

Learning and indigenous peoples during the pandemic: perspectives of and for *Kalanguyans*

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ABSTRACT

Through qualitative study and semi-structured interviews, the researchers explored the learning experiences of *Kalanguyan* teachers when schools were locked-down during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malico Elementary School, San Nicolas, Pangasinan Philippines. The results revealed the learning gaps, experiences, sacrifices, and challenges encountered by the pupils and teachers. Utilizing Colaizzi's method, the themes generated from the interviews conducted were presented to the participants and field experts to confirm their validity and authenticity. The themes generated were the Knowledge gap in science, social science, numeracy, and reading, after-work teaching sacrifices outside the classroom, language being 'fluid' for kindergarten and grade school pupils, the ability of pupils being compromised during the pandemic, module no hero, no *Kalanguyan* is left behind, guidance from parents-plus and minus-is a source of active-passive support, uniting learning and culture through curriculum and programs, yes is the key to the workplace on and off pandemic, and assessing technology for *Kalanguyans* using culture as lens. The study also conducted strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threat (SWOT) analysis. The findings will serve as basis for extension activities which will be headed by Pangasinan State University and collaboration of Department of Education (DepEd) and stakeholders that encompasses range of activities aimed at supporting the community's educational needs.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic that emerged in the middle of 2020 brought about significant changes at both global and local levels, affecting every aspect of society and human life. This global situation immensely modified the life that every individual used to have, inevitably forcing each person to live a new way of life and re-calibrate the usual life situations and practices to a new normal. According to UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) COVID-19 pandemic affects all segments of the population, especially the most vulnerable groups, including the elderly, individuals with disabilities, young people, and indigenous peoples (IP) [1].

Relatively, the global pandemic created a predicament in terms of social, economic, environmental and educational implication [2], it left an indelible alteration on the lives of Filipinos, reshaping nearly every facet of daily human existence. The effects of this global crisis have been substantial and wide-ranging, affecting everything from health and economic well-being to education, social interactions, and mental health.

Moreover, the pandemic crisis has exacerbated existing problems, disproportionately affecting the socially disadvantaged individuals, and increasing their risk of social vulnerability. Vulnerable groups such as children, elderly, people with disabilities, and low-income households have experienced pressures that are likely to threaten their health, safety, and well-being [3].

Moreover, during the pandemic, extensive research conducted by both public and private institutions, particularly in the health, business, and education sectors, has revealed the widespread negative impacts of this pandemic. In education, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented long-lasting challenges, leading to substantial learning setbacks. Various aspects of the educational system were modified, changing the curriculum, syllabus, learning guides assessment methods, teaching, and learning methods [4]. These setbacks were observed across different academic subjects such as science, social science, mathematics, reading, numeracy, and more. Thus, teachers were aware of the significant gaps in learners' knowledge and skills across different subject areas and that implementing learning interventions was necessary to address these concerns [5].

The pandemic had a significant impact on education by closing practically all of the world's schools, which caused the most enormous simultaneous disruption to all educational systems in our lifetimes. It led to an unprecedented educational crisis among countries worldwide [6]. Pupils, teachers, and parents had to deal with a wide range of learning issues due to the abrupt closing of classrooms and the transition to remote learning. These difficulties covered a wide range of problems, including the digital divide or the disparities in access to and use of technology [7], technological limits, and the psychological and social costs of isolation like loneliness, low self esteem, and physical and mental stress. In order to ensure school education continued during this crisis, educators had to adapt rapidly with innovative problem-solving. In order to facilitate learning throughout the pandemic, learning modules and session guides may be designed base on the educational and sociocultural context of the parents and their children [8].

Furthermore, the pandemic brought about a paradigm shift in the educational system in the Philippines, a country renowned for its fortitude and courage towards hardships and trials, impacting millions of Filipino learners across the country and at all levels. This change brought the need to adjust to the new normal. It forced a reevaluation of conventional educational procedures and encouraged innovation in distance learning technologies like cell phones, tablets, internet connection, tv, and online classes. Educational institutions were challenged to employ distance, blended, or hybrid learning. These learning modalities suggest to alter instructional technology to ensure continuous teaching and learning process [9] towards developing the necessary skills among the pupils amidst pandemic.

