

# Integration of Tausug *Adat* (Customary Governance) and Indigenous Knowledge Systems in the Social Science Curriculum: A Framework for Culturally Responsive Education in Sulu

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**Abstract:** Globally, the preservation of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs) is recognized as a critical pillar for the survival of both humanity and the planet. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2021), indigenous knowledge represents a sophisticated set of understandings, interpretations, and meanings that are integral to the identity of communities and the conservation of global biodiversity. Furthermore, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) emphasizes that indigenous peoples have the inherent right to maintain, control, protect, and develop their cultural heritage and traditional knowledge. Despite these international protections, globalization continues to threaten the "intellectual patrimony" of tribal communities, often replacing sustainable ancestral practices with homogenized modern systems that fail to account for local ecological and social realities.

**Keywords:** Grounded Theory, Indigenous, Integration, Sulu, Tausug Addat.

## 1. Introduction

In the national context of the Philippines, the state formally recognizes the rights of Indigenous Cultural Communities (ICCs) through the landmark Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997, also known as Republic Act No. 8371. This legislation acknowledges that the development of the nation must be anchored on the protection of the rights of ICCs to their ancestral domains and cultural integrity. The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) consistently advocates for the documentation of IKSPs to prevent biopiracy and cultural misappropriation. However, scholars like De Vera (2023) argue that while the legal framework is robust, the actual integration of these practices into regional development plans remains inconsistent. This leaves many indigenous systems vulnerable to erosion, as formal institutions often prioritize Westernized models of governance and medicine over deeply rooted local wisdom.

At the regional and local levels, specifically within the Sulu Archipelago of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), the Tausug—known as the "*Suluk*" or "*People of the Current*"—possess a unique socio-political and spiritual identity. For centuries, the Tausug have survived colonial pressures and internal conflicts by anchoring themselves to their *Adat* (Customary Laws) and *Ubat* (Traditional Healing). These are not merely relics of a bygone era; they are living blueprints for survival and social cohesion. In the local municipalities of Sulu, from the bustling center of Jolo to the coastal fringes of Indanan and Parang, the *Adat* remains a powerful force in conflict resolution and resource management, providing a sense of justice and order that formal legal systems sometimes struggle to replicate.

However, as Sulu moves toward a more modern era of sustainable development and increased urbanization, a silent risk emerges: the wisdom of the elders is being bypassed by contemporary governance and educational systems. The youth, increasingly influenced by digital globalization and a standardized curriculum, are experiencing a growing disconnect from the ancestral "Current" that has sustained their identity for generations. This study is directly aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, specifically SDG 4 (Quality Education) by promoting the appreciation of cultural diversity, SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by safeguarding cultural heritage, and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by highlighting the role of customary law in maintaining inclusive societies.

The primary aim of this research is to document and evaluate the prevailing IKSPs of the Tausug in Sulu and to assess how these indigenous practices can be integrated into modern development frameworks. By identifying the barriers to knowledge transmission between elders and the youth, this study seeks to propose a Culturally Grounded Development Model that ensures progress is achieved without losing the "soul" of the Tausug identity. It ultimately serves as a formal documentation effort to support the NCIP's mission of cultural

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revitalization and heritage preservation, ensuring that the development of Sulu is not just modern, but authentically Tausug.

## 2. Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological and operational structure undertaken to develop the Culturally Grounded Framework for the Integration of Tausug IKSPs. It discusses the research method, source of data, data-gathering instruments, respondents, sampling technique, procedure of the study, and data analysis. Measures ensuring the trustworthiness and ethical integrity of the research are also included. The methodology was carefully designed to generate valid, credible, and contextually grounded insights from the elders, educators, and youth within the Province of Sulu.

### A. Methods Used

This study adopted a qualitative research method utilizing the Grounded Theory approach, which is designed to generate theories or frameworks directly from data systematically gathered from participants lived experiences. According to Chun *et al.* (2019), grounded theory allows researchers to discover patterns, concepts, and relationships that emerge naturally from raw data, making it suitable for studies exploring the integration of indigenous knowledge into modern systems. This method was ideal for the present study because it aimed to understand how Tausug wisdom can be translated into a formal academic framework through the lived experiences of the community rather than pre-established Western educational models.

### B. Source of Data

The study primarily relied on primary qualitative data collected through interviews with three key groups in Sulu: Tausug Elders (Cultural Masters), HEI Educators, and Undergraduate Students. These participants served as the main data source because they provide the necessary "insider" perspective on the relevance and transmission of *Adat* and *Ubat*. Secondary data were also used to supplement the findings, including the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (RA 8371), existing Social Science syllabi, and academic journals regarding indigenous education.

