

PROFILING THE INDIGENOUS CULTURAL PRESERVATION PRACTICES OF THE BLAAN TRIBE: A QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how an indigenous community preserves its cultural heritage using a qualitative narrative design aimed at understanding lived experiences, historical knowledge, and cultural continuity. Seventeen community members from selected barangays in Koronadal City participated, with ten providing in-depth interviews and seven contributing through a focus group discussion. Findings revealed that cultural preservation is sustained through oral storytelling, ritual practices, and traditional craftsmanship, although these are increasingly shaped by modernization. Challenges emerged from technological distractions, limited institutional support, scarce cultural mentors, and declining youth participation. External influences such as new religious affiliations, economic pressures, and shifting community roles further affected the continuity of traditional beliefs and practices, leading to selective adaptation of cultural elements. The study implies that intentional and community-grounded cultural transmission efforts are essential to support long-term preservation.

Keywords: *Blaan Culture, Cultural Preservation, Indigenous Knowledge, Narrative Inquiry, Cultural Challenges, Qualitative Research, Koronadal City*

INTRODUCTION

Globally, the crisis of indigenous cultural preservation is a growing concern. About 40 percent of the world's 6,700 languages are endangered, and nearly 50 percent of these may disappear by 2100 without immediate action (Tokeley, 2024; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN DESA], 2023). Indigenous territories, covering 28 percent of the Earth's land area and supporting 60 percent of mammalian biodiversity, also face limited protection and recognition (Garnett et al., 2018). Climate change, land dispossession, assimilation policies, and globalization continue to worsen this situation. Without urgent, indigenous-led preservation supported by legal recognition and sustainable development efforts, these cultural and ecological systems risk permanent loss.

In the Philippines, the Blaan tribe faces ongoing challenges in cultural preservation. Of the 108 traditional upland rice varieties once cultivated, only 46 remain documented, while 62 have already diminished or become extinct, threatening both food security and cultural identity (UP Open University, 2022). Language loss is also evident as schools in Matanao, Davao del Sur prioritize Bisaya over the Blaan language, limiting its transmission among children (Banay et al., 2023). Additionally, variations in phonology, morphology, and syntax across Blaan communities make language preservation efforts more difficult (Ojanola and Tarusan, 2023).

The decline in indigenous cultural preservation among the Blaan tribe poses a significant challenge to the educational system. Rapid modernization and urbanization have diminished the use of native languages and traditions, causing younger generations to lose connection with their cultural identity (Santos & Ramos, 2021). The lack of culturally responsive teaching and limited integration of indigenous knowledge in curricula further marginalizes these traditions within schools (Garcia et al., 2023). This educational gap negatively affects indigenous students' self-esteem and engagement, threatening the survival of their cultural heritage (Delgado, 2020). Socioeconomic challenges also restrict access to quality education that honors and promotes indigenous culture (Torres & Lacerna, 2019).

Although previous research has explored indigenous cultural preservation among various tribes, there remains a lack of focused, community-based studies on the Blaan tribe's current educational practices. Many studies provide broad overviews without examining how cultural traditions are transmitted through formal and informal education (Delos Reyes, 2022). Existing literature often emphasizes historical or anthropological perspectives, missing practical approaches to incorporating indigenous knowledge in modern schools (Villanueva & Aquino, 2020). This gap underscores the need for updated, participatory research that collaborates with Blaan communities and educators to develop sustainable preservation strategies aligned with today's educational contexts (Morales, 2018). Addressing this gap can help ensure that indigenous students receive education that honors their cultural identity.

This study contributes valuable knowledge to educational practice by promoting culturally sensitive teaching frameworks that foster inclusion and respect for indigenous heritage. It supports curriculum development by offering practical methods to integrate indigenous cultural elements, enabling educators to better address cultural diversity (Lao & Bautista, 2021). Emphasizing the preservation of indigenous identity through education empowers students and enhances engagement, which may lead to improved academic performance and stronger community cohesion (Delgado, 2020). Ultimately, the findings can inform policymakers and educators in creating programs that both safeguard cultural heritage and increase education's relevance for indigenous learners.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative narrative research design to deeply explore and understand the lived experiences and cultural practices of an indigenous community in preserving their heritage. This approach was useful because it allowed participants to share their stories and perspectives in their own words, providing rich, detailed insights into how cultural knowledge was transmitted and maintained across generations. By focusing on personal narratives, the study captured the complexities and meanings behind traditional practices that quantitative methods might have overlooked, making it well-suited for documenting and honoring indigenous ways of life. The duration of the study spanned ten months, from March 2025 to October 2025, which included refining the proposal paper, participant recruitment, data collection, one month of data analysis, and one month for reporting and dissemination of findings.