Philippines have acknowledged and addressed these learning gaps and learning losses, striving to mitigate their consequences. Learning loss makes learners more likely to struggle in the classroom, which lowers their confidence and results in poor marks. The absence of in-person interaction has also hindered the growth of the learners' self-esteem and reduced their interest in learning. For this reason, it is critical to put measures in place that specifically address learning gaps and loss [10]. However, there remains a significant gap in the existing body of literature, as only limited number of studies has examined the effects of the pandemic specifically on indigenous communities. It is crucial to investigate and understand the repercussions of the pandemic on these communities, as this knowledge can inform policies in the educational system to better meet the needs of these pupils.

2. METHOD

The mountainous haven of the Kalanguya lies within the heart of Northern Luzon, Philippines. Pangasinan, Cagayan Valley, Nueva Ecija, and Cordillera are provinces where the Kalanguyan communities are found. It is made up of parts of the towns of Buguias, Kabayan, and Bokod in Benguet Province; the municipalities of Tinoc and Asipolo in Ifugao Province; the municipalities of Ambaguio, Kayapa, Santa Fe, and Aritao in Nueva Vizcaya; a segment of the municipality of San Nicolas, Pangasinan; and a segment of the municipality of Caranglan, Nueva Ecija. Most of these areas can be reached through rugged roads or foot trails [11].

The *Kalanguyans* generally share the same cultural practices, with minimal diversification depending on the geographical location of each group [12]. Almost every stage of life, including conception, birth, and death, is marked by Kalanguya ceremonies and traditions. Social customs are followed to keep the community peaceful and harmonious [13]. Positive qualities including family connection, solidarity, friendship, ecological balance, and community service are fostered by Kalanguya traditions. These ideals are supported by the community's obligation to protect the environment, a religious duty derived from the Kalanguya people's deep belief in the supernatural and Kabunyan's (supreme deity) ability to impact ecological processes directly [14]. Moreover, the *Kalanguyan* school caters the learners from the villagers of Malico, San Nicolas, Pangasinan and Malico, Sta Fe, Nueva Viscaya. The 2020 Census of population and housing by the Philippine Statistics Authority verified the presence of two Malicos, with 348 people living in Malico in San Nicolas, Pangasinan, and 234 people living in Malico in Santa Fe, Nueva Vizcaya [15].

In order to investigate the experiences of the *Kalanguyan* ethnic community, the researchers conducted a five-day immersion in the community in July 2023. This immersion activity was coordinated in advance with the barangay officials and tribal community on October 2022 and June 2023. The study utilized a qualitative research method and primarily employed semi-structured interviews to gather relevant data, which were conducted by the researchers with the assistance of two trained field assistants on July 6 and 7, 2023. The semi-structured interviews took place for two days, with the *Kalanguyan* teachers as primary source of information, specifically with the school principal who was interviewed on Day 1 and 1 kindergarten and 6 grade school *Kalanguyan* teachers handling grades 1 to 6 on Day 2.

Since the researchers could not speak and understand the languages used by the teachers specifically the *Kalanguyan* and Ilocano language, it was requested that the interviews will be conducted in the Filipino language. With the participants' permission, the first trained assistant tape-recorded the interviews, and the second trained assistant transcribed the recordings after the necessary data were gathered. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes for day 1 and 1 hour for day 2. The recordings and the resulting data corpus were securely stored at the Center for History, Culture, Arts, Languages, and Innovative Education of Pangasinan State University in the Philippines, serving as a reference for ethical research conduct.

Furthermore, the researchers coded the data through content analysis, and the manuscript was subsequently returned to the participants in July 18, 2023, for confirmation and validation as a community using Colaizzi's method. Colaizzi's method is a rigorous and robust data analysis, a qualitative method that ensures the credibility and reliability of its results. It allows researchers to reveal emergent themes and their interwoven relationships [16]. Lastly, the researchers introduced novel insights by presenting the K-A-L-A-N-G-U-Y-A Emergent themes in the results and discussion section. These themes shed light on academic and instructional concerns among the *Kalanguyan* IP. The Figure 1 represents the map of the Northern Luzon in the Philippines. It shows the location wherein the *Kalanguyan* communities are situated. The place is specifically found in the heart of the Northern portion of the Philippine archipelago.