### C. Data-Gathering Instruments

The primary tool used was a semi-structured interview guide, developed to collect rich, qualitative data about the participants' perceptions of IKSPs and their place in the classroom. This instrument allows for flexibility and probing, which is essential when discussing traditional wisdom and cultural barriers. The guide was validated by cultural experts and academic peers to ensure it respected Tausug sensibilities and aligned with the study's objectives.

### D. Respondents of the Study

The respondents consisted of a purposive group of participants from the Province of Sulu.

These included:

1. *Five (5) Tausug Elders/Cultural Masters* to provide the baseline of indigenous wisdom.
2. *Five (5) Social Science Educators* from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Sulu.
3. *Five (5) Undergraduate Students* to share their experiences with cultural learning.

This diversity ensures a 360-degree view of how knowledge moves from the community to the classroom.

### E. Sampling Technique

This study employed Purposive Sampling, a technique where participants are selected based on their specific knowledge and relevance to the research. In the context of Sulu, this meant identifying individuals who are recognized "gatekeepers" of Tausug culture and educators who are directly involved in curriculum implementation. This targeted approach ensures that the resulting framework is grounded in actual expertise rather than random opinion.

### F. Procedure of the Study

The study followed a systematic process:

1. *Permission*: Seeking approval from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) and school administrations.
2. *Ethics*: Obtaining informed consent from elders and participants, ensuring their cultural intellectual property is respected.
3. *Interviews*: Conducting sessions in a mix of English and *Süg*, allowing participants to express complex cultural concepts in their native tongue.

Table 1  
Instrument of the study alignment

Research Objectives	Interview Questions
To evaluate the level of integration of Tausug IKSPs within the formal Social Science curriculum in Sulu HEIs.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To what extent do you see Tausug <i>Adat</i> or traditional practices reflected in your current Social Science lessons?</li> <li>2. What specific indigenous topics are currently missing from the curriculum?</li> </ol>
To determine the perceptions of educators and students regarding the relevance of <i>Adat</i> and traditional practices.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do you believe Tausug traditional governance (<i>Adat</i>) can help solve modern community issues?</li> <li>2. Why is it important for the younger generation to learn these IKSPs in a formal school setting?</li> </ol>
To develop a proposed framework for a "Culturally Responsive Curriculum."	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are the main challenges in teaching indigenous knowledge in college?</li> <li>2. What strategies or methods would make learning about Tausug culture more effective for today's students?</li> </ol>

- 4. *Validation*: Transcribing the data and returning to the participants to ensure their "voice" was captured accurately.

G. *Data Analysis*

The data analysis utilized the Grounded Theory method through three coding phases:

- *Open Coding*: Breaking down interviews into themes like "Customary Laws" or "Pedagogical Gaps."
- *Axial Coding*: Connecting these themes to see how, for example, a lack of materials (Barriers) affects cultural pride (Result).
- *Selective Coding*: Integrating these categories into the final Culturally Grounded Framework for IKSP Integration.

The constant comparative method was used throughout, ensuring the framework emerged organically from the Tausug context.

3. **Result and Discussion**

Presents the findings derived from the grounded analysis of narratives from elders, educators, and students in the Province of Sulu. This section integrates these qualitative insights to construct the Framework for Culturally Responsive Education. It explains how the systematic integration of *Adat* (Customary Governance) and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) into the Social Science curriculum serves as an adaptive mechanism for cultural preservation and academic relevance.

A. *The Framework for Culturally Responsive Education in Sulu*

The framework represents the dynamic and cyclical process through which indigenous understanding is institutionalized within formal education. It emphasizes that cultural integration

is not merely an addition of topics but a structural transformation of how knowledge is delivered. Grounded in participants' lived experiences, the framework consists of four interrelated dimensions: Cultural Awareness and Validation, Pedagogical Infusion, Institutional Adaptation, and Generational Continuity.

1) *Cultural Awareness and Validation*

Cultural awareness serves as the conceptual cornerstone of the framework, representing the recognition of *Adat* and traditional practices as sophisticated systems of governance and science. The participants demonstrated that Tausug knowledge is deeply rooted in identity, functioning as a "Living Library."

*MEMOS*: The participants' responses strongly underscore that cultural awareness is the initial cognitive foundation. Their statements convey a clear awareness that Tausug identity is sustained through lived practices. A significant finding is that validation must occur before integration; the academic community must recognize *Adat* as a valid socio-political system. This highlights how Tausug wisdom currently exists in a state of "unwritten expertise" that requires institutional acknowledgment to survive the standardized education system.

2) *Pedagogical Infusion*

Pedagogical infusion reflects the transformation of cultural awareness into purposeful academic action. This involves the deliberate alignment of *Adat* and traditional practices with the formal Social Science curriculum.

