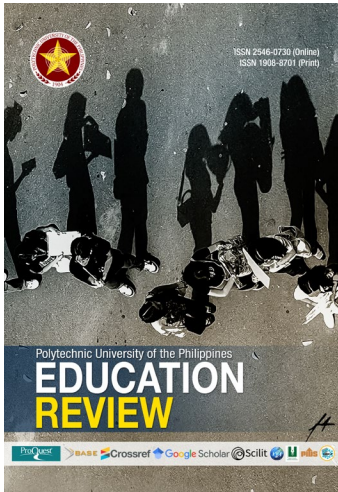




Co-Designing the “Indigenous Knowledge and Participatory Media Workshop” for Indigenous People Learners: A Reflexivity

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70922/2x8vw912>

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Other citation formats:

Article History:

Date Submitted: September 23, 2025

Date Revised: December 10, 2025

Date Accepted: June 23, 2026

How to Cite this paper:

Natano, N. M. (2026). Co-Designing the “Indigenous Knowledge and Participatory Media Workshop” for Indigenous People Learners: A Reflexivity. *Education Review*, 15(1), 35-58. <https://doi.org/>

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Abstract

This paper follows my reflexivity as a non-Indigenous researcher who co-designed the “Indigenous Knowledge and Participatory Media Workshop” with Indigenous learners in an IPEd implementing school in Tanay, Rizal, utilizing a participatory action research process. The paper states that when designing a workshop for IP learners, it is essential to employ an iterative and dialogic process. The iterative process constitutes a series of consultations (integration of dialogic process) with Indigenous People Mandatory Representatives (IPMR), IPEd teachers, and IP learners. This process avoids the imposition of enforcing a power over the decision on what culture-sensitive workshop concept should be designed for the young Indigenous peoples. The designed workshop is only tailor-fitted for the target Indigenous cultural community (ICC) among the IP learners in Tanay, Rizal; however, the designing process provides context on how to conduct a participatory process in doing action research, similar to the workshop intended for IP learners.

Keywords: *culture-sensitive workshop, indigenous knowledge, indigenous people learners, participatory media workshop*

INTRODUCTION

Co-designing the Indigenous Knowledge and Participatory Media Workshop required a deliberate negotiation between facilitating cultural knowledge transmission and ensuring that Indigenous learners’ voices shaped, rather than merely participated in, the process. For a non-Indigenous researcher, this undertaking demanded a sustained reflexivity—a critical awareness of one’s position, privilege, and responsibility in engaging with Indigenous knowledge systems. Central to this process was the ethical commitment to co-creation, where Indigenous youth were not subjects of research but collaborators in the design of a culturally responsive learning experience.

Existing scholarship on Indigenous education and participatory research has emphasized the importance of community involvement and culturally grounded pedagogy (Nakata, 2018; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). However, limited attention has been given to how Indigenous learners themselves engage in the design of learning spaces that merge traditional knowledge with digital media. Studies on participatory media often highlight

Indigenous representation and storytelling but rarely examine the formative, relational process that precedes production—the collaborative construction of the workshop itself. This gap underscores the need to foreground the design phase as an ethical and methodological site of engagement.

This paper responds to that gap by examining the question: (1) *What are the characteristics of engagement of Indigenous Peoples learners in designing the “Indigenous Knowledge and Participatory Media Workshop”?* and (2) *“How may the researcher narrate his reflexivity while engaging in the designing process of the workshop?”* These research questions situate the workshop as both a pedagogical and relational space where Indigenous youths engaged in acts of remembering, identity articulation, and co-learning through participatory media. The study is presented through the researcher’s reflexive narrative, tracing the ethical, cultural, and methodological negotiations that informed the co-design process. By articulating this reflexivity, the paper contributes to ongoing discourses on decolonizing research methodologies and underscores the value of Indigenous learners’ agency in shaping culturally relevant, participatory educational practices.

Participatory Media and Its Applications

Participatory Media traces its roots to the late 1960s when the National Film Board of Canada initiated the *Fogo Process* (Manuel et al., 2017). This early experiment in documentary filmmaking was one of the first to use media as a tool for community development and collective empowerment. It emphasized the use of participatory video for social change—deepening community engagement, uncovering hidden social dynamics, and encouraging collective action.

According to Ekström et al. (2010), Participatory Media has since evolved and been applied across multiple disciplines, including the humanities and social sciences, to explore creativity, originality, authorship, and media literacy. It has been employed to examine the dynamic relationships between media industries and consumers, fan communities, and the democratization of communication spaces. Participatory Media also serves as a catalyst for reviving the public sphere and promoting civic dialogue.

The literature identifies several manifestations of participatory media practice: storytelling (Christianson et al., 2024; Manuel et al., 2017; Savoie, 2022; Wright, 2020); audio journaling (Sawhney et al., 2018); film production (Hermann et al., 2023; Manuel et al., 2017); instructional materials (Seth & Pratap, 2020; Wright, 2020); social media sharing of videos and photos (Gwindingwe & Deity, 2018; Hernandez, 2013; Henley, 2020; Topinka, 2018); photo essays (Inamara & Thomas, 2017); community radio (Taneja, 2023); dance and folk theatre production (Onyenankaya & Salawu, 2018); and animation

(Douglas, 2024). Collectively, these studies highlight the participatory potential of media as both an expressive and pedagogical tool for communities seeking self-representation.