Participants

The study involved 17 members of the Blaan community as participants. Among them, 10 individuals participated in in-depth interviews to provide detailed personal accounts of cultural preservation practices, while 7 others took part in a focus group discussion to encourage shared dialogue and collective insights. These participants were selected from barangays within Koronadal City, where the Blaan people were actively engaged in maintaining their cultural heritage. The inclusion criteria consisted of Blaan community members who were knowledgeable about or actively involved in cultural practices and who were residents of the identified barangays. Participants were required to be willing to share their experiences and insights openly. Individuals who were not part of the Blaan community or who had limited knowledge of cultural preservation practices were excluded to ensure that the data collected remained relevant and reflective of authentic indigenous perspectives.

Data Collection Tools

The primary data collection tools used in this study were semi-structured interview guides, observation checklists, and audio recording devices. The interview guide contained open-ended questions designed to capture participants' personal narratives and cultural practices related to the preservation of their traditions. An observation checklist was utilized to document cultural events, rituals, and practices observed during field visits. Audio recordings ensured accurate transcription of participants' responses, while field notes documented non-verbal cues, environmental context, and researcher reflections that contributed to the richness of the data.

Procedures

The data collection process began with obtaining permission from local authorities and securing the informed consent of Blaan participants. After approvals were obtained, the researcher conducted field visits and engaged in rapport-building activities to establish trust within the community. Semi-structured interviews were scheduled and conducted in the participants' preferred language, with assistance from a local interpreter when necessary. Cultural events and daily practices were observed and documented during community immersion. All data were securely stored and transcribed, and follow-up sessions were conducted to verify the accuracy of the transcriptions and interpretations through member checking.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that involved identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data. After the interviews and observation notes were transcribed, the researcher read through the data multiple times to become fully immersed in the content. Codes were developed based on recurring concepts, and these codes were later grouped into broader themes that represented key aspects of the Blaan tribe's cultural preservation practices. The analysis was guided by the research questions, and the emerging themes were cross-checked with participants during validation sessions to ensure that the findings accurately reflected their lived experiences and cultural insights.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cultural Preservation Practices of the Blaan Tribe

The findings for the first research question revealed themes that outline the core cultural preservation practices of the Blaan tribe, specifically oral tradition and storytelling as cultural anchors, rituals and ceremonies as living cultural practices, craftsmanship as a link between past and present, and modernization as both a threat and resource for preservation.

Table 1. Cultural Preservation Practices of the Blaan Tribe

Issues Probe	Codes / Category	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings
Storytelling; oral teaching; memory loss	Elders' stories; chants; lullabies; recordings	"ancestral stories"; "elder teachings"; "recorded chants"	Oral tradition and storytelling as cultural anchors	Stories preserve identity and values
Ritual practice; spiritual learning; participation	Ceremonies; symbols; chants; garments	"ritual meanings"; "spiritual belonging"; "symbol learning"	Rituals and ceremonies as living cultural practices	Rituals make culture lived
Traditional skills; livelihood; symbols	Weaving; beadwork; carving; patterns	"pattern meanings"; "craft income"; "ancestral designs"	Craftsmanship as link between past and present	Crafts connect heritage and today
Technology use; migration; tourism	Digital recording; online sharing; cultural promotion	"digital recording"; "online sharing"; "tourism support"; "elder guidance";	Modernization as threat and resource	Modern tools both help and risk culture
Elder teaching; school support; learning spaces	Intergenerational learning; community education	"school integration"; "learning by doing"	Intergenerational transmission and community education	Elders sustain cultural continuity