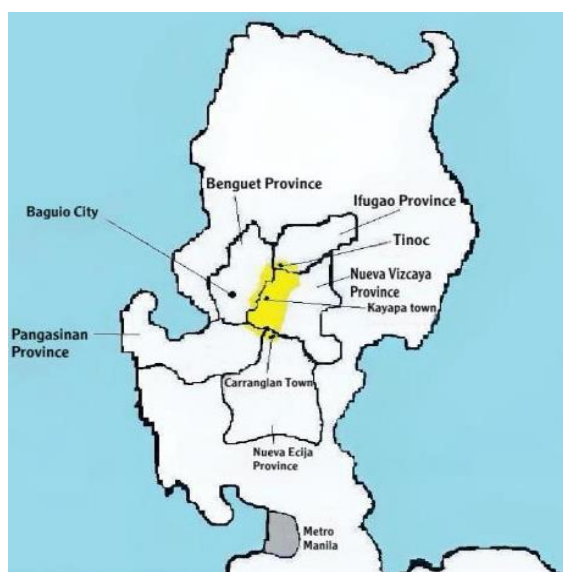


Figure 1. Northern part of the Philippines [17]

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Summary of findings

3.1.1. Knowledge gap in science, social science, math, numeracy, and reading

The participants identified a significant knowledge gap among the pupils in science, social science, math, numeracy, and reading. The participants expressed concern over the pupils' poor reading abilities, noting that many struggle to read even basic sight words. Additionally, while mathematical skills in grades 1 to grade 6 are lacking, the pupils also face difficulties comprehending complex concepts in math subjects, they experience a hard time answering equations using the four fundamental mathematical operations such as adding, subtracting, multiplying, dividing, analyzing math story problem, as well as in non-basic mathematical applications like understanding facts and analyzing concepts. The absence of face to face classes and direct instructions from teachers during pandemic had caused the learning loss in mathematical reasoning abilities

[18]. Problems in reading comprehension, numeracy and other learning skills has been observed by the teachers and even worsen during the period of pandemic. The teachers attribute these challenges to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has necessitated using modules as the primary mode of instruction. They highlighted that in a traditional face-to-face classroom setting, challenging lessons could be more easily taught and understood.

However, during the pandemic, learners developed a negative perception of modular learning, considering it an opportunity to escape from actual learning and instead engage in entertainment on social media platforms. The said findings is relative to the study of Bordeos [19], which states that learners develop a negative attitude regarding the use of modular distance learning and believe that it negatively affects their educational experience and their drive to learn. Moreover, the participants acknowledged the excessive number of modules pupils were expected to complete each day, leading to overwhelming workloads. To manage this situation, teachers selectively identified specific tasks within the modules that were deemed essential and required pupils to focus on completing those tasks. The said statement supports therecommendations of Yaya *et al.* [20] which state that, to lessen the numbers of modules per pupils for them to be able to read and answer at the given time and to limit the number of activities or exercises from the modules in each learning areas.

Providing timely feedback as a form of formative assessment becomes too tricky due to the challenges to conduct regular classes and direct supervision which was caused by the pandemic. Nevertheless, the participants emphasized that when essential tasks were left unanswered, the modules were returned to the pupils for completion. Unfortunately, this backlog of unfinished tasks accumulated week after week, leaving little room for accurate feedback on the pupils' work.

3.1.2. After-work teaching sacrifices outside the classroom

In this context, 'after-work' refers to the additional teaching and learning strategies that have emerged within the ethnic community due to COVID-19 pandemic. These strategies encompass the production of multiple subject-specific modules every week, which are subsequently distributed and handed to the pupil's parents or guardians. It could be noted that the expenses incurred for printing these modules are partially covered by the resourcefulness of teachers in soliciting sponsorships. The *Kalanguyan* teachers encountered the said situation due to the insufficiency of school budget obtained from the national government's maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE), which fails to cover all necessary expenditures, including monthly costs. The said finding is relative to the statement by Basilio in Mateo, 2020 that the MOOE could not adequately fund the costs associated with the production of modules [21]. On average, the allocated school budget is set at P19,000.00 or 323 USD per month.

Moreover, the 'after-work' aspect entails teachers conducting home visitations, particularly for those encountering difficulties with module assessments, provided that health protocols are observed. Home visitations are challenging due to the mountainous terrain of the area, as compared to non-mountainous regions. Additionally, the Philippines experiences an average of twenty or more typhoons annually, rendering the mountains treacherous and slippery during such times. These circumstances demonstrate the unwavering dedication of the *Kalanguyan* teachers in supporting their community.

3.1.3. Language is 'fluid' for kindergartners and grade school pupils

The issue of linguistic flexibility within the *Kalanguyan* language, in conjunction with other dialects spoken by *Kalanguyan* pupils, is not a pressing concern among teachers. The participants observed that the pupils possess a "multi-lingual" capability, as they can speak and comprehend not only the *Kalanguyan* dialect but also Ilocano. When queried about how this proficiency was attained, they explained that the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines implements the Mother-Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTBMLE) approach. MTBMLE refers to formal and informal education settings where the learner's mother tongue and additional languages are employed in the classroom. Learners commence their education in the language they comprehend most effectively-their mother tongue and subsequently incorporate additional languages after establishing a solid foundation in their native language [22].

Under this framework, the pupils are taught using their "mother tongue" and additional languages in the classroom, beginning their education in their first language (L1) to optimize their learning experience. However, in the case of the *Kalanguyan*, the DepEd mandates the use of Ilocano as the L1, despite it not being the actual mother tongue of the *Kalanguyan* people, whose L1 is the *Kalanguyan* dialect. The language is used in informal conversation in elementary and high school, but this is not the official medium of instruction [23]. As a result, both Ilocano and *Kalanguya* are employed in classroom instruction, community activities, and daily life, adhering to the MTBMLE implementation while preserving the *Kalanguyan* language within their tribe. This bilingual approach ultimately fosters linguistic fluidity among kindergartners and grade school pupils. The teachers do not perceive this situation as a challenge to pupils' ethnic identity, which boasts a robust and enduring language structure.

3.1.4. Ability of pupils is compromised during the pandemic; the module is no hero

The absence of age-appropriate skills among the pupils is something that the participants have often noticed. While this issue has existed in the past, the pandemic has exacerbated its prevalence. The participants frequently report that most of their pupils lack the necessary skills and competencies to perform tasks at the grade level they enrolled in the previous year. Unfortunately, the participants have noticed that the pupils have developed a propensity towards “laziness”, preferring modules that involve simple tasks such as encircling letters in response to given questions, rather than engaging in activities that require writing and critical thinking. Similarly, according to Lase *et al.* [24], “parents perceived that there is a decline in children’s learning motivation and cognitive abilities during pandemic,” (p. 103).

Moreover, it is worth noting that the shift from face-to-face instruction to non-face-to-face modalities, such as online learning, radio-based instruction, and modular approaches, occurred worldwide due to the pandemic. In the participants’ case, the school adopted modular instruction as their primary teaching mode. Modular instruction generally follows a set process where the DepEd sends soft copies of pre-designed modules to the teachers. The teachers then print these modules for each pupil, distributing them every week, and collecting them on Fridays. Subsequently, the teachers assess and score the completed modules. Unfortunately, despite the potential benefits of modular instruction during the pandemic, it became apparent that the pupils’ parents, rather than the pupils themselves, were the ones answering the modules. Even some of the parents were not knowledgeable on the content of the modules. This is relative to the findings of Luaña [25], stating that parents are the ones answering their children’s modules due to: i) poor reading and writing skills of their children, ii) time constraints due to work and household chores, iii) too many children to attend to, iv) too difficult lessons and subjects, and v) too many learning activities in the modules (p. 1). Consequently, the modules did not fulfill their intended purpose.

3.1.5. No *Kalangayan* is left behind

The participants also encountered challenges related to “special” pupils within modular instruction. Pupil A and Pupil B are two noteworthy situations. Pupil A has demonstrated special needs in writing since kindergarten. Throughout this period, Pupil A has only been able to write the letter ‘K’, the initial letter of their name. Additionally, Pupil A struggles with color recognition and can only differentiate between sizes, such as big or small. Pupil A is currently in grade 3, and the teachers concur that the pupil needs special needs support. The teachers have implemented intervention measures to assist Pupil A. However, they believe that a dedicated special needs program would be more beneficial to address the special needs of Pupil A accurately. Unfortunately, the school does not have such special needs programs or activities intended for pupils with situation similar to Pupil A.

Learners with special needs, such as those facing challenges related to hearing, vision, or mobility, will benefit from extra assistance and direction in their learning. The lack of expertise to address these specific needs at school and home can impede the progress of these learners. Consequently, it is essential to allocate time and resources towards investigating and developing optimal educational solutions for this group of learners with special needs [26]. Thus, these special needs are not provided during the time of the pandemic.

