

THE ROLE OF IPED IN SAVING ENDANGERED DIALECTS

by:

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The Indigenous Peoples Education (IPed) Program was established to recognize and respond to the diverse cultural backgrounds of learners, especially those from far-flung and marginalized Indigenous communities. By incorporating native languages, traditional stories, cultural practices, and community values into the curriculum, IPed makes learning more meaningful, inclusive, and culturally responsive.

Education becomes far more engaging when learners see themselves reflected in what they are being taught. Instead of relying on foreign or unfamiliar examples, educators are encouraged to use local references, such as nearby animals, native plants, or traditional folktales. This not only sparks students' interest but also helps deepen their understanding of lessons by connecting them to their lived experiences.

Beyond improving academic engagement, integrating Indigenous culture into daily classroom activities plays a vital role in preserving and strengthening cultural identity. With rapid modernization and shifting societal values, many Indigenous communities face the risk of losing their distinct traditions – and most critically, their languages. Linguists warn that when a language disappears, so too does a wealth of community wisdom – songs, stories, rituals, and knowledge systems vanish with it.

In the Philippines, over 120 languages are spoken, one of which is the Ayta Ambala dialect. Unfortunately, Ayta Ambala is now considered endangered, with only about 1,700 speakers remaining, primarily in parts of Zambales and Bataan. This declining number highlights the urgency of preserving this language before it fades entirely.

A major challenge lies in the fact that many younger Ayta Ambala children no longer speak their native tongue. Instead, they often use Tagalog, which is more widely spoken in schools and media. Some parents, believing fluency in Tagalog will give their children better opportunities, have stopped teaching Ayta Ambala at home. As a result, the number of native speakers continues to shrink, placing the dialect at even greater risk of extinction.

This is where the IPed Program becomes instrumental. Through its culture-based curriculum, IPed empowers schools to integrate Indigenous customs, traditions, and dialects into daily instruction. This not only honors the identity of Indigenous learners but also boosts their self-esteem and sense of belonging. Teachers receive training to weave community values and dialects into their lessons, and culturally appropriate learning materials in local languages are continuously developed.

In some schools, IP elders are invited as resource persons to teach the native language, share traditional stories, and pass on practices to younger generations. Their presence reinforces intergenerational connections and ensures that ancestral knowledge is not lost.

At Bayan-Bayanan Elementary School in Dinalupihan, Bataan, the IPed Program is making a meaningful impact—even in a mixed population that includes both Ayta Ambala learners and non-IP students. The school fosters inclusivity and appreciation for cultural diversity by encouraging parents to speak Ayta Ambala at home. Teachers also introduce non-IP learners to basic Ambala expressions, such as simple greetings and counting numbers.

These small yet powerful acts send a strong message: "Indigenous culture matters." By teaching all students to value and respect the Ayta Ambala language and traditions, the school creates a welcoming environment where Indigenous learners feel recognized

and others learn the beauty of diversity. It fosters a school culture rooted in respect, empathy, and cultural pride.

Schools play a crucial role in preserving endangered dialects like Ayta Ambala. The IPed Program serves as a bridge between modern education and Indigenous identity, ensuring that learning does not erase a child's roots but strengthens them. By valuing native languages, we help keep stories, songs, and ancestral knowledge alive – not only for today's learners but for future generations. Let education be a powerful force not only for academic success but also for cultural preservation and inclusion.

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