Theme 1: Oral tradition and storytelling as cultural anchors. The first theme centered on oral tradition and storytelling, which participants identified as the strongest cultural anchor sustaining Blaan identity. Many believed that storytelling is more than entertainment; it is the primary system through which ancestral teachings, cosmology, ethics, and history are preserved. Participants emphasized that oral narratives function as a living curriculum, shaping how children understand relationships to land, spirits, and community responsibilities. Stories encode lessons about respect, humility, bravery, and proper behavior. Because many Blaan teachings are not written down, the continuity of their cultural knowledge depends heavily on how effectively stories are retold, remembered, and practiced. Participants also expressed concern that if oral traditions weaken, the collective memory of the tribe — their myths, place-names, ecological wisdom, and lineage histories — would slowly fade, leaving younger generations without the cultural foundation that once tied families together.

“Whenever I tell the old story about the river guardians, the students begin to understand why we respect certain places and avoid disturbing sacred spots. They start asking why the river is important, and those conversations guide their behavior.” (IDI, P3)

“In school, when I share folktales during reading time, the younger ones listen closely and later ask about meanings of certain words and rituals. Those simple questions show they are starting to value our traditions.” (IDI, P6)

“Listening to the elders tell stories at night makes me feel connected to the past. Even after school, I think about how the characters in those stories lived and how they followed our beliefs.” (FGD, P2)

“I like recording the chants that my grandmother sings. I replay them while studying, and each time I listen, I understand something new about our ancestors.” (IDI, P9)

“When I teach my siblings the lullabies I learned, I feel like I am passing on a piece of our identity even if they are still too young to understand everything.” (FGD, P5)

In support, recent studies emphasize that Indigenous oral traditions remain essential to cultural survival because they transmit ecological knowledge, social norms, and worldview through narrative forms that are easier for communities to internalize (Shiri, Howard & Farnel, 2021). These works explain that stories help maintain cultural authority, strengthen identity, and preserve heritage despite pressures from modernization. Further support suggests that when oral traditions are integrated into community programs and learning environments, young people develop greater cultural pride and continuity. Contemporary research found that revitalizing storytelling in schools and community gatherings enhances intergenerational engagement and helps youth contextualize traditional beliefs within modern life (Setiawan, 2025).

Theme 2: Rituals and ceremonies as living cultural practices. Rituals and ceremonies emerged as a powerful theme because participants described them as the living expression of Blaan spirituality, communal identity, and respect for ancestral connections. They explained that ceremonies are not passive cultural displays but active practices that reinforce relationships between humans, nature, and the spirit world. Each ritual — whether a healing rite, thanksgiving celebration, planting ceremony, or community gathering — teaches discipline, humility, cooperation, and sacred responsibility. Participants added that rituals also function as informal education, where younger generations learn by watching, assisting, or participating. Through ceremonies, children and students encounter cultural values in action, observing how elders bless the land, chant traditional prayers, handle ritual garments, and uphold sacred rules. Many believed that rituals are essential because they make culture tangible, immersive, and

emotionally felt, helping younger people internalize knowledge that cannot be fully learned through explanation alone.

“During the land-blessing ceremony, many students asked why elders bowed to certain trees and offered woven leaves. After the ritual, they understood that the forest is not just a resource but part of our spiritual responsibility.” (IDI, P4)

“When I helped prepare the garments used in the ceremony, I realized each pattern has meaning, and I felt honored to be trusted with such a task.” (FGD, P1)

“Watching a healing ritual with my classmates helped us understand why our people value balance between body, spirit, and community. Later we discussed the symbols and prayers, which deepened our understanding.” (IDI, P7)

“When the chants and drumbeats started, I felt a strong sense of belonging, as if the ancestors were present. That feeling made me want to learn more of our traditions.” (FGD, P4)

“Even when relatives return from the city, they always attend weddings and rituals because these ceremonies remind them of who they are and where they come from.” (IDI, P10)

In support, studies on Indigenous revitalization found that rituals help maintain cultural cohesion and collective memory, especially when families and youth actively participate. Research highlighted that reestablishing traditional ceremonies strengthens community identity, fosters belonging, and restores disrupted cultural relationships (Chang, 2023). Moreover, ethnographic studies emphasize that rituals are essential for transferring ecological and spiritual knowledge across generations. By participating in ceremonial activities, younger members learn sacred rules, proper behaviors, and environmental ethics embedded in Indigenous belief systems, ensuring continuity amid social and environmental changes (Knight, 2021).