On the other hand, Pupil B presents a distinct situation concerning self-reflection. Pupil B exhibits a desire to achieve perfection in modules or tests assigned by the teacher. There have been instances where Pupil B demands that certain test items not be marked as incorrect, arguing that the pupil did not write those answers and only provided correct responses. While the cases of Pupils A and B are not common, they do exist, contributing to the teachers’ work during the pandemic.

The participants stated that while they closely adhered to the health regulations, they did not believe the pandemic had a major effect on the community due to the low number of infection cases. Relatively, due to self-initiated traditional lockdowns, communities of IP had largely remained COVID-19-free until such guidelines were lifted, allowing people to enter and exit their communities [27]. Moreover, the bulk of work did not change significantly during the pandemic compared to previous years. Hence, working from home is a more challenging, the teachers need to be abreast with the most recent technological developments, they must manage their time wisely and effectively. Likewise, they must also strive to improve their productivity and creativity in the teaching-learning process while maintaining their physical and mental well-being [28]. Despite these challenges, the participants remained committed to their duties, striving to serve the best interests of their *Kalangayan* tribe and ensuring that no pupil was left behind.

3.1.6. Guidance from parents-plus and minus-is a source of active-passive support

The participants unanimously recognize the importance of community support for the school during the pandemic. In particular, parents played a significant role as active and passive supporters. They actively contribute to school activities through their attendance to pick up and drop off the modules and passively support their children during the pandemic as either ‘module-doer’ or ‘co-teacher’. Parents/guardians had the potential to assist their children in adapting to the new learning format. However, some of them faced

challenges due to their difficulty in effectively facilitating and explaining the provided modules to their children [29]. Though there have been some reports that parents are the one answering the modules instead of their children, their assistance was still invaluable during the time when face-to-face learning was suspended. However, this arrangement also poses challenges and additional task for teachers when parents seek appointments to ask for clarification on how to answer the modules.

It is worth noting that most of the parents are farmers who does not possess sufficient literacy skills to understand the content requirements and instructions within the modules. Research by Pangket [30] said that parents are not prepared to take the role of the teachers. The skills and knowledge of the parents are not sufficient relative to the subject matter and they lack time to teach their children due to work related responsibilities. Nonetheless, whether the support provided by parents is active or passive, their guidance to their children is crucial for the continued functioning of the school as an educational institution.

3.1.7. Uniting learning and culture through curriculum and programs

Despite the impact of the pandemic around the Globe, the *Kalanguyan* community has maintained its tribal responsibility to safeguard the traditions and customs that define its existence as a cohesive group, since IP have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. The said right includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artifacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature [31]. To foster unity and cultural preservation through education, the participants initiate assimilation activities from the kindergarten level, where kindergartners are encouraged to engage in chanting the tribe's songs and reading stories specific to the *Kalanguyan* tribe. These practices have been integrated in the lessons thru contextualized learning tasks assigned to the pupils.

Additionally, the school places significant emphasis on the annual celebration of indigenous people's month, every October. The *Kalanguyan* still managed to incorporate the relevance of the occasion in the learning activities provided during the pandemic. The teachers also actively implement the Indigenous People's Education (IPEd) Program established by the DepEd in the Philippines to the curriculum.

The IPEd program is a direct response from the DepEd to address the rights of IP to receive primary education that is contextually relevant, respectful of their identities, and value their indigenous knowledge, skills, and cultural heritage [32]. For the *Kalanguyan* teachers, imparting the tribe's customs and practices to the younger generation is a crucial aspect of preserving their cultural identity. In instances where the subject's content fails to include the cultural beliefs of the *Kalanguyan* tribe or when the content of modules does not align with the practices of the *Kalanguyans*, the teachers are proactive in educating their pupils about the relevance of these cultural aspects.

3.1.8. Yes is the key to the workplace on and off pandemic

The participants maintained a positive outlook, believing that their pupils could acquire the knowledge, skills, and values they may have missed during the past two years of modular learning. When questioned about the loss of learning and its impact on education, the participants promptly responded that it was essential to address the situation and provide appropriate interventions. The teachers emphasized that they are driven by the excitement to observed their pupils' learning and are committed to making a positive difference.

