

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES EDUCATION: HONORING ROOTS, NURTURING FUTURES

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Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) is a rights-based approach designed to deliver learning aligned with Indigenous communities' distinct cultures, histories, aspirations, and needs. Unlike conventional standardized education, IPED is learner-centered, uses native languages, and anchors lessons on Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP). Policymakers and educators increasingly recognize this as critical: some 14–17 million Indigenous Filipinos belong to over 100 ethnolinguistic groups, many of whom have long struggled for self-determination. Quality education tailored to their identity is central to their empowerment.

IPED integrates IKSP across all levels—from early childhood and basic education to tertiary programs and literacy initiatives for out-of-school learners. Learning materials are developed through close collaboration with elders, community leaders, and parents to ensure cultural accuracy and relevance. Teaching in native languages and scripts makes lessons more accessible and meaningful: for example, science classes may draw on traditional ecological wisdom, while history includes oral traditions and folklore alongside documented events.

This approach fosters a strong sense of identity and belonging, helping learners take pride in their heritage while building modern skills. Schools that implement IPED consistently report lower dropout rates, as learners feel recognized rather than alienated. It also safeguards traditions at risk of being lost amid rapid modernization and equips youth to become cultural advocates who return to their communities to guide progress rooted in their own values.

Despite these benefits, meaningful implementation faces significant barriers. Many educators lack adequate training in IKSP and mother-tongue instruction, and culturally appropriate learning resources remain scarce. Success depends on genuine, sustained community participation, which is often undermined by environmental pressures, land disputes, discrimination, and the dominance of mainstream cultural norms. Remote areas also contend with poor infrastructure and uneven policy enforcement.

Legal frameworks such as the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997 and the Department of Education's IPED Policy clearly mandate culturally responsive education. Turning these policies into consistent practice requires shared commitment from government agencies, schools, and communities alike—so that every Indigenous learner may thrive while honoring the legacy of their people.

References:

<https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1997/10/29/republic-act-no-8371/>