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THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF DIBABAWON TRIBE ON INTERACTION WITH MODERNIZATION, AND ON CULTURAL EROSION AND RESILIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous cultural erosion had become an alarming global concern. This study explored the lived experiences of the Dibabawon tribe and examined how modernization had altered their cultural identity. The research was conducted in Laak, Davao de Oro, and involved 12 selected individuals aged between 30 and 60 years. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD). Thematic analysis revealed three major themes: modernization as a structural determinant of social change, interaction with modernization as a process and mechanism of social change, and cultural erosion as a direction and consequence of social change. These themes yielded six, five, and six subthemes, respectively. An additional emerging theme – cultural resilience and adaptation strategies in response to social change – also surfaced, comprising four subthemes. The study recommended conducting regression analysis to assess how modernization and cultural resilience predicted cultural erosion, using its subthemes as observable indicators. Furthermore, mediation analysis was suggested to explore whether cultural resilience mediated the relationship between modernization and cultural erosion.

KEYWORDS: *The Lived Experience of Dibabawon Tribe; Interaction with Modernization; Cultural Erosion; Cultural Resilience; Adaptation Strategies*

1. INTRODUCTION

In this technology-driven world, modernization has continually eroded cultural values and ethnic traditions, especially those of indigenous people (Aleria, 2020; Oko & Ogbodo, 2022). As a member of the Dibabawon tribe, this issue is particularly personal to me as I have seen how these changes impact our community, slowly undermining our cultural integrity due to global influences and technological advancements. I have observed that most of the Dibabawon youth have gradually distanced themselves from our traditional customs and practices, choosing instead to adopt modern lifestyles influenced by digital media and global trends. The elders in the community express concern about this growing disconnect, as fewer young people are interested in learning our native language, traditional arts, and ceremonies that have long defined our identity as Dibabawon. Mishra and Satpathy (2020) agree with this and say that the fast effects of globalization and modernization are making tribal stories less important, especially among younger generations of the tribe who do not care about or remember their cultural heritage. From a country that celebrates cultural diversity, it is saddening to witness how these diverse traditions, including my own, are at risk of being eroded. Zhang and Mace (2021) argue that modernization and technological advancements are weakening local and indigenous traditions. I could not help but feel that we were losing more than we were gaining in this relentless pursuit of progress.

The challenge of cultural erosion due to modernization is a global problem. In Africa, modernization threatens to dismantle the values of its nation by conforming to European-centric notions of development, overshadowing authentic African identities, including traditional clothing, language, and occupations (Oko & Ogbodo, 2022). Similarly, in Southeast Asia, the tug-

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of-war between Western cultural hegemony and cultural traditions places its cultural communities, such as Singaporeans, in a challenging position. The relentless advance of globalization encroaches upon traditional domains, putting local cultures and values at risk of erosion (Ullah & Ho, 2020).

In the Philippines, cultural erosion among indigenous tribes is an urgent threat. In Monkayo, Davao de Oro, the Manguangan tribe emulate lowland culture to adapt to modern ways of life, thereby gradually losing their cultural knowledge in the process (Piquero, 2023). Paguio and Dela Rosa (2019) reported a similar pattern among the Aeta Magbukon tribe, a "vanishing tribe" not by disappearance but because of the erosion of cultural heritage due to the effects of modernization. This narrative is familiar: we are losing our cultural diversity in exchange for conformity.

The process of modernization and technological advancement weakens communal support systems, diminishes access to traditional knowledge, and erodes cultural resilience, which is essential for navigating local and global changes (Lopez, 2024). As Oko and Ogbodo (2022) suggest, we are heading toward a homogenized society that lacks the historical richness that cultural plurality provides. In our rush toward modernization, we are pushing indigenous communities to the margins and destroying invaluable aspects of our heritage.

1.1 Research Questions

Generally, this study explored the lived experiences of the Dibabawon tribe on how modernization changed their cultural identity. Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the Dibabawon tribe on modernization as a structural determinant of social change?
2. What are the lived experiences of the Dibabawon tribe on their interaction with modernization as a process and mechanism of social change?
3. What are the lived experiences of the Dibabawon tribe on cultural erosion as a direction and consequence of social change?

1.2 Theoretical Lens

This research was anchored on the Social Change Theory developed by Haferkamp and Smelser (1992). This theory posits that social change is attributed to these three components: Structural determinants of social change, Processes and mechanisms of social change, and Directions and consequences. Structural determinants of social change is the dimension that includes the macro-level factors that drive transformation within societies. Processes and mechanisms of social change is the dimension that encompasses the specific activities and dynamics that precipitate change. Finally, the dimension of directions and consequences pertains to the outcomes and trajectories that arise from the processes of change.

1.3 Paradigm

The paradigm presented below visually outlines the relationship among the core components of the Social Change Theory, emphasizing how each dimension influences and builds upon the other. It illustrates the logical flow from structural determinants to the processes and mechanisms, culminating in the directions and consequences of social change. This framework serves as a guide for understanding how external societal forces interact with internal community dynamics, offering a structured lens to trace the progression of cultural transformation within the Dibabawon tribe.

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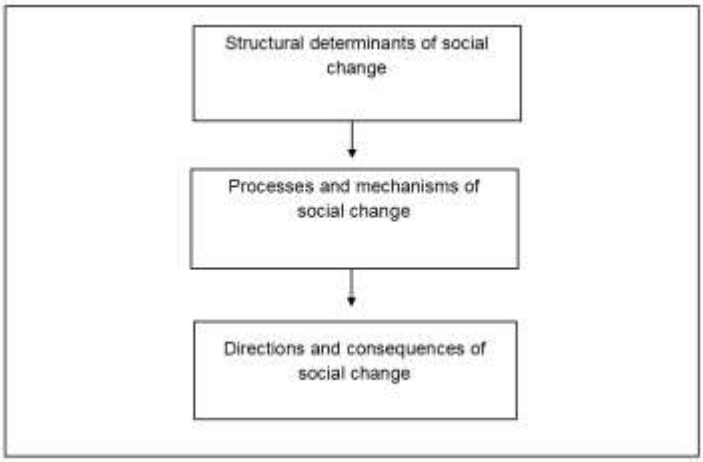


Figure 1. Social Change Theory Framework by Haferkamp and Smelser (1992)

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

I used a phenomenological approach in this research to uncover the experiences and perspectives of the Dibabawon tribe, who witnessed the erosion of their cultural traditions due to modern integration. Phenomenology, as a qualitative research method, allowed me to focus on the shared experiences of participants who encountered the same phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this case, that phenomenon was cultural erosion. This method enabled me to collect insights from those who experienced transformations and created a unified description of what they had gone through. This included both "what" they had experienced and "how" they had experienced it in an effort to elaborate on the essence of their journey (Moustakas, 1994).

2.2 Research Locale

This study was conducted in Laak, Davao de Oro, where the Dibabawon tribe is concentrated. Specifically, it included three (3) barangays - Laak, Barangay Ampawid, Barangay Bollucan, and Barangay Poblacion. Known as the "warriors in the mountains" (Tiu, 2005), the tribe lives in the upland areas of Dibabao, and thus, their cultural practices and identity are closely tied to their mountainous environment. Laak's remote barangays provide an ideal setting to explore the Dibabawon tribe's narrative of cultural erosion and their adaptation to modern societal changes.

2.3 Sample and Sampling

In this study, the sample consisted of tribal elders and community leaders from the three barangays of Laak, Davao de Oro. The study specifically focused on participants who were 30 to 60 years old. These individuals had both experienced traditional cultural practices and witnessed the ongoing changes brought about by modernization and globalization. Their perspective allowed for a thorough exploration of the cultural transition taking place within the tribe.

2.5 Data Gathering Technique

In the gathering of data, I employed a triangulation approach to ensure the depth and credibility of the finding. Triangulation is a method of using multiple data collection techniques that helped in verifying the consistency of results and obtaining comprehensive insights into the research problem (Patton, 1999; Noble & Heale, 2019). To collect sufficient information, I utilized a combination of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and In-Depth Interviews (IDI). As advised by Carter et al. (2014), using multiple methods for data triangulation facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. A pre-prepared interview guide was also designed specifically for this study, which contained key questions based on the research objectives, allowing for flexibility in probing deeper into participants' narratives and responses.

2.6 Data Analysis Procedure

In this study, I analyzed interview data using Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological approach, as outlined by Cabal (2017), following four key steps: epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. I began by setting aside biases (epoche) to approach the data objectively, then

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conducted phenomenological reduction by listing and refining significant statements (horizontalization) to identify core themes. These themes informed individual textural ("what" happened) and structural ("how" it happened) descriptions. Through imaginative variation, I explored different perspectives to uncover deeper structural meanings. Finally, I synthesized the composite textural and structural descriptions to provide a holistic understanding of the participants'shared experiences.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Modified Paradigm

Social Change Theory, in which this study is anchored, provided significant direction to the result of the study. The theory explains how societies change and evolve through three main components: Structural determinants of social change, Processes and mechanisms of social change, and Directions and consequences. However, through this study, an additional theme was identified--Cultural Resilience and Adaptation Strategies in Response to Social Change—which illustrates how societies cope and sustain their traditions in the face of modernization.

The modified paradigm illustrating these findings is presented below:

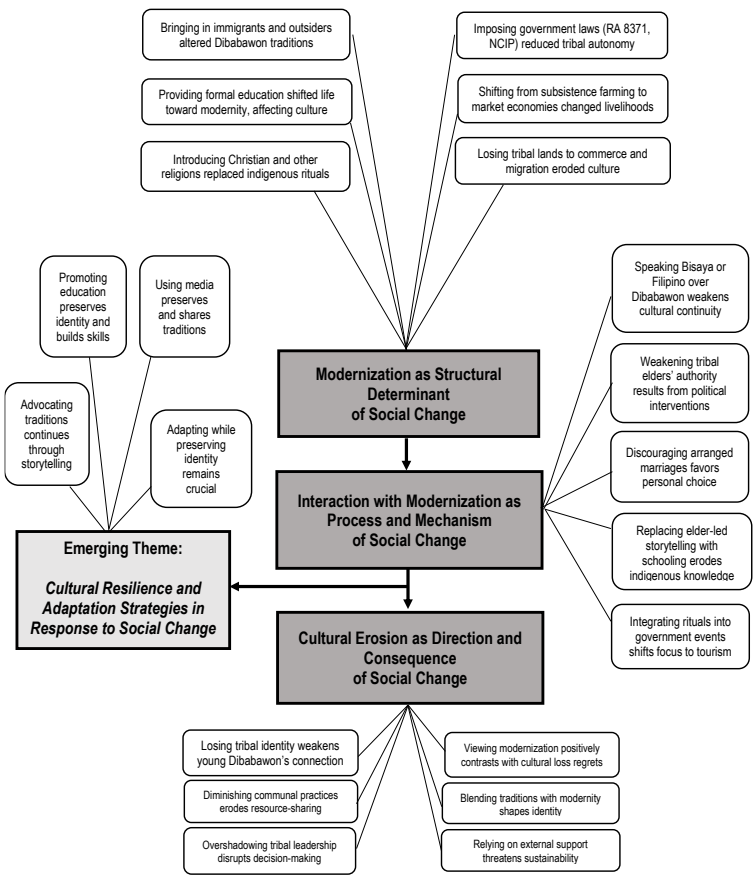


Figure 2. Thematic Analysis Results through the Lens of Social Change Theory Framework by Haferkamp and Smelser (1992)

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3.2 Themes, Emerging Theme, and Corresponding Subthemes

After careful analysis, I identified one emerging theme added to the three themes originally presented in the theory. These themes, anchored on the Theory of Social Change by Haferkamp and Smelser (1992), include Modernization as a Structural Determinant of Social Change, Interaction with Modernization as a Process and Mechanism of Social Change, Cultural Erosion as a Direction and Consequence of Social Change, and Cultural Resilience and Adaptation Strategies in Response to Social Change.

Modernization as a Structural Determinant of Social Change

Structural determinants of social change refer to macro-level forces that drive societal transformation. In the case of the Dibabawon tribe, modernization and external influences have significantly contributed to the alteration and erosion of indigenous traditions. Based on the data gathered from in-depth interviews and focused group discussions, six (6) key subthemes emerged under this particular theme. These include: (1) Bringing in Immigrants and Outsiders Altered Dibabawon Traditions; (2) Providing Formal Education Shifted Life Toward Modernity, Affecting Culture; (3) Introducing Christianity and Other Religions Replaced Indigenous Rituals; (4) Imposing Government Laws (RA 8371, NCIP) Reduced Tribal Autonomy; (5) Shifting from Subsistence Farming to Market Economies Changed Livelihoods; and (6) Losing tribal lands to commerce and migration eroded culture.

Interaction with Modernization as a Process and Mechanism of Social Change

Processes and mechanisms of social change refer to specific activities which facilitate social transformation. In the case of the Dibabawon tribe, factors including language use, authority of tribal leaders and elders, religious influences, and formal education played a vital role in redefining traditional culture. Based on the data gathered from in-depth interviews and focused group discussions, five (5) key subthemes emerged, including (1) Speaking Bisaya or Filipino over Dibabawon weakens cultural continuity; (2) Weakening tribal elders' authority results from political interventions; (3) Discouraging arranged marriages favors personal choice; (4) Replacing elder-led storytelling with schooling erodes indigenous knowledge, and (5) Integrating rituals into government events shifts focus to tourism.

Cultural Erosion as a Direction and Consequence of Social Change

Directions and consequences of social change refer to the outcomes and trajectories that arise from the processes of change. In the case of the Dibabawon tribe, data gathered from in-depth interviews and focused group discussions revealed six (6) key subthemes of these consequences, including (1) Losing tribal identity weakens young Dibabawon's connection; (2) Diminishing communal practices erodes resource-sharing; (3) Overshadowing tribal leadership disrupts decision-making; (4) Viewing modernization positively contrasts with cultural loss regrets; (5) Blending traditions with modernity shapes identity; and (6) Relying on external support threatens sustainability.

Cultural Resilience and Adaptation Strategies in Response to Social Change

The analysis of participants' responses revealed an emerging theme that refines the social change theory framework used in this study. In addition to structural determinants, processes and mechanisms, and the directions and consequences of social change, the study identified Cultural Resilience and Adaptation Strategies in Response to Social Change as a key theme. This finding underscored the Dibabawon tribe's ability to navigate the complexities of modernization while striving to preserve their cultural identity. Rather than undergoing passive assimilation, the tribe employed adaptive strategies to sustain its traditions. These acts of resilience, although some were reactive in nature due to the immediate pressures and disruptions brought by modernization, were largely rooted in intention and cultural consciousness. They suggested more meaningful approaches to integrating change that honor indigenous values and offered more effective cultural preservation strategies for generations to come. Based on the data gathered, four (4) subthemes emerged: (1) Promoting education preserves identity and builds skills; (2) Advocating traditions continue through storytelling; (3) Using media preserves and shares traditions; and (4) Adapting while preserving identity remains crucial.

4. DISCUSSION

Modernization as a Structural Determinant of Social Change

The structural determinants of social change play a crucial role in explaining cultural erosion and the deterioration of indigenous identity during periods of

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rapid transformation. As Delibasic (2018) argues, the decline of indigenous norms and values is akin to a society losing its social cohesion—a perspective that aligns with the findings of this study. Among the Dibabawon tribe, I observed how external structural forces such as immigration, religious conversion, formal education, and policy interventions have significantly weakened traditional authority systems and cultural practices, contributing to a noticeable erosion of collective identity and communal values.

Moreover, Guntoro (2020) emphasizes that structural changes brought about by modernization influence not only global systems but also personal life patterns, ultimately affecting all areas of society. He further suggests that socio-cultural change is a natural and adaptive process necessary for societal survival. While my study affirms that adaptation plays a role in survival, it also highlights a critical caveat: modernization, though beneficial in terms of education and economic mobility, has also led to unintended consequences such as cultural distancing and loss of tribal autonomy. Therefore, while I acknowledge Guntoro's assertion, my findings point to the need for balance—adaptation must be coupled with conscious efforts to preserve cultural heritage to avoid irreversible cultural loss.

Bringing in Immigrants and Outsiders Altered Dibabawon Traditions

In a study conducted by Chapagaee (2024) it reveals that colonization brought profound changes to indigenous societies, making cultural preservation difficult. The clash between adaptation and tradition led to significant cultural loss as indigenous followers struggled against colonial dominance. Similarly, Indrizal and Anwar (2023) note that immigration exposed indigenous peoples to foreign tools, spiritual ideologies, and economic incentives, all of which contributed to shifts in their traditional ways of life. These intercultural encounters brought about profound modifications in indigenous cultural dynamics. Similar to the transformations observed by these scholars, the experiences of the Dibabawon tribe reveal that the arrival of non-indigenous settlers brought about significant changes to their traditional way of life. Cultural blending, cross-cultural marriages, and altered social structures became increasingly common, gradually diminishing long-established customs and values.

Providing Formal Education Shifted Life Toward Modernity, Affecting Culture

Formal education has driven the Dibabawon community toward modernity by integrating technology, expanding access to information, and fostering intellectual growth. As Rizqi et al. (2023) note, evolving curricula influence cultural progression and alter traditional social relationships. While education has created new opportunities and improved access to modern livelihoods among the tribe, it has also contributed to the erosion of traditional roles and indigenous knowledge. The shift from a subsistence-based lifestyle to formal schooling has weakened the intergenerational transmission of native wisdom, as modern systems often exclude tribal values and practices.

Gaddapati (2025) further emphasizes that modern school institutions often create tensions among indigenous youth, as standardized educational content tends to overshadow traditional clan-based perspectives. Additionally, the need for many indigenous youths to leave their communities in pursuit of education contributes to their growing disconnection from their cultural roots (Chichekian & Bragoli-Barzan, 2021). The findings of my study affirm these assertions, as the mainstream curriculum reinforces national and global perspectives, often at the expense of Dibabawon's indigenous identity. This has led to a diminished presence of traditional lifeways, with educated youth increasingly prioritizing modern careers over tribal customs.

Introducing Christianity and Other Religions Replaced Indigenous Rituals

The introduction of Christianity and other religions into the Dibabawon tribe's ancestral lands has led to a significant decline in their spiritual traditions, echoing Ribeiro's (2020) view that Christianity has been a driving force in the cultural suppression of many indigenous communities. The transition from indigenous spiritual leaders, such as the baylan, to reliance on external religious doctrines and modern healthcare practices underscores the cultural shift described by Nwaogaidu (2020), where traditional belief systems clash with new religious teachings.

In my study, the fading of spiritual traditions and the loss of cultural practices such as agricultural rituals and healing ceremonies reflect the broader impact of religious conversion on the Dibabawon community.

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This aligns with the observations of Yeboah et al. (2024), who note that the blending of Christian elements with indigenous practices has been limited and often lacks the communal cohesion that once defined traditional rituals. These findings reinforce the notion that Christianity while introducing new social and moral structures, has played a central role in the erosion of indigenous cultural identity within the Dibabawon tribe.

Imposing Government Laws (RA 8371, NCIP) Reduced Tribal Autonomy

Aside from religion, government laws and policies also have significant implications for the social organization and autonomy of indigenous communities. Hagen and Minter (2020) demonstrate that legal frameworks surrounding indigenous land rights often weaken tribal self-governance by imposing bureaucratic procedures that prioritize development interests over indigenous autonomy. In my study, several participants expressed frustration with government-led initiatives and land titling processes that have diminished their traditional authority over ancestral domains. The community's ability to exercise self-determination has been notably constrained by top-down policies that frequently overlook meaningful consultation with tribal leaders.

Similarly, Doyle (2020) documented that bureaucratic hurdles, limited awareness, and a lack of genuine governmental commitment continue to hinder indigenous groups from fully accessing and exercising their rights. Among the Dibabawon, many community members are unaware of the laws intended to protect them, and those who are aware often find the processes burdensome and inaccessible. This reinforces the notion that, while government frameworks claim to safeguard indigenous communities, they frequently operate in ways that undermine rather than support tribal independence and cultural continuity.

Shifting from Subsistence Farming to Market Economies Changed Livelihoods

The shift toward market-oriented farming is one of the primary forces driving societal evolution. Unlike subsistence farming, this modern approach enables farmers to engage with the cash economy, allowing them to purchase non-food items and participate in broader markets (Kubitza et al., 2024). However, this transformation also leads to the erosion of traditional community support systems, as evidenced by the diminishing practice of informal communal sharing (Mgomezulu et al., 2024). These observations are also evident among the Dibabawon tribe. Their shift from self-sustaining, communal farming practices to market-oriented economic activities has significantly reshaped both their lifestyle and economic stability. What was once a system rooted in cooperation, reciprocity, and self-sufficiency has gradually been replaced by monetized transactions and individualized pursuits. While this transition has opened new avenues for economic participation, it has also weakened communal ties and contributed to the gradual erosion of traditional farming and hunting practices.

Losing tribal lands to commerce and migration eroded culture

Similarly, the shift from traditional farming to commercial markets has led to significant disruptions in longstanding agricultural practices, pushing many indigenous groups to confront land ownership constraints brought about by government and corporate land acquisitions (Mgomezulu et al., 2024). Hagen and Minter (2020) noted that despite strong indigenous rights laws in the Philippines, groups like the Agta still face displacement from large-scale developments, revealing a gap between legal protections and actual enforcement of indigenous land rights.

My findings support and extend these concerns. Among the Dibabawon tribe, participants shared experiences of losing access to ancestral lands due to agricultural conversions and infrastructure development. Despite the legal frameworks that are meant to protect ancestral domains, the tribe struggles with limited legal literacy and bureaucratic obstacles, which make it difficult to assert their rights. My study underscores that while modernization offers economic potential, it simultaneously poses existential threats to indigenous land stewardship, especially when legal mechanisms fail to uphold community autonomy.

Interaction with Modernization as a Process and Mechanism of Social Change

Various mechanisms and agents are processes of social change within complex systems shaped by organizational structures and self-organizing factors. Though change is inevitable and essential, its success relies heavily on societal acceptance and widespread adoption (Bevzenko, 2023). Rabie (2023) identifies four key tools driving social transformation: socio-cultural influences on norms, sociopolitical power structures, socio-economic impacts on wealth

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distribution, and infomedia shaping communication. The evolution of these tools creates changing relationships as they work together to shape current social interactions.

Processes and mechanisms of social transformation, including modernization together with globalization, trigger cultural degradation by pushing people to choose outside influences rather than indigenous customs, which results in collective identity destruction and the decline of both societal and economic systems (Ghosh, n.d.). These mechanisms tend to drive people away from traditional cultural elements towards foreign elements (Bevzenko, 2023).

Speaking Bisaya or Filipino over Dibabawon weakens cultural continuity

The transition from native languages to mainstream languages poses a significant threat to cultural continuity, as language assimilation weakens identity and erodes indigenous traditions (Chui, 2023; Akintayo et al., 2024; Liu, 2024). Chui (2023) argues that prioritizing mainstream languages over native tongues leads to the abandonment of indigenous languages, ultimately threatening the survival of diverse cultures and their unique heritage. Similarly, Akintayo et al. (2024) highlight concerns regarding the erosion of native languages within migrant communities, emphasizing that language loss disrupts cultural identity and hinders the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Liu (2024) further underscores the detrimental effects of linguistic domination, which include the erosion of traditional knowledge, diminished community ties, and the weakening of cultural identity.

My study affirms and reinforces these prior findings. Based on the narratives of my Dibabawon participants, the diminishing use of their indigenous language has already begun to disrupt traditional knowledge systems and intergenerational communication. Elders expressed concern that their children and grandchildren now prefer Filipino or English, especially within academic and public spaces, resulting in the gradual disconnection from their roots. This shift indicates a pressing need for revitalization efforts such as the integration of indigenous language education in schools and community-led oral tradition preservation initiatives.

Weakening tribal elders' authority results from political interventions

Political interventions have weakened tribal elders' authority by disrupting traditional governance. In Pakistan, the state once depended on elders for community leadership, but rising state demands and political dynamics led to their dismissal in 2018, diminishing their traditional influence. (Haroon, 2022). Similarly, in the Philippines, while Indigenous rights are legally recognized, this recognition is often conditional, requiring compliance with state policies that undermine the autonomy of tribal elders (Theriault, 2019). Elders are pressured to conform to governmental expectations, which dilutes their traditional authority and decision-making power. Furthermore, the imposition of dominant cultural norms by political elites fosters the minoritization and marginalization of tribal elders, who are often perceived as obstacles to state objectives, thereby limiting their influence and ability to advocate for their communities (Morales et al., 2024).

In the case of the Dibabawon tribe, traditional leadership once held by the datu and elders has been gradually diminished as governmental structures have assumed greater control over community governance, law enforcement, and conflict resolution. Legal recognition of indigenous rights is often conditional and constrained by compliance with state policies, which undermines the autonomy of tribal governance. Moreover, the growing influence of modern values, especially among younger generations, has further destabilized the once-respected role of elders in both household and community decision-making. These findings affirm the urgent need for governance models that integrate and respect indigenous leadership systems rather than marginalizing them in favor of externally imposed frameworks.

Discouraging arranged marriages favors personal choice

Arranged marriage is a traditional practice in which parents or senior family members select a spouse for their child, often with minimal interaction between the prospective partners before marriage, contrasting with self-choice marriages where individuals independently choose their partners (Allendorf, 2023). In the Dibabawon tribe, arranged marriages were traditionally the norm, with parents solely responsible for partner selection. However, the current generation increasingly embraces personal autonomy in romantic decisions, a

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change driven by exposure to modern education, legal norms, and digital technology. The shift toward individual agency in marital decisions reflects broader cultural changes, where personal choice is increasingly valued (Theriault, 2019).

In India, arranged marriages remain deeply rooted, with families playing a crucial role in partner selection based on caste, religion, and social status (Singh & Pandey, 2023). In contrast, my findings reveal a reversal within the Dibabawon tribe, where parental control is increasingly seen as restrictive. The younger generation's embrace of self-determination marks a cultural shift away from ancestral matchmaking customs.

Replacing elder-led storytelling with schooling erodes indigenous knowledge

Elders are recognized as the primary transmitters of Indigenous knowledge, preserving cultural practices and beliefs through oral traditions (Rowe et al., 2020). Storytelling, historically a rich medium for integrating personal experiences and community values into education (Deer, 2016), remains vital for passing down history, language, culture, and a sense of place (Hausknecht et al., 2021). Consistent with these findings, my study of the Dibabawon tribe highlights the elders' role as crucial guardians and narrators of cultural heritage. Participants revealed that the marginalization of storytelling, replaced by the prioritization of formal education, has weakened intergenerational knowledge transfer, with elders warning that without their active involvement, younger generations risk losing a deeper connection to their tribal history and identity. Additionally, the replacement of elder-led storytelling with formal schooling poses a threat to the transmission of Indigenous Knowledge (IK), as traditional narratives often lose their contextual depth in structured educational settings (Kotut & McCrickard, 2022).

Integrating rituals into government events shifts focus to tourism

The commercialization of traditional rituals, once vital for social and environmental conservation, has significantly reduced their effectiveness, leading to the overexploitation of these indigenous practices (Widianti Aptasari et al., 2024). The increasing focus on commercial gains may dilute the original cultural and environmental significance of these traditions, transforming them into mere tourist attractions rather than meaningful community rituals (Ilieva et al., 2024). Dibabawon elders expressed similar concerns, noting that the rituals that once held to invoke blessings, honor spirits, or conserve natural resources have gradually shifted toward performance-based showcases for visitors, sometimes losing their sacred meaning.

Cultural Erosion as a Direction and Consequence of Social Change

One key consequence of social norm change is its impact on individual and group behavior, influencing societal expectations. Spontaneous shifts, driven by crises or cultural changes, can either strengthen social cohesion or create conflict when norms clash. (Andrighetto et al., 2024). Among indigenous tribes, globalization, colonialism, and government policies threaten Indigenous and Local Knowledge (ILK) systems, leading to cultural erosion through suppression and appropriation of practices requiring urgent preservation efforts to safeguard Indigenous heritage and knowledge systems (Fernandez-Llamazares Onrubia et al., 2021). Additionally, modernization has profoundly transformed key societal structures, including the economy, class structure, political systems, and education, further influencing social norms and cultural transitions (Etzioni-Halevy, 2024).

Losing tribal identity weakens young Dibabawon's connection

Among the Dibabawon youth, the erosion of tribal identity, caused by diminished exposure to traditional practices and language, has led to a weakened sense of belonging and lower levels of cultural confidence. This finding supports Schultz and Noyes's (2020) assertion that the weakening of tribal identity significantly affects younger members' connection to their culture, impacting their social networks and overall well-being. It suggests that cultural disconnection can foster feelings of historical loss and diminished cultural pride among Indigenous youth.

Additionally, consistent with the findings of Angelino et al. (2024), a strong cultural connection—characterized by ethnic identity and tribal affiliation—is associated with positive mental health outcomes in adolescents, whereas the loss of tribal identity may weaken these connections and negatively affect their well-being. Elders from the Dibabawon community further observed that younger generations are becoming increasingly disconnected from community

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rituals and oral traditions, a shift they attribute to the overwhelming influence of formal education, media, and urban migration. Moreover, Kennedy et al. (2023) view the presence of tradition-bearers, such as elders and tribal leaders, as a key protective factor in fostering resilience and sustaining cultural pride among indigenous youth.

Diminishing communal practices erodes resource-sharing

The diminishing of communal practices among Indigenous tribes leads to reduced resource sharing, exacerbating land alienation and increasing poverty (Eswaran, 2023). The erosion of traditional resource governance undermines tribal livelihoods as communities struggle with inadequate access to land and essential resources (Sarap, 2017). In the case of the Dibabawon tribe, the transition from collective resource-sharing to more individualistic practices have significantly impacted the cohesion of the community. Traditionally, resource-sharing was a vital practice that fostered strong social bonds and ensured mutual support, but with modernization, these communal practices have weakened, leading to a fragmented sense of unity.

The study further underscores how the weakening of these traditions diminishes the tribe's ability to manage resources effectively, which is consistent with Raderschall et al.'s (2020) observation that the loss of indigenous governance and community cohesion hinders sustainable resource management. However, in some contexts, traditional communal sharing practices remain resilient despite external influences, as seen in Palau, where they continue to sustain relationships between humans and ecosystems, supporting resource management and climate resilience (Iida et al., 2020).

Overshadowing tribal leadership disrupts decision-making

In the Philippines, political interventions, particularly under authoritarian regimes, have undermined the autonomy of tribal elders despite legal recognition of Indigenous rights, as state policies often impose restrictive conditions (Theriault, 2019). Similarly, in Pakistan, the state's historical reliance on tribal elders for governance and community policing shifted drastically, culminating in their dismissal in 2018, further diminishing their influence (Haroon, 2022). The results of my study reveal a similar trend in the negative consequences of diminishing tribal leadership. For the Dibabawon tribe, the decline of traditional leadership represents a profound shift in their societal structure. Historically, decisions were made by datus and elders, whose guidance preserved cultural values and customary laws. However, with increasing external interference, decision-making now tends to be controlled by government policies rather than the tribe's indigenous leaders.

The erosion of leadership disrupts indigenous principles of community engagement and collaboration, which are essential for inclusive decision-making and for addressing community issues, particularly during turbulent times (Moore & Doxtater, 2020). In the case of the Dibabawon tribe, these disruptions have made it increasingly difficult to sustain traditional governance structures, leaving the community more vulnerable to external pressures. If this trend continues, the Dibabawon, like other Indigenous groups, may struggle to preserve their identity and autonomy.

Viewing modernization positively contrasts with cultural loss regrets

Viewing modernization positively contrasts with cultural loss regrets as modernization often leads to cultural loss, resulting in diminished local ecological knowledge and psychological distress, which threatens both cultural identity and resilience, underscoring the need for balanced preservation efforts (Aswani et al., 2018). Among the Mentawai people, modernization fosters a 'false consciousness,' where its perceived benefits mask deeper issues of marginalization and cultural erosion, leading to feelings of exploitation and cultural backwardness (Irwandi & Taufik, 2023). While the shift towards modernization has undeniably improved access to education, economic opportunities, and infrastructure for the Dibabawon tribe, it has also resulted in a loss of ancestral rights and traditional ways of life. The younger generation, driven by the need to adapt to modern society, tends to prioritize education and non-traditional livelihoods, leading to a gradual detachment from their indigenous roots.

Blending traditions with modernity shape identity

Blending traditions with modernity significantly shapes the identity of Indigenous peoples by the process of fostering cultural hybridization, where modern influences integrate with traditional practices, reinforcing Indigenous identities and mitigating feelings of cultural loss (Alam, 2025; Mulyana et al.,

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2023). The Indigenous community of Kampung Urug maintains its cultural identity through a triadic authority system: customary, religious, and government, balancing modern values and ancestral traditions. Their structured participation in education and governance ensures cultural preservation while adapting to contemporary societal changes (Mulyana et al., 2023). Furthermore, the integration of traditional knowledge into contemporary practices helps preserve cultural diversity, rituals, and belief systems, empowering Indigenous communities to address globalization's challenges while fostering a balanced relationship with nature (Sumitro et al., 2024).

Like other Indigenous communities, the Dibabawon tribe navigates this process of adaptation, ensuring survival without fully abandoning their traditions. Moreover, the tribe's commitment to preserving cultural practices through language revival and fostering intergenerational understanding highlights the importance of family and generational connections in maintaining cultural identity. While modernization challenges traditional ways, my study reinforces the notion that cultural hybridization, rather than complete assimilation, plays a crucial role in helping the tribe preserve its heritage while adapting to contemporary challenges.

Relying on external support threatens sustainability

Indigenous communities often possess unique knowledge systems that are incompatible with external development agendas, leading to a loss of traditional practices and spiritual connections essential for sustainability (Luetz, 2024). External funding and market integration have had damaging effects, such as attempts to involve the Aeta tribe in the Philippines in commercial systems, weakening their independence and resilience (Nennstiel, 2024). Additionally, funding policies for indigenous-led organizations frequently reinforce inequities, creating "capability traps" that hinder their long-term sustainability and ability to address community needs effectively (Deutsch et al., 2023).

The findings from my study support previous concerns about the potential threats external support poses to the sustainability of indigenous tribes. While external funding and government assistance can offer temporary relief, the Dibabawon tribe's growing reliance on such support has weakened their ability to independently preserve their culture and traditions, ultimately hindering their long-term sustainability. However, my study also diverges from earlier assertions by highlighting the tribe's active engagement in cultural resilience through adaptive strategies, such as integrating education with indigenous knowledge systems. This finding challenges the view that external influences inherently undermine cultural identity, suggesting instead that, when thoughtfully managed, external support can be woven into community-driven initiatives that honor traditional values—as demonstrated by the tribe's efforts to balance modern education with cultural preservation.

Cultural Resilience and Adaptation Strategies in Response to Social Change

Traditional societies encounter significant challenges due to globalization, which often dilutes cultural practices and languages. As these communities face environmental and socio-political changes, adaptation strategies become crucial in maintaining cultural resilience (Krasniqi, 2023; López et al., 2024). Engaging local communities in decision-making has proven effective in enhancing ownership and sustainability of adaptation efforts. In coastal regions, community-based approaches have led to significant improvements in resilience and livelihoods, demonstrating the importance of local participation in cultural preservation (Niu et al., 2023; Mallick et al., 2024).

Cultural resilience involves diverse strategies to counter-cultural erosion from modernization. Indigenous communities preserve their identities by blending traditional knowledge with modern education, helping younger generations appreciate their heritage while gaining the skills needed to thrive in contemporary society (Kandpal & Kumar, 2024). According to Fiorentino & Vandini (2024), participatory conservation plays a vital role in safeguarding cultural heritage, reinforcing a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members. By involvig local populations in heritage protection, these initiatives ensure that cultural identity remains intact despite external pressures.

Promoting education preserves identity and builds skills

The shift toward modernity through formal education has reshaped cultural dynamics, fostering both continuity and change (Duminskaya & Miller, 2023). According to Kandpal and Kumar (2024), blending

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traditional knowledge with modern education helps younger generations appreciate their heritage while adapting to contemporary society. Similarly, integrating local traditions and bilingual instruction into educational frameworks strengthens cultural identity, allowing communities to modernize without losing their heritage (Gaddapati, 2025). Additionally, educational modernization, particularly in the context of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, supports innovation while reinforcing local languages and cultural practices, highlighting a symbiotic relationship between education and cultural preservation (Murad et al., 2020).

The Dibabawon tribe's experience underscores the potential of education as a tool for cultural empowerment when it is integrated with indigenous values and knowledge. The tribe's emphasis on community-based education as a means to maintain cultural continuity illustrates that a carefully balanced approach to education can lead to both individual advancement and cultural resilience rather than cultural dilution. Therefore, education, when aligned with indigenous knowledge, can be a catalyst for cultural preservation in the face of modernization, contrary to the concern that formal education might contribute to detachment from traditional life.

Advocating traditions continues through storytelling

Oral storytelling has long been a vital tool for transmitting Indigenous knowledge, ensuring cultural continuity through the teachings of elders who pass down history, language, and traditions (Rowe et al., 2020). Among the Blaan tribe, storytelling remains a key cultural practice that not only preserves their heritage but also strengthens community bonds and fosters resilience against contemporary challenges (Fajinmi & Oloyede, 2025).

The Dibabawon tribe has historically relied on oral storytelling to pass down traditions, history, and values. However, my findings highlight a decline in communal storytelling practices due to modernization. Although storytelling has become rare, participants in my study emphasized the need to reconnect with elders to revitalize cultural narratives, suggesting that such practices can be reintegrated into contemporary life. This aligns with Hausknecht et al. (2021), who advocate for the integration of digital storytelling to reinforce cultural identity and intergenerational connections. Digital technology enhances and preserves tradition and makes indigenous narratives more accessible and engaging for younger generations, blending modern tools with ancestral practices.

Using media preserves and shares tradition

The use of media plays a crucial role in preserving and promoting Indigenous traditions by facilitating community participation, cultural expression, and language revitalization (Minhas & Salawu, 2024). The Dibabawon tribe's use of social media platforms and digital documentation illustrates how technology can facilitate cultural expression, community engagement, and the revitalization of traditions. The tribe's proactive efforts to document and upload their practices to online platforms also resonate with Aiseng's (2023) perspective on ensuring cultural continuity through digital tools.

Indigenous language community radio stations also contribute to cultural preservation by broadcasting traditional music, dance, and poetry, reinforcing cultural values, and fostering community development. However, the potential risks of digital tools should not be disregarded (Molale & Mgogo, 2023. Similarly, my study also acknowledges the caution some participants express about the dual nature of technology. While my findings support the positive impact of media on cultural preservation, they also emphasize the importance of responsible use to ensure that digital representations of traditions remain authentic and true to their cultural roots.

Adapting while preserving identity remains crucial

Adapting while preserving indigenous identity is crucial for maintaining cultural resilience amidst modernization and globalization (Goyal et al., 2025). While globalization threatens Indigenous languages and traditions, communities employ strategies such as cultural hybridization and digital integration to safeguard their heritage (Alam, 2025). The preservation of indigenous languages plays a vital role in sustaining cultural identity and unique worldviews, with community involvement, education, and digital tools ensuring their continuity for future generations (Kakembo, 2024).

Parallel to these studies, the Dibabawon tribe recognizes that while modernization offers new opportunities, it also presents challenges for safeguarding their cultural heritage. The tribe's emphasis on intergenerational understanding and the

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importance of balancing modernity with cultural preservation aligns with the concept of cultural hybridization. The participants in my study advocate for a balance that allows for the preservation of traditions while adapting to changing times, highlighting the relevance of digital tools and cultural strategies in ensuring the continuity of heritage. Therefore, my study supports the notion that cultural resilience is not about resisting modern influences but about adapting in ways that respect and honor Indigenous values, as suggested by previous research.

5. FUTURE DIRECTION

Based on the findings, I recommend conducting a regression analysis to examine the predictive influence of modernization as a structural determinant of social change, interaction with modernization as a process and mechanism of social change, and cultural resilience and adaptation strategies in response to social change, with cultural erosion as a direction and consequence of social change serving as the criterion variable and its emerging subthemes as observable indicators. It would also be valuable for future research to conduct mediation analysis to explore whether cultural resilience and adaptation strategies mediate the relationship between interaction with modernization and cultural erosion, providing insight into how indigenous coping mechanisms may buffer or redirect the impacts of modern influences.

6. IMPLICATION FOR PRACTICE

This study on the Dibabawon tribe holds significant implications for the field of Social Studies education, particularly in enhancing the curriculum with culturally responsive and localized content that highlights indigenous resilience amid modernization. By integrating the lived experiences, traditions, and challenges of the Dibabawon people into formal education, the Department of Education can promote intergenerational learning, cultural continuity, and a deeper understanding of the socio-political realities faced by indigenous communities. Embedding indigenous knowledge systems in the Social Studies curriculum can help address systemic inequalities while equipping learners with the cultural sensitivity and critical awareness needed in a diverse society. Moreover, the promotion of digital storytelling—through community-led initiatives that document oral traditions, rituals, and historical narratives—serves as a powerful educational tool for preserving the tribe's heritage and raising awareness among students. By incorporating digital media and indigenous perspectives into classroom instruction, educators can support both cultural preservation and the broader goal of sustainable development, particularly the protection of cultural heritage, as emphasized in SDG 11.4.

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I wholeheartedly dedicate this manuscript to my beloved tribe, the Dibabawon community. This research has deepened my appreciation for the richness of our cultural heritage, and I pledge to continue contributing to the preservation and enrichment of our living traditions. To my parents, whose unwavering support has guided me through every step of this journey, thank you for your love and encouragement. Above all, I offer this work to God Almighty, for the gift of faith, wisdom, and strength that made this endeavor possible.

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