intercultural interaction strengthens confidence in indigenous identity.

At the same time, participants expressed concern regarding the need to sustain youth engagement in cultural practices to prevent long-term cultural weakening. This perspective reflects a balanced understanding of cultural accommodation as both opportunity and responsibility.

Overall, integration was interpreted as a process of negotiated coexistence that strengthens intercultural harmony while maintaining cultural continuity.

Implications for Social Science Education

The findings of the study provide important implications for Social Science education, particularly in teaching cultural heritage within multicultural learning environments.

First, the results demonstrate that indigenous cultural traditions continue to exist as living and adaptive systems rather than static

historical practices tied exclusively to ancestral territories. Presenting culture as dynamic helps learners understand how identity is sustained through migration and interaction.

Second, the study highlights the continuing role of elders and families as primary transmitters of cultural knowledge. However, the observed decline in youth participation suggests that schools must function as institutional partners in heritage preservation by supporting storytelling activities, community engagement projects, and documentation of oral traditions.

Third, the positive reception of Igorot traditions within the lowland environment provides strong support for culturally responsive teaching approaches that promote intercultural understanding and respect for diversity. Integrating localized ethnographic experiences into classroom instruction strengthens learners' awareness that indigenous traditions remain meaningful within contemporary society.

Finally, the findings demonstrate that analyzing the reasons behind cultural change such as legal regulations, healthcare access, intermarriage, and modernization helps students develop critical perspectives on cultural continuity. Social Science classrooms therefore serve as important spaces for strengthening both heritage appreciation and inclusive citizenship formation.

Taken together, the results indicate that cultural accommodation among migrant Igorot communities provides strong empirical support for localized, contextualized, and culturally responsive approaches to heritage education.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Traditional Igorot cultural practices remain actively present in the lowland community; however, their forms have evolved in response to environmental conditions, institutional influences, and intercultural interaction. Practices associated with marriage and mourning continue to function as strong cultural identity markers, while practices related to courtship, conception, childbirth, and healing reflect adaptive transformation shaped by modernization and accessibility of services.
2. The extent of accommodation of traditional practices is determined largely by their compatibility with the social, legal, and institutional structures of the lowland environment. Cultural practices that can be symbolically expressed within community regulations remain strong, while those requiring specialized ritual conditions or ancestral spatial arrangements are more difficult to sustain. Cultural accommodation therefore reflects resilience and adjustment rather than cultural decline.
3. Intergenerational transmission of Igorot cultural practices continues to rely heavily on family-based instruction, storytelling traditions, and participation in community gatherings. However, the sustainability of cultural continuity



faces increasing challenges due to declining youth engagement and competing modern influences. Without strengthened institutional support from schools and community organizations, the long-term transmission of certain traditional practices may weaken.

4. Igorot community members perceive the integration of their traditional practices into the lowland cultural environment as a positive and meaningful experience that strengthens intercultural relationships while maintaining ethnic identity. Cultural accommodation is understood as transformation rather than assimilation, demonstrating the community's ability to preserve values such as cooperation, respect, and solidarity across changing environments.
5. Cultural accommodation of Igorot traditions in lowland communities presents important opportunities for Social Science education to promote localized heritage instruction, strengthen intercultural understanding, and support identity formation among learners. Schools play a critical role in sustaining indigenous cultural knowledge by serving as institutional partners in heritage preservation and transmission.

Recommendations

For the Igorot Community: Community elders and cultural leaders are encouraged to continue strengthening storytelling traditions, ritual participation opportunities, and community gatherings that serve as primary mechanisms for transmitting indigenous knowledge. Establishing structured cultural documentation initiatives within the community may help preserve practices that are gradually declining due to modernization.

For the Lowland Community: Lowland community members and local leaders are encouraged to sustain supportive attitudes toward indigenous cultural expression by providing inclusive spaces for traditional performances, ceremonies, and cultural participation. Continued intercultural cooperation strengthens social harmony and promotes mutual respect among ethnolinguistic groups.

For Students: Students are encouraged to actively participate in cultural documentation activities such as interviewing elders, recording oral traditions, and observing community rituals. Developing awareness of local cultural heritage strengthens identity formation and promotes appreciation of indigenous knowledge systems within multicultural environments.

For Teachers: Social Science teachers are encouraged to integrate localized cultural examples into classroom instruction by incorporating storytelling activities, heritage mapping projects, and comparative cultural analysis tasks. Using community-based cultural experiences as instructional materials strengthens learner engagement and promotes meaningful understanding of indigenous traditions as living heritage.

For Curriculum Developers: Curriculum developers are encouraged to strengthen localization and contextualization components within Social Science learning competencies by integrating migrant indigenous experiences alongside traditional homeland-based cultural descriptions. Developing instructional

materials such as cultural heritage pamphlets, oral tradition modules, and community-based activity guides will support culturally responsive teaching practices aligned with heritage preservation goals.

For Future Researchers: Future researchers are encouraged to expand the scope of similar studies by including participants from multiple Igorot ethnolinguistic groups and other migrant indigenous communities in lowland areas to provide comparative perspectives on cultural accommodation patterns. Additional research may also explore the role of digital platforms in supporting cultural transmission among younger generations, as well as the effectiveness of school-based heritage education programs in sustaining indigenous identity across generations.

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At present he currently explores different teaching environment where he would fit in, Improving himself in his graduate studies after 3 years of teaching in a private institution. His professional interests include Social Science education, cultural studies, economics, curriculum implementation, and improving instructional practices to enhance student learning outcomes.

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