Participatory media has been increasingly recognized as a platform for cultural expression and identity formation. For Indigenous youth, media participation provides an avenue to reclaim narratives historically misrepresented in dominant discourses. This recognition of technology as a relational tool resonates with the emerging field of *Indigenous digital media studies*, which positions technology not as a disruptor of culture but as a new medium through which relational knowledge can be extended. It is within this framework that the current research situates the Indigenous learners’ engagement in co-designing a workshop that bridges ancestral knowledge and digital storytelling.

Decolonizing Methodologies and Reflexivity

The theoretical foundation of this study is strongly influenced by Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999) *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Smith critiques traditional research paradigms as extensions of colonial domination that have historically marginalized Indigenous knowledge systems. She asserts that research is not a neutral act but one embedded in power relations—remarking that “research is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world” (Smith 1999, 1).

Smith’s concept of *reflexivity* serves as an essential ethical practice for non-Indigenous researchers working with Indigenous communities. Reflexivity requires a critical examination of one’s positionality—acknowledging how personal identity, values, and institutional affiliations shape interactions and interpretations. Smith’s notion of *culturally safe research* calls for methods that honor Indigenous worldviews, foster mutual respect, and dismantle the “imperial gaze” (Smith 1999, 23) that objectifies Indigenous peoples.

In this study, reflexivity becomes central to understanding how Indigenous learners engage in the co-design process. The researcher’s role transitions from a facilitator of learning to a co-learner, continuously aware of power dynamics that may influence decision-making in the workshop design. Following Smith’s framework, the research privileges Indigenous voices as the primary authors of their cultural representations.

Building upon Smith’s decolonial stance, Wilson (2008) advances an *Indigenous research paradigm* rooted in relationality. He defines a paradigm as “a set of beliefs about the world and how it works,” noting that Indigenous paradigms differ fundamentally from Eurocentric frameworks such as positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and interpretivism. These differences are grounded in four interrelated aspects: ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology.

In Indigenous ontology, *reality is not an object but a process of relationships* (Wilson 2008, 73). Knowledge is relational, emerging through interconnected relationships with people, ideas, the cosmos, animals, plants, and the land. Hence, Indigenous epistemology—how knowledge is formed—is inseparable from the relationships that sustain it.

From this relational worldview arises an Indigenous axiology based on *relational accountability*. Wilson (2008, 77) asserts that “value judgments lose their meaning” in Indigenous research; what matters instead is how researchers fulfill their obligations within relationships. This means being accountable not only to participants but to all elements—human and non-human—involved in the research.

Chilisa (2012) and Smith (1999) affirm that Indigenous methodologies demand respect, reciprocity, and responsibility as guiding ethical principles. Validity and reliability are secondary to fulfilling one’s moral and relational commitments to the community. In this sense, axiology serves as the ethical backbone of Indigenous methodology, ensuring that the research process sustains rather than appropriates Indigenous knowledge.

Reflexive Application of Indigenous Paradigms in the Present Study

Guided by Wilson’s (2008) relational framework, this study adopts an Indigenous research paradigm in both design and engagement. The co-designing of the *Indigenous Knowledge and Participatory Media Workshop* exemplifies a methodological commitment to relational accountability, where the Dumagat/Remontado learners are treated as active co-creators of knowledge. Their participation in developing Indigenous media embodies an Indigenous epistemology that views knowledge as co-constructed through shared experiences and relationships.

Moreover, the engagement process reflects Indigenous axiology—valuing collaboration, co-creation, and moral responsibility over external validation. The focus is not on whether the research results are statistically significant, but on whether the relationships built throughout the process honor Indigenous values of respect, reciprocity, and collective ownership.

This reflexive integration of Indigenous ontology and participatory media transforms digital tools into what may be termed *relational artifacts*—mediums through which Indigenous learners document their relationships with their environment, community, and heritage. Technology thus becomes a conduit of relational knowledge rather than a foreign imposition, aligning with the ontological stance that knowledge is alive and interdependent.

Taken together, these bodies of literature and theoretical perspectives articulate a coherent foundation for examining *the characteristics of engagement of Indigenous Peoples learners in designing the “Indigenous Knowledge and Participatory Media Workshop.”* Participatory media provides the methodological entry point, decolonizing methodologies offer the ethical framework, and Indigenous paradigms furnish the epistemological and ontological grounding. The intersection of these concepts situates Indigenous learners’ engagement as both a relational and reflexive process. It is through this lens that the study explores how Indigenous youth, through co-design and participatory media, express their agency, negotiate cultural continuity, and reimagine their indigeneity in a digital age.

METHODOLOGY

This paper utilized a Participatory Action Research, which is one of the frameworks under the Participatory Research. Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) described that Participatory Research is a research-to-action approach that emphasizes direct engagement of local priorities and perspectives. Cargo and Mercer (2008) cited that PR can be defined as an umbrella term for research designs, methods, and frameworks that use systematic inquiry in direct collaboration with those affected by the issue being studied for the purpose of action or change.

Participatory Action Research (PAR), according to several authors (Baum et al., 2006; Chevalier & Buckles, 2019; Ozer, 2017), combines participation and action to understand and address societal issues. It also emphasizes democratic processes in participation with others rather than research for research’s sake, conducted on people/communities. More so, PAR fosters a sense of agency, recognizing the community to shape the research agenda and identify solutions that are relevant to their needs.

Whenever we are talking “participation” and “action” in relation to research, it is not the researcher who is imposing the “action” on the community; it should be the community who should be deciding to the “action” needed. The role of the researcher is to facilitate the participation as an outsider, and let the community to perform and decide on their own, while conducting several strategies to conduct PAR, which I will be discussing in the results and discussion of this paper.

