CHALLENGES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES’ EDUCATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

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The plight to be recognized as a group that is equal in rights to the majority is as long as a lifetime for the country’s natives. Comprising a maximum of around 17 million individuals, the indigenous peoples (IPs) are still considered as the most vulnerable and marginalized group of the Philippines. While conflicts with the military and land ownership urge for solutions, indigenous peoples’ education also cries for help.

IPs at formal schooling experience scrutiny and discrimination from the majority, having to carry the stereotypes of being uncivilized, backward, or ignorant. This, along with other misfortunes, is evidence of the struggle of IPs in the modern educational setting. IPs house very diverse cultures and hence have their distinct learning and educational systems. IP education adhering to national standards is not entirely wrong. However, doing so may also equate to the gradual erasure of their identity, which they find so difficult to protect along with their territory. In example, Sitio Bendum in the Cordilleras has employed a five-year education program that integrated local culture and tradition with elementary subjects in the classroom. Unfortunately, there was a need to validate their local education with national equivalency tests, which coincided less with the community-based education system that Bendum applied.

IP education is distinguishable from the convention by the incorporation of the groups’ values, establishment of student-teacher trust, active citizenship, inclusion of indigenous knowledge, and — most importantly — a medium of instruction in their native language. Language is the indigenous peoples’ brand of identity. Bendum instructs in native language for other subjects, while English and Filipino are separately taught. This
transition may be more effective than when IPs are placed in formal schooling, where subjects are taught in either English or Filipino.

In summary, the absence of indigenous values, of knowledge on the students’ native culture, and of native language utilized in teaching prove to be hurdles to effective IP learning in a modern or formal setting. Instead of forcibly instilling concepts that are foreign to the IP student, it may be recommended to slowly transition with the aid of their native educational system.

References:

