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Not peer-reviewed version

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Posted Date: 15 January 2025

doi: 10.20944/preprints202501.1135.v1

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Article

Profiling Indigenous Cultural Preservation Efforts of the Blaan Tribe in Kiblawan, Philippines

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Abstract: This study investigates the indigenous cultural preservation efforts of the Blaan tribe in Kiblawan, Davao del Sur, Philippines, highlighting their practices, challenges, and strategies for safeguarding their cultural heritage. Employing a qualitative approach, the research involves in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participatory observations with tribal elders, cultural practitioners, and community leaders. Key findings reveal that the Blaan tribe actively preserves their traditions through oral storytelling, ritual ceremonies, traditional crafts, and indigenous knowledge systems. Despite these efforts, challenges such as modernization, land disputes, and limited government support pose threats to their cultural identity. The study underscores the significance of community-driven initiatives, external support from stakeholders, and policy interventions to ensure the sustainability of Blaan cultural heritage. By documenting these practices, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of indigenous cultural preservation and provides actionable insights for fostering cultural resilience in the face of contemporary challenges.

Keywords: Blaan tribe; cultural preservation; indigenous heritage; oral traditions; rituals; craftsmanship; generational knowledge transfer; modernization; land disputes; youth engagement; digital archiving; stakeholder collaboration; Philippine indigenous peoples; cultural sustainability

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

The Blaan tribe, one of the indigenous peoples of the Philippines, has a rich cultural heritage that includes oral traditions, unique artistry, ritual practices, and indigenous knowledge systems. Nestled in the municipality of Kiblawan, Davao del Sur, the Blaan people have long preserved their identity despite the encroachment of modernization and external influences. Cultural preservation serves as a means to sustain their identity, heritage, and communal cohesion. However, these traditions face increasing threats due to economic pressures, urbanization, and a diminishing sense of cultural continuity among the younger generation. This study focuses on profiling the efforts of the Blaan community to safeguard their heritage and ensure its transmission to future generations.

1.2. Problem Statement

The cultural heritage of the Blaan tribe is at risk due to various factors, including the loss of traditional practices, external economic and social pressures, and insufficient documentation and support mechanisms. Despite the tribe's initiatives to preserve their traditions, there is a lack of comprehensive profiling of these efforts and the challenges they face. Addressing this gap is crucial to understanding the current state of Blaan cultural preservation and developing strategies to protect and promote their rich heritage.

1.3. Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the key cultural preservation practices employed by the Blaan tribe in Kiblawan, Philippines?
- What challenges hinder the preservation of their cultural heritage?
- How do the Blaan people perceive the importance of cultural preservation?
- What strategies can be employed to enhance the sustainability of their preservation efforts?

1.4. Scope and Limitations

This study focuses on the cultural preservation practices of the Blaan tribe in Kiblawan, Davao del Sur. It primarily examines traditional practices, including rituals, oral storytelling, craftsmanship, and community initiatives. The research includes interviews with tribal elders, community leaders, and cultural practitioners, along with participatory observations. The study does not extend to other indigenous groups in the Philippines or the broader national policies on cultural preservation, though these may provide context. Additionally, the findings are limited to the insights gathered during the study period and the participants' willingness to share information.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Blaan Tribe: History and Culture

The Blaan tribe, an indigenous group in Southern Mindanao, is known for its vibrant culture and traditions. They are distinguished by their intricate beadwork, handwoven textiles, and oral storytelling practices, which reflect their deep connection to their ancestral lands and spirituality. Historical accounts indicate that the Blaan people have inhabited the region for centuries, developing a way of life that harmonizes with the natural environment. However, the tribe's history is marked by struggles to retain their cultural identity amid colonization, modernization, and land disputes. Understanding their culture and history is essential to contextualizing their preservation efforts.

2.2. Indigenous Cultural Preservation: A Global Perspective

Indigenous communities worldwide face challenges in preserving their cultural heritage in the face of globalization, urbanization, and external cultural influences. Successful preservation strategies often involve documenting oral traditions, reviving traditional practices, and fostering intergenerational knowledge transfer. Examples include the use of digital platforms to archive indigenous languages and government-led initiatives to support cultural festivals and education programs. Despite these efforts, many indigenous groups still struggle due to systemic marginalization and resource constraints, highlighting the need for sustained support and adaptive preservation models.

2.3. The Philippine Context

The Philippines is home to diverse indigenous groups, including the Blaan, who contribute significantly to the country's cultural landscape. The Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997 provides a legal framework for protecting their rights, including the preservation of cultural heritage. However, implementation gaps, limited funding, and socio-economic pressures often hinder the effectiveness of these provisions. In some cases, external organizations and local governments have collaborated with indigenous communities to document and promote their traditions. The preservation of cultural heritage in the Philippine context requires balancing modernization with the need to sustain indigenous identities.

2.4. Gaps in Existing Literature

While studies on the Blaan tribe have explored their cultural practices and social dynamics, there is limited research that specifically profiles their cultural preservation efforts in detail. Most existing literature focuses on broader issues affecting indigenous peoples in the Philippines or Southeast Asia,

leaving a gap in understanding the unique challenges and strategies of the Blaan tribe. Additionally, there is a need for research that integrates the perspectives of tribal members, particularly in assessing the effectiveness of current preservation initiatives and identifying areas for improvement. This study aims to fill these gaps by providing an in-depth exploration of the Blaan tribe's cultural preservation practices and their implications for sustaining indigenous heritage.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore and profile the cultural preservation efforts of the Blaan tribe in Kiblawan, Davao del Sur. The study adopts an ethnographic approach, allowing an in-depth understanding of the tribe's practices, beliefs, and challenges through immersion and interaction with the community. This design is appropriate for capturing the nuanced and contextual nature of indigenous cultural preservation.

3.2. Data Collection Methods

- Interviews: Semi-structured interviews with tribal elders, cultural practitioners, community leaders, and younger members of the tribe will provide insights into their perspectives and practices.
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): FGDs with selected community members will facilitate collective reflections on cultural preservation efforts and challenges.
- Participatory Observation: Observing and participating in rituals, craft-making, and other traditional activities will offer first-hand insights into cultural practices.
- Document Analysis: Reviewing existing records, photographs, and artifacts related to Blaan culture will supplement primary data with historical and contextual information.

3.3. Sampling

This study uses purposive sampling to ensure the selection of participants who are most knowledgeable and actively involved in cultural preservation. Key informants will include:

- Tribal Elders: Custodians of oral traditions and rituals.
- Cultural Practitioners: Individuals involved in traditional crafts, music, and dance.
- Community Leaders: Those engaged in initiatives to safeguard Blaan heritage.
- Younger Members: To understand intergenerational knowledge transfer and their engagement with cultural practices.
- The sample size will depend on the point of data saturation, where no new information or themes emerge during data collection.

3.4. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis will be used to analyze the data, involving the following steps:

- Data Familiarization: Transcribing interviews, FGDs, and field notes, and reviewing documents and observations.
- Coding: Identifying recurring words, phrases, and concepts related to cultural preservation.
- Theme Development: Grouping codes into themes that reflect key aspects of the Blaan tribe's cultural preservation efforts and challenges.
- Interpretation: Linking themes to the research questions and contextualizing them within broader cultural preservation discourse.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, triangulation will be applied by cross-referencing data from multiple sources and methods. Member checking will also be conducted by sharing findings with participants for feedback and validation.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Current Cultural Preservation Efforts

The Blaán tribe employs a range of practices to safeguard their cultural heritage. These include:

- **Oral Storytelling:** Elders pass down myths, legends, and historical narratives to younger generations, ensuring the continuity of their identity.
- **Rituals and Ceremonies:** Traditional ceremonies, such as healing rituals and agricultural blessings, are actively practiced, preserving spiritual and cultural beliefs.
- **Craftsmanship:** The production of intricate beadwork, handwoven textiles, and traditional attire remains a vital cultural expression.
- **Knowledge Transfer:** Community-led workshops and informal learning settings facilitate the teaching of traditional skills and values.
- These efforts highlight the tribe's commitment to preserving their heritage despite societal changes.