This idea is in connection with what Wilson (2008) emphasized, that the nature of PAR is its “social action component” (p. 16). This is apparent in the discussion of Chilisa (2012) about action research that it is a “process of doing, reflecting on the action, drawing conclusions, and then reflecting again on the process... requires a continuous cycle of practice and reflection based on real life experience” (p. 191).

Conducting participatory research with Indigenous peoples presents several key challenges that can hinder the effectiveness and authenticity of the research process.

Historically, research involving Indigenous communities has often been characterized by significant power imbalances where Indigenous peoples are positioned as passive subjects rather than active participants (Nadeau et al., 2022). This legacy of oppression can lead to mistrust and reluctance to engage in research initiatives, complicating the establishment of genuine partnerships.

Roos (2024) stated that engaging Indigenous Peoples in research projects can be challenging, especially if there is a history of negative experiences with previous research efforts. Many Indigenous communities may have faced extractive research practices, where researchers collect data without providing tangible benefits or feedback to the community. This can result in skepticism and reluctance to participate in new projects.

Structural barriers, such as limited resources, funding constraints, and rigid institutional frameworks, can impede the implementation of participatory research. These barriers may restrict the time available for building trust and meaningful participation, which are crucial for successful collaborative research (Nadeau, 2022).

Following a focus-group discussion, a total of 60 participants were involved in the study. The participants who participated in the co-designing were the selected Dumagat/Remontado youth, enrolled at Tanay-Sampaloc Integrated National High School, located in Sampaloc, Tanay, Rizal. These individuals represented a significant portion of the Indigenous population in the area, and their active involvement was vital to the goals of this research. Based on the profiling of the learners, most of them have high engagement in utilizing communication technology. They acknowledged that mobile technologies can have negative and positive effects on their community. But highlighting the positive effects of mobile technologies, they emphasized that this communication technology can be useful in disseminating their culture and tradition if it is used properly. Other individuals involved in the participatory process include four (4) teachers and their principal, involved in IPEd implementation in the target school, one of the chieftains from Laiban, Tanay, Rizal, who participated and selected adult IPs from the community.

Ethical dilemmas often arise in participatory research, particularly concerning the ownership of knowledge and the benefits derived from research outcomes. Researchers may face conflicting obligations to their funding bodies and the Indigenous communities they work with, complicating accountability and ethical decision-making.

Language differences can pose significant obstacles in participatory research, affecting the clarity of communication and the ability to engage effectively with community members (Roos, 2024). Miscommunication can lead to misunderstandings about the research process and its implications.

There may be a mismatch between the research interests of external researchers and the needs or priorities of Indigenous communities. If the research is perceived as irrelevant or disconnected from local issues, community engagement may suffer, and the research may not yield meaningful outcomes (Roos & Reccius, 2024).

To adopt a reflexive and culturally sensitive approach when engaging with Indigenous communities, researchers should highlight that participatory research genuinely reflects the voices and priorities of those involved.

Ethical Consideration

The development of the Indigenous Knowledge and Participatory Media Workshop was grounded in a culturally sensitive process that acknowledged both institutional and community protocols governing research with Indigenous Peoples. Prior to the conduct of the workshop, a consultation was held with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), the mandated body that ensures the protection of Indigenous cultural rights and interests in the Philippines. In this consultation, the researcher was advised that the activity qualified as a form of “service learning,” primarily educational in nature and oriented toward community capacity building rather than extractive research. To formalize this understanding and ensure accountability, a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the NCIP and the University was considered and executed. This agreement provided the institutional and ethical framework through which the workshop was conducted, affirming the collaborative nature of the initiative. Additionally, parental consent forms were secured from participating Indigenous learners, ensuring transparency and voluntary participation at the individual level.

It must also be emphasized that the scope of this study is limited to the design of the Indigenous Knowledge and Participatory Media Workshop, which primarily focused on exploring the dynamics and characteristics of engagement among Indigenous learners during the co-design process. The study did not involve the documentation, representation, or dissemination of cultural materials—activities that fall within the domain of cultural documentation research and would therefore require a separate ethical process involving collective consent and further community validation.

Within this bounded scope, the engagement of Indigenous learners was characterized by dialogic collaboration, reflective participation, and mutual respect for Indigenous pedagogical values. The participatory design sessions were structured to foreground the learners’ voices, allowing them to articulate how indigenous knowledge systems could be meaningfully integrated with contemporary digital tools. This engagement process reflected a relational ethic that aligns with Indigenous methodologies, emphasizing co-learning and reciprocity rather than data extraction or representation.

Furthermore, the reflexive stance of the researcher served as a methodological safeguard, ensuring that the positionality of the researcher—as an academic partner and facilitator—was constantly examined in light of Indigenous epistemological and ethical expectations. The use of reflexivity as a narrative tool in this study underscores the researcher’s accountability to both institutional protocols and Indigenous relational ethics, providing a transparent account of the workshop’s design process.

In essence, the ethical grounding of the study, while not operating under a formal FPIC framework, was anchored on institutional collaboration with the NCIP, informed parental consent, and the ethical principles of relational accountability and respect for Indigenous autonomy. This framework ensured that the engagement of Indigenous learners in designing the workshop was both culturally responsive and methodologically sound, consistent with the values of participatory and Indigenous research paradigms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion below present the thematic presentation of the consultation, reflecting the characteristics of engagement of Indigenous Peoples learners in co-designing the “Indigenous Knowledge and Participatory Media Workshop”:

Reflexive Positionality and the Ethical Tensions of Engagement

The development of the *Indigenous Knowledge and Participatory Media Workshop* was rooted in a deeply reflexive process that acknowledged the researcher’s positionality outside the Indigenous lifeworld of the Dumagat/Remontado communities. The consultation phase was characterized by continuous self-interrogation and awareness of potential extractivist tendencies, as the researcher critically examined whether the process of co-designing the workshop risked reproducing colonial power relations. Reflexivity became the foundation of engagement, allowing ethical awareness to guide methodological decisions.

This reflexive stance shaped the interaction between the researcher and the community, especially when discomfort arose over questions of authority—specifically, who should determine the content of the workshop. The recognition that Indigenous participants held the moral and epistemological authority to validate or contest topics marked an early form of participatory engagement. The researcher’s positional reflection thus functioned as both a methodological checkpoint and an ethical compass that steered the workshop away from prescriptive academic designs and toward an Indigenous-centered, relational approach.

This feeling of discomfort led the researcher to contemplate the critical contrast between theoretical knowledge and ethical practice, aligning with Indigenous epistemological values. In the course of reflection, it became evident that assumptions long held as correct required deeper scrutiny. It cannot be avoided that many researchers or community workers engaging in projects with Indigenous cultural communities may lack a comprehensive understanding of *Indigenous Studies* and *Indigenous Research Methodologies*. Even the researcher, himself, was once confused about the field he is pursuing because of the delicate approach of this field. While theoretical grounding is essential, genuine respect for Indigenous participants is not solely measured by the sophistication of one’s research framework. Rather, it is reflected in the ethical and relational dimensions of the research process—seeking informed consent, ensuring that Indigenous participants retain ownership over the research outputs, and, above all, honoring the relationship built with them throughout the inquiry.

In the process of designing the workshop, the researcher is grounded in the fact that the participants in the project held the power to validate or contest the topics presented, including the workshop’s format, its institutional affiliations, and its academic objectives. Undeniably, the design of the workshop can be influenced by my position within the university, which may not be aligned with Indigenous ways of knowing, learning, and communicating. While the structure of the workshop was explicitly guided by participatory frameworks, a critical question inevitably emerged: *How participatory is this engagement, really?* In the initial planning stages, this led to a moment of significant hesitation as the researcher was confronted a fundamental dilemma: *Who should have the authority to determine the topics to be discussed and transmitted in the workshop?*

Dialogic Consultation as a Process of Relationship-Building

There is a researcher’s self-awareness that introducing topics based solely on his assumptions would risk re-enacting colonial modalities of knowledge production, in which Indigenous communities are rendered as objects of research rather than active subjects and authors of their own narratives. Thus, rather than unilaterally selecting topics that are presumed to be important, the researcher sought to engage the IP youth, a chieftain/IP Mandatory Representative (IPMR), and Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) teachers in the process of collaborative topic identification.

The process of topic selection was both *iterative* and *dialogic*. It is *iterative*, considering that a series of consultations were followed to arrive at the outline of topics to be included in the series of workshops. It is *dialogic* because of the process of conversing with the participants involved in designing the workshop.

Initial consultations were held with the tribal chieftain or Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative (IPMR), whose insights ensured that the proposed topics remained grounded in customary knowledge, ritual practices, and lived experience. During casual community visits, the researcher conversed with the chieftain regarding the topics that needed to be taught among the Indigenous youth. The chieftain observed that many of the young people today are no longer aware of their own culture. Several traditional practices are no longer observed within the community. She emphasized the timeliness and necessity of initiating an activity—such as the proposed community project—that would reintroduce and strengthen these cultural traditions. She mentioned specific examples, including rituals of wedding and courtship, as well as farming and fishing practices, that have largely disappeared. Moreover, she expressed concern that the youth have lost pride in their physical appearance, which she regarded as reflective of a deeper disconnection from cultural identity. This conversation provided the researcher with essential guidance in outlining possible topics during the design phase of the community project.

These discussions were further enriched through engagements with Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) teachers at Tanay-Sampaloc Integrated National High School. The researcher and the research team have maintained a long-standing partnership with the said school since 2018. The institution has become a learning hub for the implementation of various IP-related initiatives. Some of its teachers have also volunteered as educators in literacy and livelihood programs for the Dumagat/Remontado communities in Tanay, Rizal. Their extensive experience with Indigenous learners allowed the research team to identify specific educational needs and cultural aspirations among the youth. The researcher presented the initial activities designed based on the IPMR’s recommendations. The teachers affirmed the IPMR’s observation regarding the youth’s diminishing interest in their culture and their lack of confidence in expressing ethnic pride. From these shared insights, topics such as personality development and the culture and traditions of the Dumagat/Remontado emerged as central components to be included in the workshop.

An orientation session with the youth participants was subsequently conducted, during which the preliminary list of topics was presented not as a fixed curriculum but as a flexible and revisable framework for collective discussion. Participants were encouraged to critique, modify, or add to the proposed topics. This dialogic engagement affirmed their agency and ensured that the selected themes reflected both ancestral traditions and the youths’ contemporary concerns regarding identity, community, and continuity.

Based on the initial empirical findings, the study focused on three interrelated domains: digital access, technological engagement, and cultural impacts. The findings from the empirical data gathering at the IPEd-implementing school in Tanay, Rizal, deepened the researcher’s understanding of the lived experiences of young Dumagat/Remontado learners with respect to mobile technology. As the researcher examined their

patterns of technology use, the complexity of their engagement with digital tools became increasingly apparent. This realization became pivotal in conceptualizing the Indigenous Knowledge and Participatory Media Workshop, which was envisioned not merely as an educational activity but as a culturally responsive and dialogic space co-developed with and for Indigenous learners.

The findings also revealed that mobile technology functions as more than a communication device for these young learners—it serves as a relational tool. They use it to sustain emotional ties with family members, access school-related materials, and engage with the broader world through social media. However, it is also used for entertainment and escapism. While this highlights the functional role of technology in their daily lives, it also exposes the absence of structured, creative, and culturally grounded digital activities. This understanding prompted the researcher to conceptualize the workshop as a venue where mobile phones could be reoriented from tools of consumption toward instruments of cultural expression and participatory storytelling.

Another salient aspect of the findings was the learners’ concern about the cultural implications of technology use. While some expressed optimism that social media could serve as a platform for promoting their culture, others feared that it might contribute to the erosion of traditional practices, the widening of generational gaps, and the weakening of community bonds. These concerns were not viewed as mere critiques but as valuable invitations for reflection. They encouraged the researcher to design the workshop around participation, positioning the youth not as passive recipients of knowledge but as co-creators of the learning process. It became evident that the most ethical and effective way to develop the workshop was through a participatory approach, wherein the learners’ insights, preferences, and aspirations actively shaped its content, tools, and outcomes.

Thus, this empirical phase transcended data collection; it became a moment of deep learning and mutual reflection. The narratives and perspectives shared by the Indigenous youth formed the conceptual backbone of the workshop. Their voices underscored the necessity of a culturally rooted, technologically engaged, and ethically grounded intervention. In this regard, the findings did not merely support the rationale for the workshop—they became integral to the participatory process of its design. This reinforced the researcher’s commitment to conducting research that is not only about Indigenous communities but meaningfully done with and for them.

The empirical findings further supported the objective of integrating mobile technology into the pre-determined topics. However, the question of whether these topics genuinely reflected the interests of the youth or aligned more closely with institutional agendas remained complex. Many of the themes—such as rituals, oral narratives, ecological knowledge, and traditional practices—emerged from community consultations and youth engagement.

Nevertheless, it also became apparent that certain topics may have been prioritized or elevated in response to institutional expectations, particularly those promoting cultural documentation and heritage awareness. This tension required the researcher to engage in a deeper form of reflexivity: *Were researchers and educators unconsciously reproducing a static and romanticized vision of indigeneity by steering youth toward “remembering” what has supposedly been forgotten? Or were they responding to a genuine intergenerational desire to reconnect with endangered cultural practices?*

The researcher acknowledged that the very act of framing the workshop around “indigenous knowledge” presupposes that the young participants are passive inheritors of ancestral memory rather than active cultural agents negotiating their place within modernity, digital spaces, and communal life. Hence, the workshop was intentionally designed to remain open-ended—allowing space for both remembrance and reinvention.

Youth’s Engagement as Dialogic and Passive

The researcher’s experience in engaging with Indigenous learners during the consultation on the proposed topic outline of the workshop resulted in a notably passive interaction. Although the students did not verbally express their thoughts, their subtle nuances suggested a lack of interest in sharing their perspectives. Such observed behavior served as an initial indicator of their discomfort with the process. This disengagement became particularly apparent when some participants responded with hesitation, uncertainty, or avoidance when asked to reflect on traditional practices. The affective hesitance may also have stemmed from feelings of self-consciousness regarding their physical appearance or their association with the “bukid” (upland) lifestyle. Moreover, the researcher’s presence as a newcomer to the group further contributed to their reluctance to share insights about the planning of topics for the project.

These attitudes mirror broader societal narratives that often frame indigeneity as backward—a perspective that the workshop itself sought to confront and deconstruct. This encounter proved instructive for the researcher, who realized that when dealing with younger participants, it is essential to foster familiarity and trust through a series of interactions rather than relying on a single meeting. The process, therefore, must be iterative, allowing rapport to develop gradually. When initial attempts to elicit participant input proved unproductive, the researcher sought assistance from their teachers, who voluntarily helped facilitate the consultation period and mediate communication.

Chilisa (2012) underscores that research involving Indigenous peoples must be situated within decolonizing frameworks. She outlines two primary approaches to decolonizing action research. The first emphasizes participants as co-researchers, whose involvement extends to assisting with research questions, designing methodologies,

analyzing data, co-authoring research papers, and disseminating results (Chilisa 2012, 193). The second approach, known as transformative participatory action research, integrates the participant-as-co-researcher model with an explicit focus on personal and social transformation. Central to this approach is the active and purposeful engagement of both researchers and participants, who collectively take political and social action (Chilisa 2012, 197).

More so, the researcher deepened understanding and learning by initiating a participatory process centered on the collaborative development of Indigenous media. This participatory process promoted community ownership of both the research and its outcomes. Correspondingly, the research involved training Indigenous Cultural Communities (ICCs) to document and package their own Indigenous Knowledge. In alignment with the principles of cultural sensitivity and respect, the researcher demonstrated a willingness to listen to and learn from Indigenous participants. Accordingly, the presentation of ideas concerning Indigenous media was delivered in culturally appropriate ways, incorporating visual materials to foster more active participation. As part of the data-gathering process, the research employed multiple participatory methods, such as consultations on seminar-workshop content and the interactive processing of ideas between sessions, ensuring that the process remained dialogic and inclusive.

Smith (1999) further emphasized that one of the most significant pathways for advancing the Indigenous research agenda lies “through community action projects” (124). Within this context, community-based projects are typically designed, funded, and managed by researchers trained in specific disciplinary or methodological frameworks, often affiliated with academic or research institutions (Smith 1999). This observation underscores the crucial role of university-based researchers who, guided by the principles of academic freedom, are positioned to validate, support, and promote innovative approaches that prioritize community involvement and self-determination.

Furthermore, Smith explained that defining “community research” is as complex as defining “community” itself. The term *community* often denotes a personal, human, and self-defined space within research, whereas *field* refers to a more external and detached setting where people may or may not participate. Building on this distinction, Smith characterized *community action research* as a cooperative mode of inquiry that equips people with the tools and confidence to take organized action toward addressing particular social concerns. In parallel with this conceptualization, the current research aligns closely with the principles of Participatory Media, as its purpose in organizing a community-based activity for the development of Indigenous media was to provide Indigenous communities with a venue to reflect on their lived experiences, articulate their own questions and priorities, and cultivate skills and sensibilities that could either advance or challenge the trajectory of community-based initiatives.

Relational and Cultural Reflexivity in Topic Formation

The engagement of Indigenous learners was mediated through a collaborative process of co-deciding the topics and content of the workshop. The participants—both elders and youth—contributed themes that bridged traditional knowledge with contemporary digital practices. While the Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative (IPMR) emphasized the revitalization of fading traditions, the youth expressed interests aligned with technology, particularly in the use of mobile devices for storytelling. Reflexively, the researcher navigated the tension between cultural preservation and institutional expectations of “heritage documentation.” This reflexive stance highlighted the ambivalence between addressing community aspirations and avoiding the romanticization of indigeneity.

The engagement of Indigenous learners thus emerged as both dialogic and negotiated—an encounter between ancestral continuity and youthful reinvention. Their participation did not merely replicate traditional forms but reinterpreted them through their lived experiences with technology. Moreover, this process stemmed from a critical interrogation of the researcher’s positionality and the inherent limitations of institutional frameworks, leading to an intentional shift from a top-down mode of content delivery toward a participatory, co-constructed process. Drawing insights from empirical findings and community consultations with Indigenous youth, the IPMR, and Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) teachers, the design of the workshop evolved through iterative dialogues that honored both ancestral knowledge and contemporary realities.

By engaging with the tensions between cultural preservation and digital participation, the emerging framework ensured that the workshop would not merely serve as a conduit for transmitting Indigenous knowledge but would also recognize Indigenous youth as active cultural agents navigating modernity. Consequently, the workshop became a space for ethical engagement and collaborative meaning-making, wherein Indigenous epistemologies shaped both the form and content of the learning experience.

The insights gathered from these consultations were not treated as background data but were actively integrated into the final design of the workshop modules. For instance, the recurring expressions of unfamiliarity with rituals—such as wedding practices, agricultural cycles, and courtship traditions—prompted the inclusion of topics on cultural practices. Meanwhile, the participants’ strong interest in mobile-based content creation informed the addition of sessions on video production. Furthermore, many participants conveyed discomfort or insecurity about being publicly identified as Dumagat/Remontado, particularly in relation to their skin tone or speech mannerisms. This candid admission reinforced the inclusion of topics centered on understanding the self, specifically through personal narrative building as a way of reclaiming pride in indigeneity.

To maintain relational accountability, the draft of the workshop framework—now integrating the learners’ inputs—was presented to both the IPed teachers and the IPMR. Their feedback ensured that while the workshop reflected the interests of the youth, it remained grounded in cultural protocol and epistemological integrity. This collaborative exchange created an intergenerational validation loop that affirmed the voices of Indigenous youth without detaching them from customary knowledge systems. With this framework in place, the topics were ultimately finalized not as a prescriptive syllabus but as a community-articulated response to shared needs and aspirations.

Negotiating Participation—Between Tokenism and Genuine Co-Authorship

Based on the researcher’s experience, while the workshop aimed to foster participatory co-design, underlying power asymmetries persisted. As reflected in the shared narratives of those involved in the iterative process, the sessions provided opportunities for expression and co-decision-making. The participatory media workshop, which engaged Dumagat/Remontado youth aged 12 to 22 years old, offered meaningful avenues for Indigenous self-expression. However, when examined critically, the project revealed complex tensions between tokenistic inclusion and genuine youth-led participation.

Although the youth contributed to the production of cultural content through video documentation, it may be argued that the overall structure, decision-making, and facilitation were largely adult-directed. These concerns center on the extent of control and authorship that participants truly exercised. Despite prior consultations with elders and IPed teachers, the youth were involved in the process only after the agenda had been drafted. This situation raises questions regarding *tokenism* versus *authentic youth-led engagement*.

Tokenism in youth participation refers to the superficial inclusion of young people without genuinely acknowledging their agency or sharing decision-making authority. Such involvement often results in youth feeling voiceless, uninformed, and excluded from meaningful participation, where engagement becomes symbolic rather than transformative. In contrast, genuine youth-led engagement requires power-sharing, transparency, and accountability, ensuring that youth contributions significantly influence outcomes. While tokenistic participation allows expression, it often excludes youth from actual decision-making—granting them a voice but not a seat at the table. Real youth-led engagement, therefore, entails shared decision-making and meaningful influence over processes and outcomes.

