

TOWARDS INCLUSIVE LEARNING: THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF THE AYTA MAGBUKUN COMMUNITY

by:

Rubilyn C. Adion

Teacher I, Kinaragan Integrated School

Inclusive education is a basic right that aims to provide equal access to quality learning for everyone, no matter their cultural background, economic status, or location. However, Indigenous communities in the Philippines, like the Ayta Magbukun of Bataan, still encounter barriers that hinder their access to meaningful education. As a Negrito group living in Limay and nearby areas, the Ayta Magbukun have a unique linguistic, cultural, and historical identity that often goes unrecognized in mainstream educational systems. This article discusses the specific educational needs of the Ayta Magbukun and suggests ways to create a more inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment for their community.

The Ayta Magbukun are part of the Indigenous peoples of Central Luzon, with most members residing in remote sitios and mountainous regions of Limay, Mariveles, Abucay and Bagac, Bataan. Their traditional lifestyle focuses on forest-based living, strong community connections, and oral traditions. This way of life shapes their learning, communication, and relationship with the world. The Magbukun language, is mostly spoken and poorly documented, with only a few written resources available. Many Ayta Magbukun learners grow up in environments where their first language is neither Filipino nor English. This puts them at a disadvantage when they enter mainstream schools that use these national languages heavily.

Despite government efforts through the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program, various challenges remain in implementing inclusive education for the Ayta Magbukun. One of these is the Language Barrier.

Instruction often occurs in Filipino or English, which many learners do not fully understand. There are few materials available in Magbukun, and lack of IP teachers training for multilingual or mother tongue-based instruction. School content, teaching methods, and classroom structures often do not reflect or respect the experiences, values, and beliefs of Indigenous learners. Remote communities face limited access to schools. Traveling to school can involve long walks through forests or mountains, leading to low attendance or early dropout rates.

Poverty leads many Ayta Magbukun learners to contribute to family activities like gathering food. As a result, they have little time or energy for formal education. Discrimination and Marginalization: Some learners experience bullying or exclusion because of their ethnicity, language, or appearance, further discouraging their participation in school.

Educational Needs of the Ayta Magbukun Learners For education to be truly inclusive and effective, it must meet the real needs of Ayta Magbukun learners and their communities. There is a need for learning materials that reflect the Ayta Magbukun's way of life, environment, and cultural values. Lessons about farming, forest knowledge, oral history, and traditional practices that originally came from their Indigenous Knowledge System and Practices (IKSP's) should be included in school curricula. Implementing MTB-MLE using the Ayta Magbukun language as a medium of instruction in early grades can improve comprehension, confidence, and academic performance. This requires developing spelling systems, teaching guides, and storybooks in Magbukun, with the involvement of elders and local linguists. Teachers who work with Ayta Magbukun learners should be trained in Indigenous education methods. Understanding local customs, respecting community structures, and being open to dialogue with parents and elders are essential. Community Involvement Education should be a collaborative effort between schools and the Ayta community. Elders can share knowledge, help develop

learning content, and mentor learners. Their involvement supports the community's authority and builds trust in education.

Through the Department of Education's IPed Program, some schools in Bataan have begun to localize their curriculum and involve community members in lesson planning. Department of Education and educators have partnered with Ayta Magbukun elders to create bilingual storybooks that preserve oral traditions and promote literacy in Magbukun.

Support from local government and the private sector has helped address economic barriers through scholarships, food distribution, and livelihood programs for parents. While these efforts are commendable, they need to be expanded and maintained through ongoing policy support and active monitoring.

Achieving inclusive education for the Ayta Magbukun is not just about access; it is also about relevance, respect, and representation. To move forward, the following actions are recommended: Develop a community-led project to standardize the Magbukun language for use in schools. Allocate resources for creating culturally appropriate teaching materials. Establish partnerships between schools, Indigenous Peoples' Organizations (IPOs), and local governments. Monitor and evaluate inclusion efforts with input from the Ayta Magbukun community. Empower Ayta youth and parents with leadership and capacity-building programs to advocate for their educational rights.

Inclusive education is not a one-size-fits-all solution. For the Ayta Magbukun of Limay, it means building a learning environment that values their language, stories, knowledge, and identity. It involves listening to the community, including them in decisions, and reshaping the system to meet their needs. Only then can education truly serve as a tool for empowerment instead of assimilation. As we move toward inclusive

learning, we must ensure that the voices of the Ayta Magbukun are heard, respected, and uplifted.

References: