

Guardians or Gravediggers: The Role of Schools in Blaan Indigenous Language Preservation and Shift

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore how schools in the Blaan communities of Matanao, Davao del Sur, Philippines, influence the preservation and shift of indigenous languages, particularly in relation to the dominant dialect Bisaya. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for addressing the erosion of the Blaan language and promoting cultural sustainability. A focused ethnography design was utilized, involving 18 participants, consisting of key informants for interview, focus group discussion, and photo elicitation. They are second-generation Blaan speakers with positive attitudes toward their language. Included are housewives and farmers, who maintain their Blaan heritage despite broader exposure, and who primarily use Blaan at home but switch to Bisaya in other contexts. Findings indicate that the adoption of Bisaya as a medium of instruction accelerates the shift away from Blaan, yet integrating indigenous languages into curricula and hiring teachers who are fluent Blaan speakers can support preservation. This research addresses a critical gap in the literature by examining the relationship between education and language preservation in the Blaan community, an area that has been under-researched in existing literature. This study offers valuable insights for policy development and educational practices, contributing to the revitalization of indigenous languages and fostering cultural sustainability within indigenous communities.

Keywords: indigenous language preservation, language shift, role of schools, language policies, educational practices

INTRODUCTION

Language is a vital component of indigenous cultures, functioning as both a means of communication and a vessel for cultural and spiritual knowledge (Throsby & Petetskaya, 2016). For many indigenous communities, preserving their language is essential to maintaining their cultural identity and spiritual practices. Consequently, the loss of a language due to language shift often equates to the erosion of traditional knowledge and cultural pride (Mister, 2023; Rogers, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial for communities to actively engage in language preservation efforts to prevent their languages from being overshadowed by dominant ones (Khawaja, 2021; Lee, Wong, & Laxman, 2014).

To further clarify, language shift refers to the process whereby a community gradually abandons its native language in favor of a more dominant one, often leading to the former language's decline and eventual extinction. In contrast, language preservation involves deliberate efforts to maintain and revitalize a language, ensuring that it continues to be spoken and used within a community. Preservation activities may include teaching the language in schools, documenting it through written materials, and promoting its use in daily life.

Unfortunately, the global decline in languages is a pressing issue, with projections suggesting that up to 90% of the world's languages could vanish by the end of the century

(Foltz, 2015). According to the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, a third of these languages have fewer than 1,000 speakers, and a language dies approximately every two weeks (Strochlic, 2018). Moreover, this decline is often worsened by educational systems that prioritize dominant languages over indigenous ones, leading to reduced use of native languages among younger generations (Bromham et al. et al., 2020). Additional factors, including failures in intergenerational language transmission, cultural disconnection among youth, and historical trauma, further complicate the situation (Khawaja, 2021).

Given these challenges, understanding the role of formal education in language preservation is essential, particularly for the Blaan language, which faces significant threats amid social, educational, and economic pressures. Specifically, the Blaan community, like many indigenous groups, is experiencing cultural erosion that directly impacts their language. As a result, the shift toward more dominant languages in educational settings diminishes the use of Blaan among younger generations, leading to a decline in fluency and cultural identity (Benito, 2020). Research indicates that many young Blaan speakers prefer to communicate in Bisaya due to perceived social advantages, which exacerbates the risk of language extinction (Trocio et al., 2023).

DESPITE GLOBAL AND NATIONAL EFFORTS TO PRESERVE INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES, INCLUDING THOSE IN THE PHILIPPINES, WHERE 14 LANGUAGES ARE AT RISK AND 11 ARE ENDANGERED (SIMONS & FENNIG, 2018), THERE REMAINS LIMITED UNDERSTANDING OF HOW LOCAL EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES SPECIFICALLY IMPACT THE BLAAN LANGUAGE IN MATANAO. WHILE REFORMS SUCH AS THE INTEGRATION OF MOTHER TONGUE INSTRUCTION INTO THE MATATAG K TO 10 CURRICULUM (HERNANDO-MALIPUT, 2023) AIM TO SUPPORT LANGUAGE PRESERVATION, THE EROSION OF THE BLAAN LANGUAGE DUE TO THE PRIORITIZATION OF BISAYA THREATENS BOTH THE CULTURAL IDENTITY OF THE BLAAN COMMUNITY AND THE OVERALL SUSTAINABILITY OF INDIGENOUS CULTURES.