The participants highlighted that their workloads during the pandemic were comparable to their workloads before the pandemic. They noted that the demands on their time and efforts remained consistent, regardless of the challenging circumstances. Additionally, the participants went extra mile by visiting pupils' homes, utilizing walkie-talkies due to the mountainous and remote nature of the area. Being a *Kalanguyan* teacher means embracing the challenges of the current situation and overcoming them with determination and resilience without disregarding the minimum health standards like social distancing and alike. The said situation is consonant with the study of Del Rosario and Galang [33], which states that despite facing numerous challenges in the complex setup, teachers worked to develop qualities such as adaptability, creativity, dynamism, and sociability in order to improve success and effectiveness in the teaching and learning process. Relatively, the resilient attitude of basic education teachers towards teaching and learning in the post-pandemic is evident despite all the challenges they faced. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges to teachers in the new approach in teaching [34].

3.1.9. Assessing technology for *Kalanguyans* using culture as lens

The participants observed a decline in the pupils' motivation and increased laziness when completing modules, with a preference for multiple-choice questions over activities that require writing. The participants hypothesize that the pupils may have developed a preference for social media content during school closures, as it is easily accessible with today's technology. However, the teachers promptly reminded the pupils that

technology should be seen as a learning tool, cautioning against too much exposure to content that may obscure their understanding of their tribe’s culture and traditions.

Consequently, the teachers took the initiative to educate the pupils on assessing non-school learning sources through the lens of their tribal culture, referring to non-*Kalanguyan* social media content to parents and the community for further guidance. To reintegrate the beliefs, customs, and traditions of the *Kalanguyan* tribe into the pupils’ education, the participants embarked on the development of “big books of stories.” These books feature authentic stories from *Kalanguyans*, written by themselves with assistance from the division office in the form of cartooning. The participants mentioned that these big books were submitted to the regional IPEd Office for evaluation, suggesting a process of validation and recognition of their cultural content.

The teachers’ initiative to provide learning material relative to IP culture during pandemic is consonant with the study of Pedroso *et al.* [35] which states that providing IP learners with strategic contexts improves learning process by inspiring interest, curiosity, motivation, and engagement with knowledge. This approach is called contextualized teaching strategies, an instructional approach which relates learning to a specific environment, scenario, or application area to target relevant skills and aid students’ learning. The integration of local materials includes reading materials, modules, and contextualized storybooks.

3.2. The *Kalanguyan* as an IPL during the pandemic and *Kalanguyan* IPL during the post-pandemic

The Figure 2 is a representation of male and female *Kalanguyan* pupils. Both *Kalanguyan* pupils experience the negative impact of the pandemic listed in colum A. Likewise, column B is the aspiration of *Kalanguyan* teachers for their IP learners. Moreover, the illustrated Arrow A in the middles below the line represents the obstacles, trials, and challenges the IPL had experience towards the pandemic. On the other hand, the illustrated Arrow B in the middle above the line represents the attributes of ideal *Kalanguyan* IPL that could be possible provided through quality and age appropriate learning. Furthermore, employing an interpretivist approach, the researchers could describe the *Kalanguyan* learners as IP learners during the pandemic and IP learners in the post-pandemic.

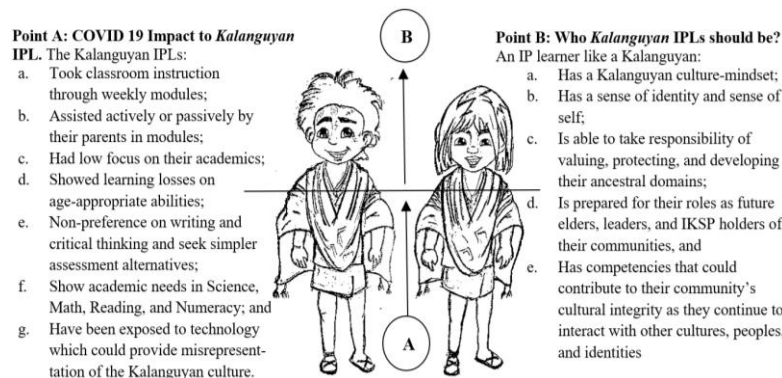


Figure 2. *Kalanguyan* learners as IP learners during pandemic and IP learners in post-pandemic

3.3. Strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threat analysis

The researchers conducted SWOT analysis to identify the possible opportunities for the *Kalanguyan* School to strengthen it is potential and use it to its advantage. Likewise, the areas where the school is weak may be addressed, and relevant interventions could be provided by the faculty members of Pangasinan State University and heads of the *Kalanguyan* School with the assistance of it is stakeholders such as parents, and community officials. The SWOT analysis enables an organization to focus on it is processes and operations as shown in Table 1. The organization’s key competencies and opportunities for improvement will be better understood as a result of this procedure. Organizations can make decisions that promote growth, enhance performance, and strengthen their competitive edge by being aware of their strengths and weaknesses. SWOT analysis is a framework for strategic planning that is used to assess an organization, a plan, a project or any endeavor [36]. This process enables an organization to choose the best action for its long-term performance, define realistic goals, and allocate resources efficiently [37].