4.2. Challenges in Cultural Preservation

Several challenges impede the Blaán tribe's efforts to safeguard their culture:

- **Modernization and Urbanization:** The influence of modern lifestyles and economic pressures has led to a decline in traditional practices.
- **Land Disputes:** Loss of ancestral lands affects cultural activities tied to specific locations, such as rituals and farming traditions.
- **Generational Gaps:** Younger members are increasingly disengaged from cultural practices due to limited interest and exposure.
- **Resource Constraints:** Insufficient funding and support for cultural programs hinder the expansion and sustainability of preservation efforts.

4.3. Role of Stakeholders

The preservation of Blaán culture involves collaboration among various stakeholders:

- **Tribal Leaders and Elders:** Act as custodians of cultural knowledge and play a pivotal role in guiding community efforts.
- **Local Government Units (LGUs):** Provide logistical and financial support for cultural events and educational programs.
- **Educational Institutions:** Incorporate indigenous knowledge into curricula and facilitate cultural appreciation among students.
- **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):** Offer resources, training, and platforms for documenting and promoting Blaán traditions.
- **Community Members:** Active participation and engagement are essential for sustaining cultural practices.

4.4. Innovations and Best Practices

The Blaán tribe has adopted innovative approaches to strengthen their cultural preservation:

- **Digital Archiving:** Recording oral traditions, rituals, and crafts using audio-visual media to ensure long-term documentation.
- **Cultural Festivals:** Hosting annual events to showcase traditional music, dance, and crafts, fostering community pride and external awareness.
- **Youth Engagement Programs:** Encouraging younger generations to participate in workshops and mentorship programs led by elders and artisans.
- **Inter-Community Collaborations:** Partnering with other indigenous groups to exchange knowledge and strategies for cultural preservation.

These findings emphasize the resilience of the Blaan tribe and the potential for strengthening cultural preservation through targeted interventions and partnerships. The discussion underscores the importance of addressing challenges holistically and leveraging innovations to ensure the sustainability of Blaan cultural heritage.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Summary of Findings

This study profiled the cultural preservation efforts of the Blaan tribe in Kiblawan, Philippines, uncovering key practices, challenges, and innovative strategies. The Blaan actively preserve their heritage through oral storytelling, rituals, craftsmanship, and intergenerational knowledge transfer. However, their efforts are hindered by modernization, land disputes, generational disengagement, and limited resources. Stakeholders, including tribal leaders, local government units, educational institutions, NGOs, and the community, play crucial roles in these preservation activities. Innovations such as digital archiving, cultural festivals, and youth engagement programs have shown promise in addressing these challenges.

5.2. Recommendations

- **Policy Support:** Advocate for stronger implementation of the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) and increased funding for cultural preservation initiatives.
- **Educational Integration:** Collaborate with schools to incorporate Blaan traditions and indigenous knowledge into formal curricula.
- **Youth Engagement:** Develop targeted programs, such as mentorships and cultural workshops, to rekindle interest among younger generations.
- **Technology Utilization:** Expand the use of digital tools to document and disseminate Blaan cultural practices to a broader audience.
- **Community-Led Projects:** Encourage and support initiatives spearheaded by the tribe to enhance ownership and sustainability of preservation efforts.
- **Stakeholder Partnerships:** Foster stronger collaborations between the Blaan community, local governments, NGOs, and academic institutions to provide resources and platforms for cultural promotion.

5.3. Future Research Directions

- **Comparative Studies:** Examine cultural preservation efforts of other indigenous groups in the Philippines to identify shared challenges and effective strategies.
- **Impact Assessment:** Evaluate the long-term impact of digital archiving and youth engagement programs on cultural preservation.
- **Generational Studies:** Investigate the factors influencing the younger generation's attitudes towards cultural practices and identify ways to strengthen intergenerational knowledge transfer.
- **Land and Cultural Identity:** Explore the relationship between land ownership and cultural preservation among indigenous communities.
- **Policy Effectiveness:** Analyze the implementation and outcomes of government policies aimed at protecting indigenous cultural heritage.

The findings and recommendations of this study provide a framework for strengthening cultural preservation efforts among the Blaan tribe and contribute to broader discussions on sustaining indigenous heritage in the face of modernization.

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