Although culturally sensitive and well-intentioned, the facilitator-researcher acknowledged occupying a position of authority that inevitably shaped the parameters of

youth expression. Drawing on Roger Hart’s (1992) ladder of participation, the Indigenous youths in this project appeared to occupy a mid-level position, possibly as “consulted and informed” or “assigned but informed,” rather than as initiators of the process. Lundy (2018) provides nuance to this concern by suggesting that certain forms of tokenism may serve as necessary preliminary steps toward deeper participation. From this perspective, the workshop may be viewed as a formative space where Indigenous youths begin developing their voices and agency, even if they have not yet assumed full leadership of the process.

Nevertheless, Charteris and Smardon (2018) caution against partial or transitional forms of participation, emphasizing that youth’s voice often becomes instrumentalized to advance adult or institutional agendas rather than transform power relations. While the workshop avoided the most superficial forms of tokenism, it still fell short of achieving full youth-led authorship. It represents an important beginning—particularly in communities where youth participation has historically been limited—yet it also signals the need for future iterations that further share control, co-design processes, and empower Indigenous youth to take the lead in telling their own stories in their own ways.

Despite the facilitator-researcher’s sincere intention to act in solidarity, positionality remained a critical factor. As an adult, academic, and often an outsider to the Indigenous community, the researcher occupied a position of power that complicated the project’s claim to “community-authored knowledge production.” While the outputs, such as the video documentation, were created by the Indigenous youths, the conditions of their creation—including materials, prompts, and timelines—were shaped by a non-Indigenous system of knowledge validation. Thus, the video documentation, though participatory in intent, was not exempt from hegemonic codes of representation or from the power asymmetries that inevitably characterize pedagogical encounters between adult facilitators and minor Indigenous learners.

Ultimately, the facilitator-researcher, despite acting with cultural sensitivity and genuine collaboration, remained an external figure whose positionality inevitably shaped the learning ecology. This positionality could not be neutralized, even with prior familiarity with the community or an understanding of Indigenous contexts at the national level.

Relational Accountability and Ownership of Knowledge Production

The consultations also surfaced critical concerns regarding the ownership and representation of cultural outputs. The production of videos, narratives, and photographs by Indigenous learners raised important questions about intellectual property and cultural authority. *Who owns the output? What protocols govern its distribution or publication?* While the sessions aimed to promote cultural documentation, they simultaneously

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opened potential spaces for commodification, misinterpretation, or appropriation. In the absence of a clear community-led framework on cultural intellectual property, such risks may persist despite the participatory intention.

Reflexively, the researcher acknowledged the ethical tension between documentation as a form of empowerment and as a potential site of commodification. This recognition prompted the inclusion of community discussions on cultural protocols to ensure that engagement was guided by collective consent and relational accountability.

This ethical reflexivity resonates with Wilson’s (2008) Indigenous axiology, which emphasizes that research validity is not determined by accuracy but by the fulfillment of obligations within relationships. The Indigenous learners’ engagement, in this regard, extended beyond participation in workshops; it encompassed their role as custodians of the cultural materials they produced. Their participation thus became a moral practice—one that embodies respect, reciprocity, and responsibility toward their community.

To address possible critiques of the participatory process, the researcher observed that the participants’ age range of 12 to 22 years old presented certain pedagogical challenges. Drawing on Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, younger participants required more scaffolding and adult support as they demonstrated varying levels of readiness for complex critical reflection. This underscores the importance of involving individuals who can share cultural knowledge with the youth while also cultivating their skills in video documentation.

The intergenerational context of knowledge transfer, as seen in the Indigenous youths’ initiatives to engage with their elders, emerged as a crucial factor underscoring the significance of elder guidance. Each session was designed to foster the youth’s development through skill-building activities. Although this objective could imply a deficit in the youth’s capacities, it nonetheless recognized their pre-existing knowledge and competencies. Moreover, the instruction of digital tools such as videography and photography, while beneficial, risked unintentionally reinforcing dominant media aesthetics and narrative structures.

Collectively, the sessions represented a significant pedagogical intervention aimed at bridging Indigenous knowledge systems and technological mediation. They functioned not only as technical workshops but also as epistemological encounters between oral and visual traditions—between ancestral knowledge and contemporary digital tools.

Indigenous Knowledge and Participatory Media Workshop Topic Outline

Following the *iterative process*, a series of consultations among the IP Mandatory Representatives, IPED teachers, and target students were conducted to finalize the topic

outline. The topics are categorized into two main topics: Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices and Media Production. This is presented as follows:

Part 1: Indigenous Knowledge

- A. **Ako Bilang Isang Katutubo:** This session tackles among the Indigenous youths the importance of self-acceptance, and cultural roles and responsibilities.
- B. **Kabuhayan ng mga Katutubo:** This session introduces among the Indigenous youths the different sources of livelihoods by cultivating the land and soil, and obtaining food from the river.
- C. **Nakagisnang Kasanayan ng mga Katutubo:** This session among the Indigenous youths is about the material culture and various cultural practices, including courtship, marriage, filial piety, sacred and spiritual knowledge, and traditional medicine and healing practices, among others.
- D. **Kahalagahan at Kaugnayan ng mga Katutubo sa Kalikasan:** This session tackles the Indigenous youths about the ecological knowledge and resource management grounded on their Indigenous ways of knowing, and their roles in mitigating climate change and other natural disasters.
- E. **Mga Katutubong Laro:** This session introduces the Indigenous youths to the different traditional games such as sikli, mali, lawin-lawinan, and arambitan, among others.

Part 2: Participatory Media Workshop

- A. **Story Writing Development:** This session introduces the Indigenous youths to the basics of how to conceptualize a story based on the knowledge they gained from the sessions in Indigenous Knowledges.
- B. **Mobile Videography and Photography:** This session introduces the fundamentals of mobile videography and photography, specifically on the elements of video/photograph, camera angling, basic shots, and process shots.
- C. **Basic Scriptwriting:** This session introduces the Indigenous youths to how to write a script for a video material following the basic scriptwriting format.

Proposed Plan of Activities

This matrix outlines the proposed implementation plan for organizing Indigenous Knowledge and Participatory Media Workshops in other IPEd Implementing Schools in the Province of Rizal. It includes planned activities, persons involved, and success indicators, with a specific focus on engaging Indigenous youth in using mobile technology to document Indigenous Knowledge.

Planned Activities	Persons Involved	Success Indicators
Community Consultation and Partnership Building (Dialogue with community elders, leaders, and LGUs to secure consent and partnership)	Project team, Indigenous leaders, Elders, IPMRs, NCIP representatives, LGU officials	• MOUs signed with at least 3 IPEd Implementing Schools • Positive reception from elders and leaders • Community consent obtained
Identification and Mobilization of Indigenous Youth Participants (Selection of youth participants with community endorsement)	Youth organizations, Barangay IP focal persons, IP elders, NCIP, community facilitators	• At least 20 youth participants per community were identified • Gender-inclusive and representative participation
Capacity-Building Orientation for Project Facilitators (Preparation of facilitators on participatory Indigenous research and cultural sensitivity)	Project staff, cultural researchers, media educators, IP rights advocates	• Facilitators trained and evaluated • Orientation module developed and utilized.
Design and Customization of Workshop Modules (Adaptation of IK documentation tools and media production lessons to each community’s context)	Curriculum designers, Indigenous scholars, cultural workers	• Module localized for each ICC • Modules reviewed and approved by IP elders
Conduct of Indigenous Knowledge and Participatory Media Workshop (Three-day intensive workshop per community integrating IK sharing and mobile media production)	Project facilitators, youth participants, elders (as resource persons), cultural practitioners	• Successful conduct of at least 3 workshops • 90% participant attendance rate • Participant satisfaction survey conducted
Mobile Documentation Activity (Youth-led documentation of Indigenous Knowledge using smartphones)	Indigenous youth, mentors, and elders	• At least 3 cultural knowledge outputs (videos, photos, stories) per participant • Ethical consent documentation completed

Planned Activities	Persons Involved	Success Indicators
Digital Exhibition and Community Presentation (Showcasing of Indigenous media outputs through a community screening and discussion)	Youth participants, families, community leaders, educators, and LGU representatives	• 3 exhibitions conducted • Increased community pride and awareness observed • Qualitative feedback gathered
Evaluation and Reflection Session (Facilitated group reflection and feedback on the process and outcomes)	Youth participants, elders, project team	• Narrative reflections gathered • Assessment report written • Lessons learned documented
Dissemination and Policy Advocacy (Presentation of project results to stakeholders for potential institutionalization)	Project team, NCIP, DepEd IPED coordinators, LGUs, NGOs	• Policy brief or documentation toolkit produced • Stakeholder forum conducted • Interest in scale-up documented

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the development of the workshop, the researcher positioned himself as a non-Indigenous collaborator. His role was not to *lead but to listen, not to dictate but to engage in dialogue, and not to presume relevance but to facilitate meaningful participation.*

The co-designed *Indigenous Knowledge and Participatory Media Workshop* adopted a culturally sensitive and youth-appropriate facilitation approach, wherein Indigenous learners were not interrogated but rather invited to reflect, collaborate, and co-envision. The developed workshop was not designed for universal application across all Indigenous Cultural Communities (ICCs); rather, it was specifically tailored to the context and cultural dynamics of the communities in Tanay, Rizal. Nonetheless, other researchers may examine how the workshop was co-designed to identify adaptable principles suitable for their respective ICCs.

For future researchers pursuing similar studies, it is essential to ensure that engagement transcends mere participation. A more grounded application of participatory media principles must be emphasized. One viable approach is the establishment of a community-based steering committee composed of youth representatives, elders, and educators, who would co-design not only the content but also the structure and objectives of subsequent workshops. Another strategy involves embedding reflexivity in the development of workshop topics by allocating opportunities for participants to critique the process, articulate their discomforts, and propose alternative methods or themes.

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Furthermore, it is recommended that the developed workshop, once implemented, be subjected to a systematic evaluation to assess its effectiveness, cultural responsiveness, and impact on Indigenous learners’ engagement and knowledge-sharing practices. Such evaluation would ensure the workshop’s continued refinement and relevance to the evolving needs of Indigenous communities.

STATEMENTS AND DECLARATIONS

1. **Funding details.** This research is personally funded by the researcher.
2. **Disclosure statement.** The author reports that there are no competing interests to declare.
3. **Ethical Approval:** Informed consent from the research participants’ parents was obtained prior to the conduct of the research. A memorandum of agreement was also initiated between NCIP-Regional Office and the University since the activity is for the purpose of “service learning,” not on Indigenous Knowledge.
4. **Declaration of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Scientific Writing.** The author/s used Grammarly to improve the grammar corrections of this research; Perplexity AI, Research Rabbit, and Consensus to identify related literature and studies; and ChatGPT to formulate an outline of the discussion and refinement of grammar. However, the author affirms his responsibility for the accuracy of the whole manuscript.
5. **Acknowledgment.** The researcher wishes to acknowledge the Ph.D. in Indigenous Studies Program of the University of the Philippines-Baguio for providing the researcher the opportunity to explore this research topic, and to the University of Rizal System for granting his scholarship to pursue his post-doctoral studies.

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