*MEMOS*: Pedagogical infusion is the operational core of the framework. It bridges abstract cultural pride with tangible classroom activity. The findings suggest that "decolonizing" the curriculum occurs when teachers stop treating indigenous knowledge as "outside" data and start using it as the primary lens for Social Science. This transition marks the shift from being a passive recipient of a national curriculum to an active creator of a culturally responsive one.

Table 2  
Participant responses on cultural awareness and validation

Participant Statements	Open Codes	Axial Codes	Selective Codes
"The <i>Adat</i> is the law of our ancestors. It is how we truly settle conflicts in the community when formal courts are too far."	Customary laws; Conflict resolution.	Customary Governance ( <i>Adat</i> )	Validation of Tausug IKSPs
"Our ancestors understood the tides and the medicinal plants of the mountain long before the modern textbooks arrived."	Traditional science; Ecological wisdom.	Indigenous Knowledge Systems	Validation of Tausug IKSPs
"If the curriculum does not mention our culture, the students will feel like their identity has no value in the modern world."	Identity risk; Curricular gaps.	Cultural Identity Preservation	Validation of Tausug IKSPs

Table 3  
Participant responses on pedagogical infusion

Participant Statements	Open Codes	Axial Codes	Selective Codes
"I use the Tausug Sultanate as a case study for my political science class. It helps students understand power structures better."	Localizing concepts; Relevant examples.	Culturally Responsive Instruction	Social Science Curriculum Infusion
"We must write our own modules because the current books do not reflect the reality of life here in Sulu."	Lack of materials; Need for localization.	Curriculum Localization	Social Science Curriculum Infusion
"When students see their culture respected in the classroom, they become more engaged and prouder of their heritage."	Academic validation; Student engagement.	Contextualized Pedagogy	Social Science Curriculum Infusion

Table 4  
Participant responses on institutional adaptation

Participant Statements	Open Codes	Axial Codes	Selective Codes
"The school must recognize our elders as 'Cultural Professors' even if they do not have a formal teaching license."	Redefining expertise; Community inclusion.	Community-Academic Partnership	Strategies for Culturally Responsive Education
"We are planning to create a cultural resource center where students can touch and study traditional Tausug tools."	Physical spaces; Visual learning.	Resource Mobilization	Strategies for Culturally Responsive Education
"Institutions must be flexible. We need policies that encourage local research on our own indigenous practices."	Policy reform; Proactive research.	Institutional Resilience	Strategies Culturally Responsive Education

### 3) *Institutional Adaptation and Strategies*

Institutional adaptation represents the behavioral alignment of an HEI's policies with the indigenous reality of Sulu. This dimension shows how schools respond to the "stress" of cultural erosion through strategic innovation.

*MEMOS*: The responses collectively demonstrate that institutional adaptation functions as the stabilizing pillar. It shows how HEIs in Sulu can overcome standardized barriers by seeking alternative resources. The ability to utilize community experts (Elders) as legitimate sources of knowledge strengthens the institution's capacity to deliver a curriculum that is both academically rigorous and culturally authentic.

### 4) *Generational Continuity (The Outcome)*

The final stage, Generational Continuity, represents the integrated outcome of the framework. It reflects a Tausug professional who exhibits both academic excellence and deep cultural rootedness. This outcome underscores that true Culturally Responsive Education produces graduates who are not forced to choose between their identity and their profession. It fulfills the ultimate goal of the study: creating a sustainable bridge between the Tausug past and the academic future.

## 4. Conclusion

Presents the summary of conclusions derived from the study "Integration of Tausug Adat (Customary Governance) and Indigenous Knowledge Systems in the Social Science Curriculum: A Framework for Culturally Responsive Education in Sulu." It synthesizes the major results from the previous chapter and provides practical, evidence-based suggestions to strengthen indigenous education, institutional policies, and community-academic partnerships. The insights in this chapter aim to promote cultural continuity and academic relevance within Higher Education Institutions in Sulu.

This study concludes that Culturally Responsive Education is not a fixed curriculum but a progressive, grounded process that develops through the validation of indigenous wisdom.

Higher Education Institutions in Sulu do not achieve inclusivity solely through policy mandates, but through the active integration of *Adat* and traditional practices into the daily academic experience. The findings highlight that academic

excellence in the Tausug context involves the ability to align modern social sciences with ancestral values.

In the context of the Bangsamoro, where identity and self-determination are central to the educational mission, the integration of IKSPs is essential. The Framework for Culturally Responsive Education provides a practical model that bridges the community's "Living Library" with formal academic standards. It establishes that cultural resilience is the ultimate indicator of educational success, reflecting maturity in leadership and a commitment to intergenerational knowledge transfer. Ultimately, the study concludes that indigenous knowledge is both a survival skill and a scholarly asset anchored in the "intellectual patrimony" of the Tausug people.

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