THIS STUDY SEEKS TO ADDRESS THESE GAPS BY EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN EITHER FACILITATING OR HINDERING THE PRESERVATION OF THE BLAAN LANGUAGE, PARTICULARLY IN THE CONTEXT OF CURRENT EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN MATANAO, DAVAO DEL SUR. SPECIFICALLY, THE STUDY AIMS TO ANSWER THE RESEARCH QUESTION: “WHAT IS THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN BLAAN LANGUAGE PRESERVATION AND SHIFT?” EMPLOYING A FOCUSED ETHNOGRAPHY FRAMEWORK (HIGGINBOTTOM, PILLAY, & BOADU, 2013; THOMAS, 2017), THE RESEARCH WILL INVESTIGATE HOW THESE PRACTICES CONTRIBUTE TO LANGUAGE PRESERVATION OR SHIFT THROUGH DATA GATHERED FROM IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS, FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS, PHOTO-ELICITATION SESSIONS, AND OBSERVATIONS. ULTIMATELY, THE STUDY AIMS TO OFFER A COMPREHENSIVE UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN PRESERVING THE BLAAN LANGUAGE AND PROVIDE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE PRESERVATION OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IS A CRUCIAL ISSUE AMID GLOBAL LANGUAGE SHIFT AND CULTURAL ASSIMILATION. SCHOOLS ARE CENTRAL TO THIS DYNAMIC, PLAYING A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN EITHER

SUPPORTING OR UNDERMINING THE MAINTENANCE AND REVITALIZATION OF THESE LANGUAGES. THIS REVIEW EXPLORES THE IMPACT OF DOMINANT LANGUAGES ON MINORITY LANGUAGES, THE LEGAL FRAMEWORKS SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE PRESERVATION, AND THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN THIS CONTEXT.

LANGUAGE SHIFT AND ASSIMILATION. AS DOMINANT LANGUAGES PREVAIL IN VARIOUS COMMUNICATIVE SETTINGS, MAINTAINING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES BECOMES INCREASINGLY CHALLENGING. ALLARD AND LANDRY, AS REFERENCED BY VILLANUEVA AND BALUYOS (2014), NOTE THAT INDIVIDUALS OFTEN ADOPT THE LANGUAGE OF THE MAJORITY GROUP, LEADING TO CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC ASSIMILATION. THIS SHIFT OCCURS BECAUSE THE DOMINANT LANGUAGE IS PERCEIVED AS MORE ADVANTAGEOUS FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC MOBILITY. CHEMLA (2021) SUPPORTS THIS VIEW, HIGHLIGHTING HOW MINORITY LANGUAGES ARE OFTEN DEVALUED COMPARED TO DOMINANT LANGUAGES, WHICH ARE THOUGHT TO ENHANCE THEIR SPEAKERS' SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROSPECTS. CONSEQUENTLY, THE NUMBER OF MINORITY LANGUAGE SPEAKERS DECLINES, A TREND OBSERVED BY OTIENO (2023).