In terms of the strength, the researchers observed that the school maintains a clean and environmentally friendly environment, which creates a conducive learning atmosphere. In addition, the school location’s weather conditions are favorable, contributing to a comfortable and pleasant learning environment. Further, the school has an IPEd Office, indicating a commitment to indigenous education and promoting love of culture. Furthermore, the

principal provides strong leadership and support, fostering a positive school culture. Finally, the teachers demonstrate a supportive attitude towards the pupils and their learning needs.

In terms of the weaknesses, the limited financial resources from the MOOE is one of the challenges of the school that restricts its ability to address various needs particularly during pandemic. Some of the parents lack literacy skills that hinder effective communication and engagement to the school, teachers, and helping their children. Further, the absence of trained and licensed guidance counselors limits the availability of professional support for pupils' socio-emotional needs like self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness [38]. Furthermore, the curriculum is overcrowded, potentially limiting the depth and effectiveness of learning experiences.

Regarding the opportunities, the researchers believe that conducting psychological tests for pupils can help identify and address their specific needs, ensuring appropriate support and intervention. Providing psycho-social training for teachers equips them with the necessary skills to support pupils' emotional well-being and create a nurturing learning environment. In addition, raising awareness and promoting the existence and rich cultural heritage of the *Kalanguyan* community can foster appreciation and respect among the broader society. Moreover, integrating the *Kalanguyan* culture into the curriculum enhances cultural understanding, appreciation, and respect among the pupils, teachers, the community, and the school's stakeholders.

In terms of the threats, the researchers have inferred that the decreasing frequency of *Kalanguya* language usage in daily life poses a threat to its preservation and potential loss of linguistic heritage because of the use of Ilocano as L1. Experiences from other places suggest that if it is not frequently used at early age, the language will be lost. Likewise, the lack of continuous integration of *Kalanguyan* culture into various aspects of school life may contribute to cultural erosion and diminished cultural identity. Further, as a threat, increasing reliance on technology may lead to a shift away from traditional cultural practices and values, potentially diluting the *Kalanguyan* cultural heritage. Technology penetration limits the ability of indigenous groups to practice their own culture [39]. In addition, the school's goal to provide quality education and preparing pupils to a better future has been challenged due to the increasing number of non-performing pupils. The absence of age-appropriate abilities among pupils highlights the need for interventions and support to bridge the learning gaps. Analyzing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats helps identify areas of improvement and potential actions the school as a community can undertake to maximize its strengths, address weaknesses, capitalize on opportunities, and mitigate threats.

Table 1. The SWOT analysis enables an organization to focus on processes and operations

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threat
Clean and green school	Low amount of budget from MOOE	Psychological test for pupils	Non-daily use of <i>Kalanguya</i> as a dialect
Conducive weather	The presence of non-literate parents	Psycho-social training for teachers	Non-integration of culture
With IPED Office	No trained guidance counselors	Exposure to <i>Kalanguya</i> 's Existence	Technology as an alternative to culture
Support principal	Congested curriculum	Cultural integration in curriculum	Projected non-skilled pupils
Supportive teachers			Non-age-appropriate abilities

3.4. Potential extension of higher education institutions

Collaboration plays a crucial role in the process of nation-building and community development. Through the researcher's immersion in the *Kalanguyan* community, various areas for potential collaborations between the *Kalanguyan* educators and stakeholders, such as Pangasinan State University, Philippines, have been identified. The said collaborative initiatives encompass a range of activities aimed at supporting the community's educational needs.

One area of collaboration will involve the implementation of numeracy and literacy programs specifically tailored to assist struggling readers within the *Kalanguyan* community. These programs will provide targeted support to enhance their mathematical and reading skills. Additionally, there is a need for psycho-social support for both teaching and non-teaching staff and community members. Collaborative efforts may focus on providing resources and assistance to address the mental well-being and emotional needs of the teachers.