LEGAL BASIS FOR INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND PRESERVATION. IN RESPONSE TO THE CRITICAL NEED FOR LANGUAGE PRESERVATION, VARIOUS INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL LEGAL INSTRUMENTS HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED. THE UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES (UNDRIP), ADOPTED IN 2007, IS A LANDMARK DOCUMENT AFFIRMING THE RIGHT OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES TO REVITALIZE AND TRANSMIT THEIR LANGUAGES (NAKATA, 2024). ARTICLE 13 EMPHASIZES THE RIGHT TO DEVELOP AND USE INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES, WHILE ARTICLE 14 SUPPORTS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS IN THESE LANGUAGES. ADDITIONALLY, THE UN'S DESIGNATION OF 2019 AS THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES AND THE PERIOD FROM 2022 TO 2032 AS THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES HIGHLIGHT A GLOBAL COMMITMENT TO SUPPORTING LANGUAGE PRESERVATION (MAYO, 2023; BICAY ET AL., 2024). IN THE AMERICAS, LEGAL FRAMEWORKS SUCH AS THE AMERICAN DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND THE NATIVE AMERICAN LANGUAGES ACT OF 1990 ALSO SUPPORT LANGUAGE PRESERVATION EFFORTS (MAYO, 2023; EDUARDO & GABRIEL, 2021). IN CANADA, THE INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES ACT OF 2019 AIMS TO REVITALIZE INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES (EDUARDO & GABRIEL, 2021), WHILE AUSTRALIA'S ADOPTION OF UNESCO'S ACTION PLAN SUPPORTS LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION (NAKATA, 2024). THE PHILIPPINES' INDIGENOUS PEOPLES RIGHTS ACT OF 1997 SIMILARLY RECOGNIZES THE RIGHT OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES TO PRESERVE AND DEVELOP THEIR LANGUAGES (BICAY ET AL., 2024). DESPITE THESE ROBUST FRAMEWORKS, NEARLY HALF OF THE WORLD'S LANGUAGES ARE AT RISK OF EXTINCTION DUE TO FACTORS SUCH AS COLONIZATION, ASSIMILATION POLICIES, AND THE DOMINANCE OF MAJORITY LANGUAGES (BONIFACIO ET AL., 2021).

ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND REVITALIZATION. SCHOOLS ARE PIVOTAL IN SHAPING LANGUAGE USE,

IMPACTING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE PRESERVATION SIGNIFICANTLY. ON ONE HAND, THE DOMINANCE OF MAJORITY LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION OFTEN MARGINALIZES INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES, COMPELLING STUDENTS TO USE THE DOMINANT LANGUAGE FOR ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL SUCCESS, WHICH ACCELERATES LANGUAGE SHIFT AND CULTURAL ASSIMILATION. ON THE OTHER HAND, SCHOOLS CAN ACTIVELY SUPPORT LANGUAGE PRESERVATION BY INCORPORATING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES INTO THE CURRICULUM, EMPLOYING NATIVE-SPEAKING TEACHERS, AND CREATING A CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT THAT VALUES LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY. INITIATIVES THAT INTEGRATE INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES AND CULTURAL PRACTICES INTO THE CURRICULUM CONTRIBUTE SIGNIFICANTLY TO LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE.

EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT. IN TAIWAN, GOVERNMENT PROJECTS LIKE THE SIX-YEAR INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION PROJECT HAVE PROMOTED LANGUAGE IMMERSION CLASSROOMS AND TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS. DESPITE URBANIZATION CHALLENGES, COMMUNITY-BASED LANGUAGE PLANNING HAS BEEN ESSENTIAL FOR PROMOTING ACTIVE PARTICIPATION AND OWNERSHIP AMONG COMMUNITY MEMBERS (HOU ET AL., 2024). IN THE U.S., GRASSROOTS EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH COMMUNITY-BASED IMMERSION SCHOOLS ARE SUPPORTED BY INITIATIVES LIKE THE ESTHER MARTINEZ NATIVE AMERICAN LANGUAGES PRESERVATION ACT, WHICH FUNDS LANGUAGE EDUCATION PROGRAMS (NATIONAL INDIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, 2019). EDUCATORS WHO SHARE CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS WITH THEIR STUDENTS ENHANCE THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE AND REINFORCE CULTURAL IDENTITY.

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION. DESPITE THESE EFFORTS, CHALLENGES REMAIN. STUDIES ON AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS EDUCATION REVEAL THAT IMPLEMENTATION OF LANGUAGE PROGRAMS IS OFTEN HINDERED BY INSUFFICIENT FUNDING, LACK OF RESOURCES, AND STANDARDIZED CURRICULA (LOH & HARMON, 2023). COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS INVOLVING INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES ARE CRUCIAL FOR MEANINGFUL PROGRESS IN LANGUAGE PRESERVATION.

THIS REVIEW UNDERSCORES THE NEED FOR STRONGER IMPLEMENTATION OF EXISTING LAWS AND POLICIES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT LANGUAGE PRESERVATION. BY EXAMINING SPECIFIC PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES, SUCH AS THOSE USED BY THE BLAAN COMMUNITY IN THE PHILIPPINES, THIS RESEARCH CONTRIBUTES TO THE BROADER ACADEMIC DISCOURSE ON PRESERVING LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in Giles et al.'s (1977) ethnolinguistic vitality model, Fishman's (1991) theory of reversing language shift, and Crystal's (2000) language revitalization theory. Giles' model emphasizes the crucial role of institutional support, community involvement, and educational policies in maintaining linguistic diversity, with schools being central to this effort. Fishman's theory focuses on how supportive educational practices can mitigate the dominance of major languages. Crystal's theory adds that literacy and comprehensive educational systems, including adult education, are vital for revitalizing endangered languages. Together, these

theories offer a framework for understanding how schools can either support language preservation or contribute to language shift.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design centered on focused ethnography, guided by frameworks from Higginbottom, Pillay, & Boadu (2013) and Thomas (2017). Focused ethnography is a specialized method that delves into specific social or cultural phenomena through detailed narratives (Ejimabo, 2015). Unlike traditional ethnography, which involves long-term cultural immersion, focused ethnography zeroes in on particular issues within a specific group or setting (Trundle & Philipps, 2023; Higginbottom, Pillay, & Boadu, 2013).

A key characteristic of focused ethnography is its targeted approach, which organizes data into categories to identify patterns relevant to the research questions (McMillan, 2014). This method uses flexible techniques to explore complex issues and contexts through brief field visits and tools such as audio or video recordings (Bikker et al., 2017; Wall, 2015; Higginbottom, Pillay, & Boadu, 2013). In this study, focused ethnography is ideal for examining how schools influence the preservation and shift of indigenous languages. By focusing on specific aspects of language use and educational practices within indigenous communities, this method offers detailed insights into the impact of schools on language preservation, aligning with the study's goal to assess the direct effects of educational settings on language dynamics (Trundle & Philipps, 2023; Rashid et al., 2019).

Sampling. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants for this study, adhering to specific criteria. Participants needed to be permanent residents of the community, second-generation Blaan speakers with both parents as native Blaan speakers, have attended college or been away from the community for at least a year, and be willing to participate voluntarily. These criteria, based on recommendations from tribal leaders and local gatekeepers, aimed to capture a deep connection to the Blaan language and insights into maintaining it despite challenges.

Second-generation Blaan speakers were chosen due to their generally more positive attitudes and higher vitality ratings towards their language, as noted by Chikaipa and Kishindo (2019). The requirement for participants to have left the community or pursued higher education was based on research by Torres (2016) and UNESCO Bangkok (2019), which highlights the challenges faced by such individuals, including language discrimination.

Eight key informants were selected for interviews, including Cris (KI1), Jane (KI2), Leo (KI3), Mark (KI4), Ivan (KI5), Sally (KI6), Danny (KI6), and Rudy (KI7). Focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted with two groups: Nita (FGD1), Magda (FGD2), Lito (FGD3), and Isko (FGD4), who are housewives and farmers, and Pedro (FGD5), Ruel (FGD6), and Gary (FGD7), who have maintained their Blaan heritage despite broader exposure. The photo elicitation session involved Alice, Cynthia, Berta, and Linda, who use Blaan at home but switch to Bisaya in other contexts. Photo elicitation is important in focused ethnography because it allows participants to reflect on their experiences and cultural practices through visual stimuli. It enriches data collection by capturing context-specific insights that cannot emerge through interviews alone.

Data Collection. To explore how schools affect indigenous language shift and preservation, data were gathered using a rigorously tested interview guide, validated by experts. The guide was translated from English to Bisaya to accommodate participants, though the Blaan translation was prepared but not used as the participants can understand and communicate in the Bisaya language. With approval from the National Commission of

Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), the researcher collaborated with tribal leaders to connect with participants and obtain consent. They were asked to sign an informed consent and were assured that confidentiality and anonymity are observed. Data collection involved in-depth interviews and focus groups, focusing on the role of schools in language preservation or shift. Sessions were recorded with audio and video equipment, complemented by field observations and photo elicitation, providing valuable insights into educational practices and school initiatives.

Data Analysis. Focused ethnography relies on an iterative, cyclical, and self-reflective approach to deeply understand cultural practices (Higginbottom, Pillay, & Boadu, 2013). This study utilized the data analysis framework established by Roper and Shapira (2000), as previously applied by Higginbottom et al. (2013) and Thomas (2017). Initially, data were organized and prepared for analysis, with interviews transcribed by two court stenographers—one for Cebuano and English, the other for Blaan. The researcher then verified the accuracy of these transcriptions. Following recommendations by Yunus et al. (2022) and van Nes et al. (2010), translations were deferred until after initial data analysis to avoid misinterpretation.

Subsequently, the transcriptions were repeatedly reviewed to sort information relevant to the research questions. Data were coded into segments and labeled, with significant statements independently coded by both the researcher and inter-coders. Discrepancies were discussed until consensus was achieved. Patterns emerged, and themes were developed, integrating participant views and personal observations. Outliers were scrutinized according to Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) to explore alternative meanings. The final analysis involved generalizing themes, incorporating outliers, and using memoing for reflective notes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results. Schools play a crucial role in shaping the preservation and shift of the Blaan language, as illustrated in the table below. This table explores how educational settings impact the use of Blaan by detailing practices that either support the language's maintenance or contribute to its shift towards the dominant Bisaya language. It highlights the importance of integrating Blaan into school curricula, promoting tribal identity, and employing indigenous language teachers as strategies for preservation.

The table provides a comprehensive view of how schools impact the preservation and shift of the Blaan language. It reveals that educational settings often lead students to shift from Blaan to the dominant Bisaya language. Although Blaan is sometimes used in schools, especially during cultural events or when Blaan-speaking teachers are present, the overall trend favors Bisaya due to a shortage of Blaan-speaking educators and the need for effective communication. Observations and participant feedback underscore this shift. However, the table also highlights the critical role of schools in preserving Blaan through curriculum integration, cultural celebrations, and hiring indigenous language teachers, suggesting that flexible educational policies are essential for supporting indigenous languages and addressing language shift challenges.

Table 1
Role of Schools in Indigenous Language Shift and Preservation

Theme	Description	Sample Participant Statements
Role of Schools in Language Shift	Schools influence the shift from indigenous languages to dominant languages, impacting students' linguistic choices.	"Since we don't have Grade 5 in our barangay, we have to attend Grade 5 in Bangkal, and there are already Bisaya there. So when I attended school there, I used Bisaya" (K12).
<i>Facilitating Language Shift</i>	Schools facilitate a shift in language by incorporating the dominant language into daily classroom activities	"We cannot use Blaan in school because the teachers are Bisaya, not Blaan... My niece is a Blaan, she's a

Theme	Description	Sample Participant Statements
		teacher, but she does not use Blaan in school because she has Bisaya students" (FGD1).
<i>Influencing Language Use</i>	Schools influence language use by the proficiency of their teachers, who either support the use of indigenous languages or drive a shift toward the dominant language.	"They said that when they go to school, since there are no teachers who can understand their language, they try their best to speak Bisaya. They are the ones who will adjust because they are only few" (TOI2).
Role of Schools in Language Preservation	Schools have the potential to support the preservation of indigenous languages through specific practices and policies.	"Teachers and schools should encourage the use of indigenous languages in both school programs and classroom instruction" (KI2).
<i>Hiring Indigenous Language Teachers</i>	Hiring teachers fluent in indigenous languages is essential for effective language preservation.	"The hiring of teachers fluent in indigenous languages was underscored as a key strategy for language preservation" (FGD5, FGD6).
<i>Curriculum Development and Cultural Representation</i>	Integrating indigenous languages and cultures into the curriculum is crucial for language maintenance.	"Including indigenous cultural elements in the curriculum would help students understand and appreciate their heritage while reducing the potential for discrimination" (KI8).

Discussion. The preservation of indigenous languages is a critical issue, particularly in multicultural and multilingual societies where dominant languages often overshadow minority languages. Schools, as key institutions in the transmission of knowledge and culture, play a significant role in either sustaining or eroding these languages. This study explores the role of educational settings in the maintenance and shift of the Blaan language, focusing on how language use in schools impacts the linguistic choices of Blaan students. Through interviews, focus group discussions, and observations, the study reveals the complex dynamics at play within Blaan schools, where the use of the indigenous language is often limited to specific contexts, leading to a gradual shift towards the dominant Bisaya language.

Role of Schools in Indigenous Language Shift. Schools play a crucial role in the dynamics of indigenous language shift, acting as both facilitators of language change and influencers of language use. Often, schools prioritize the dominant language for instruction, which can lead to a shift away from indigenous languages, especially when teachers and students primarily use the dominant language. Teachers’ proficiency impacts language use significantly; those fluent in indigenous languages can support their use, whereas those who speak only the dominant language may drive students toward it. Peer dynamics also play a role, as students adapt to the majority language to fit in.

Facilitating Language Shift. Facilitating language shift refers to the gradual transition from using indigenous languages to more dominant ones, often driven by social and educational influences. The findings of this study highlight the significant role that schools play in promoting language shift from indigenous languages to dominant languages. Participants frequently reported that upon starting school, they began using Bisaya, the dominant language, due to the lack of Blaan-speaking teachers. This necessity for effective communication with both teachers and classmates drives the shift. For instance, one participant noted, "Since we don’t have Grade 5 in our barangay, we have to attend Grade 5 in Bangkal, and there are already Bisaya there. So when I attended school there, I used Bisaya" (KI2).

Focus group discussions further confirmed this pattern, with participants sharing that they had to learn and use Bisaya in school because their teachers were not Blaan speakers. A participant mentioned, "We cannot use Blaan in school because the teachers are Bisaya, not Blaan... My niece is a Blaan, she’s a teacher, but she does not use Blaan in school because she has Bisaya students" (FGD1). Observations during the study reinforced these findings,

with one observer noting, "They really try to speak Bisaya because they are used to speaking Bisaya in school" (TO11).

This language shift in schools aligns with the ethnolinguistic vitality model of Giles et al. (1977), which suggests that when a language is not used in education or supported by government policies, it is less likely to be maintained. Additionally, Rosdiana (2014) and Hinton (2014) argue that schools have historically played a significant role in facilitating language shift, often through policies and ideologies that favor the dominant language. As a result, students may prioritize the school language, leading to a decline in the use of their native language over time.

Influencing Language Use. Influencing language use refers to the complex dynamics between educational institutions and indigenous languages, particularly how schools can both support and undermine the preservation of these languages. The findings of this study emphasize the essential role that schools play in preserving indigenous languages, even as they often contribute to language shifts. While homes and communities are critical to language maintenance, schools have a unique capacity to influence language use, either supporting or undermining indigenous languages (Ningsih, 2018; Rouchdy, 2013). This study observed that schools located near or within Blaan communities occasionally incorporate the Blaan language, particularly when the teacher is Blaan or during cultural events like "Buwan ng Wika" and Tribal Day. One participant noted, "Bisaya is used except for ALS where Blaan language is used since the teacher is Blaan" (KI6). Another shared, "If you are a Blaan teacher and your students cannot understand Bisaya, you have to use Blaan to make it easier" (KI7). These insights highlight the importance of integrating indigenous languages into the educational setting.

The influence of schools on language maintenance is complex. Teachers fluent in indigenous languages can promote their use in classrooms, whereas those who predominantly speak dominant languages may unintentionally contribute to language shift. For example, a participant recalled, "By the time we attended school, that's when we learned Bisaya" (KI5), reflecting on how schooling often becomes the point where children adopt the dominant language. Another participant described how they adapt: "In school, when the teacher and other students use Bisaya, we also use Bisaya. If that's what they use in school, then that's what we will speak" (KI4). Peer dynamics also reinforce this shift; one participant remarked, "We really have to practice [speaking Bisaya]... just to learn our lessons because no one teaches [in Blaan]" (FGD5).

The limited use of Blaan in schools demonstrates how education can both support and undermine minority languages. The pressure to succeed academically in the dominant language often leads to a decline in native language use, a phenomenon echoed in Limacher (2019), Hinton (2014), and Fishman's (1971) arguments that peer influence and academic necessity drive language shift. Gineta's (2016) study similarly found that indigenous students often adopt dominant languages to fit in, underscoring the significant impact of school environments on language use.

Role of Schools in Indigenous Language Preservation. The role of schools in the preservation and shift of indigenous languages is crucial, as evidenced by the findings from this study on the Blaan language. Participants consistently emphasized that the preservation of their language depends significantly on its integration and recognition within the educational system.

Hiring Indigenous Language Teachers. A key factor in preserving indigenous languages within schools is the hiring of teachers fluent in these languages. Hiring indigenous language teachers means employing educators who are fluent in and culturally knowledgeable

about indigenous languages. In this study, the participants stressed the importance of having indigenous language speakers, especially at the elementary and high school levels where shifts to dominant languages are common. This shift can lead to the gradual abandonment of indigenous languages. As KI2 noted, “For teachers to encourage [students] to preserve their culture...if you have fellow Kaulo companions, converse in your language so that your Kaulo language does not fade away.” This statement underscores the role of teachers in promoting linguistic pride and daily language use. KI3 added that exclusive language use in certain classes is crucial: “They have a grade where they speak and teach exclusively in the Blaان language.”

KI6 emphasized the value of incorporating indigenous languages into daily routines, such as classroom greetings: “Every morning... during a brief period like greetings inside the classroom, they would rehearse the dialect. If there are several different tribes... they will allocate specific times to use their respective languages.” Focus group discussions echoed these views, with FGD5 expressing the hope for more indigenous teachers under the Department of Education (DepEd): “That’s what we hope for...that there would be teachers under the DepEd...we would like [Blaان teachers] to be included,” and FGD6 adding, “We still need teachers who speak the indigenous language...qualified to use Blaان in the classroom.” Hiring indigenous language speakers as teachers is crucial for preserving these languages and fostering a culturally relevant learning environment.

Curriculum Development and Cultural Representation. Curriculum development that incorporates indigenous languages and cultural representation is another critical aspect of preserving linguistic heritage. Curriculum development and cultural representation refer to the process of designing and implementing educational programs that inclusively incorporate diverse cultural perspectives and practices, particularly those of indigenous communities. This concept emphasizes the importance of integrating indigenous languages, histories, and cultural practices into the curriculum, ensuring that these elements are not only taught but also celebrated within the educational environment.

In this study, the participants stressed that the Blaان language and culture should be embedded in the curriculum, extending beyond classroom use to form part of the broader school culture. KI8 suggested, “Teach what the Blaان culture is as a part of the curriculum... It's like a source of information as well, so that others can say, ‘Ah, so that’s the Blaان culture.’” This approach aims to prevent discriminatory attitudes and foster respect for diverse cultural identities.

Participants also advocated for the inclusion of indigenous representatives in curriculum planning and decision-making processes. KI7 emphasized the need for representation: “There should be heads or representatives for the Blaان people when making decisions about the curriculum...to contribute ideas about what should be done.” This involvement ensures that indigenous perspectives are considered, creating educational materials that accurately reflect their cultural and linguistic heritage.

Additionally, promoting tribal diversity within schools was highlighted as a means to encourage students to take pride in their heritage. Participants noted that identifying and acknowledging students' tribal affiliations during school programs fosters a sense of belonging and recognition. KI3 shared, “The best thing to do is to introduce oneself... and state your tribe, so they’ll notice.” Similarly, KI4 stressed the importance of recognizing tribal groups in schools: “The students... should introduce themselves as Blaان... so the school administration can identify how many are from the tribal group.”

Moreover, the integration of cultural activities, such as wearing traditional attire and performing indigenous songs during school events, was seen as vital for cultural pride and preservation. KI5 described a local practice: “Every Friday, the students wear Blaان costume

as their uniforms.” This practice, along with other initiatives, fosters a school environment that celebrates and normalizes the presence of indigenous cultures.

Incorporating indigenous languages into educational curricula is crucial for preserving cultural and linguistic diversity, as highlighted by several scholars. Majzub and Rais (2011) emphasize that education can play a transformative role in protecting endangered languages. They argue that integrating language revitalization programs into educational systems promotes national unity while respecting ethnic diversity, encouraging policymakers to include these efforts in both educational and social frameworks. This approach ensures the preservation of minority languages, reflecting a shared recognition of their value.

Pun and Gurung (2020) similarly call for a shift in educational policies to prioritize indigenous languages in curricula, asserting that this inclusion is vital for cultural preservation. Their research suggests that robust policies can empower language revitalization efforts, safeguarding linguistic heritage.

The Philippines provides an insightful example. Abiog and David (2020) discuss how the Philippine Department of Education’s policy of using native languages in early education supports language development and aligns with the 1960 Convention against Discrimination in Education. This balance between cultural preservation and social integration is critical, ensuring that linguistic rights are upheld.

However, Pine and Turin (2017) reveal that despite the initial enthusiasm for mother-tongue education in the Philippines, its impact on preserving endangered languages has been limited, highlighting the need for more effective strategies. Metila, Pradilla, and Williams (2016) further argue that successful implementation requires adapting policies to the local linguistic context, recognizing the fluid nature of language use.

Crystal (2000) reinforces the importance of embedding endangered languages in education, positing that this fosters a strong sense of identity and community responsibility among students, thereby driving active engagement in language preservation.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, LIMITATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

This study’s exploration of the Blaan language within educational settings reveals the critical role schools play in either accelerating language shift or fostering language preservation. The conclusions drawn from this research highlight the influence of educational policies and practices on language use, emphasizing the need for supportive measures while recognizing the study’s limitations that may affect the broader application of its findings.

Conclusion. The research underscores the significant impact of schools in either encouraging the shift away from or supporting the preservation of indigenous languages like Blaan. While schools often prioritize the dominant language, Bisaya, inadvertently contributing to language shift, they also hold potential to promote indigenous languages through strategies such as hiring Blaan-speaking teachers and integrating the language into cultural events and educational contexts. The school environment shapes students’ language preferences, often favoring the dominant language due to insufficient support for indigenous tongues.

Implications. The findings advocate for educational policies that actively incorporate indigenous languages into curricula and school activities, thereby enhancing linguistic diversity and preserving cultural heritage. Schools should be viewed not just as centers of academic learning, but as vital spaces for cultural preservation. The active use of indigenous languages by teachers can greatly impact language retention and cultural continuity.

Limitations. This study’s focus on the Blaan language and its specific educational context limits the generalizability of its findings to other indigenous languages and settings.

Reliance on interviews and focus groups means the results are shaped by participants’ personal experiences. Moreover, the absence of longitudinal data restricts insights into long-term trends in language maintenance or shift.

Suggestions. Future research should explore the long-term impact of initiatives like employing indigenous language-speaking teachers and embedding these languages in curricula. Additionally, examining other indigenous languages in various educational settings could provide broader insights into effective strategies for language and cultural preservation.

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