Furthermore, collaborations may involve psychological assessments for pupils who exhibit special qualities or have unique learning requirements. The said activities may help identify their specific needs and provide appropriate interventions and support. Another collaboration is to enhance the research writing skills of the *Kalanguyan* teachers, the collaborative workshops may deal on writing action research papers, focus on utilizing case study method. These workshops would empower the teachers to conduct meaningful research and contribute to advancing knowledge in the field of education.

Lastly, collaborations can extend to mentoring opportunities for academic publication through an online journal. This initiative would support and guide the teachers in publishing their scholarly work, thereby increasing

their visibility and contributing to the dissemination of valuable insights and experiences. By engaging to these collaborative efforts, the *Kalanguyan* teachers, stakeholders, and Pangasinan State University, could work together to address the educational needs of the community and promote holistic development.

4. CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on various segments of the society, including ethnic communities such as the *Kalanguyans*, who reside in the mountainous regions of Pangasinan and Nueva Vizcaya in the Philippines. While previous studies have documented similar experiences among indigenous populations, this study stands out as the first to present firsthand accounts from *Kalanguyan* educators, providing an authentic perspective. The study focused on the experiences of elementary school teachers from the *Kalanguyan* community, explicitly examining the teaching and learning process when schools were closed, and face-to-face classes were prohibited to prevent the further spread of COVID-19. The researchers introduced novel insights by presenting the K-A-L-A-N-G-U-Y-A Emergent themes in the results and discussion section. These themes shed light on academic and instructional concerns among the *Kalanguyan* Indigenous Peoples. Employing an interpretivist approach, the researchers depicted the characteristics and attributes of the *Kalanguyan* IP during the pandemic. They identified key issues regarding their learning and well-being, emphasizing that these characteristics and attributes are permanent. The researchers highlighted the need for the *Kalanguyan* IP, with the support of educational institutions like Malico ES, to preserve and maintain their cultural identity and expression, which is in line with who they should be. Furthermore, through additional qualitative analysis, the researchers explored the SWOT analysis within the context of potential collaborations between indigenous communities and higher educational institutions. This analysis identified various areas where collaborative efforts could be pursued, with higher educational institutions as key stakeholders.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The empirical results reported herein should be considered in the light of some limitations. Three significant limitations in this study could be addressed in future research. First, the study focused on the experiences of indigenous people in the mountainous area in the Northern part of Luzon in the Philippines; the results may vary if a similar study is conducted in a less remote community in the country. Second, the study utilized a qualitative research method; the comprehensiveness of the result may also be achieved through a separate quantitative or mixed method. Lastly, results may also differ if pupils and parents are also part of the study as participants or respondents.

IMPLICATIONS

The result of the study is regarded significant to agencies from the education sector to realize the impact of the situations during the pandemic, which created learning gap among the learners specifically to the indigenous people like the *Kalanguyans* and the sacrifices encountered by the public school teachers. The aforementioned learning gap contributes to the learning challenges pupils currently encounter throughout their educational journey, including issues with comprehension, numeracy, critical thinking, and other abilities. Further, the results of the study suggest that the Department of Education may offer interventions and measures to prevent deficiencies and inabilities among the learners.

Moreover, the study documented the resilience and coping abilities of the *Kalanguyan* teachers despite the challenges brought by the difficult times during pandemic. Teachers assure that learning would continue despite limited resources and difficulties they may encounter. In the absence of chances to go to school and learn, parents take part in teaching their children. However, the interventions to learn through modules through the assistance of the parents were not easy, there were shortcomings and limitations which leads to learning loss among learners. Relative to sustainable development goal 4 (SDG 4), which is to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary schooling by the year 2030, the study could be considered an eye opener and brings forward new information to the education sector that COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact to the quality of education. This social concern requires a continuous effort from DepEd in order to reduce the possible ill effect of the said learning loss and learning gap.

On the other hand, since the study did not include parents and pupils as participants, further research is required to know their perceptions and listen to their sentiments about the educational processes during the pandemic. Parents are stakeholders of the school and partners in the progress of the educational community, their narratives are good source of information to reach out the educational needs of their children not only during period of health crisis but also during the usual times of school activities. Further, the point of views of the pupils are also relevant to address their specific learning needs. Lastly, people experience different challenges and uncertainties in life. The experiences of the *Kalanguyan* learners perceived by the teachers and the sacrifices of teachers are testimonies that

the educational system must be ready from possible circumstances so that learning will progress and grade-appropriate learning may continue no matter how difficult the situation is.

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