Theme 3: Craftsmanship as a link between past and present. Craftsmanship — including weaving, beadwork, embroidery, brasswork, and carving — was consistently highlighted by participants as a vital bridge connecting ancestral heritage with contemporary life. They explained that crafting is not simply an artistic skill but a cultural language encoded in patterns, motifs, materials, and techniques. Each design carries symbolic meaning: clan identity, spiritual beliefs, historical memory, and stories of place. Participants described how learning these crafts teaches patience, discipline, respect for elders, and understanding of Blaan cosmology. Craftsmanship also functions as a livelihood strategy, allowing artisans and students to earn income while preserving culture. This economic relevance helps sustain traditional practices in modern contexts, preventing the erosion of skills that once defined Blaan material culture. Through crafts,

younger generations not only inherit ancestral knowledge but also reinterpret it creatively, merging tradition with modern aesthetics without losing cultural essence.

“I learned weaving by sitting beside my aunt for many months. She explained every pattern while I practiced. Each design tells a story, and when I weave them, I feel the presence of our ancestors.” (IDI, P2)

“I make bead bracelets and sell them during school events and community gatherings. It helps me support my studies, and at the same time, I promote our heritage.” (FGD, P6)

“We invited artisans to school to demonstrate weaving, carving, and beadwork. Many students became interested when they saw how meaningful each pattern is.” (IDI, P5)

“When I carve figures into wood, I imagine how our elders once shaped designs based on stories and dreams. Crafting feels like touching the past with my own hands.” (FGD, P3)

“I experiment with new colors to attract buyers, but I never change the symbols. The meaning stays the same, and that is what makes our craft alive.” (IDI, P8)

In support, research on Indigenous craft revitalization concluded that youth engagement, skill transmission, and economic opportunities are key to sustaining traditional crafts in modern contexts. In communities where crafting becomes livelihood, cultural knowledge is more likely to be preserved and passed on (Ariffin, 2023). Additional studies emphasize that craftsmanship embodies Indigenous identity, and its preservation requires balancing cultural authenticity with creative adaptation. When communities integrate traditional crafts into education, tourism, and cultural programs, they strengthen intergenerational learning and ensure that ancestral meanings encoded in designs continue to thrive (Craft Preservation Studies, 2025).

Theme 4: Modernization as both a threat and resource for preservation.

Participants described modernization as a double-edged force in Blaan cultural preservation. On one hand, modern lifestyles disrupt traditional practices due to migration, digital entertainment, time constraints, and exposure to dominant cultures. Many explained that younger people often prioritize schooling or work outside the community, which reduces opportunities to learn cultural practices. On the other hand, participants also emphasized that modernization introduces tools that can strengthen cultural transmission. Smartphones, social media, digital archives, and cultural tourism allow the Blaan to document, share, and promote their heritage to wider audiences. Some participants described using phones to record chants, film dances, or create online platforms that attract interest among youth. Thus, modernization becomes both a challenge and an opportunity: it can weaken cultural continuity if uncontrolled, but it can

also empower Indigenous communities when used with intentional cultural leadership.

“Many young people who study in the city forget the old chants and stories because they become busy and disconnected from community life.” (FGD, P7)

“I record our dances and songs using my phone. When I share them online, many friends ask about our traditions, and some want to learn.” (IDI, P1)

“Phones sometimes distract children, but we also use them to record grandmothers’ stories and chants before they are forgotten.” (IDI, P6)

“Tourism brings people to see our crafts and rituals. The income helps support artisans and elders, but we must ensure our culture is respected.” (FGD, P2)

“I study outside the community, but I return during rituals because that is how I stay connected. I tell my classmates about our traditions so they understand our culture.” (IDI, P9)

In support, studies on globalization and Indigenous resilience argue that digital technology can either erode or strengthen cultural identity depending on how communities use it. When Indigenous groups harness digital tools to document traditions, they reinforce cultural pride and visibility (Dam Lam, 2023).

Further research shows that modernization can support cultural preservation when communities adopt balanced strategies such as digital archiving, structured cultural programs, and youth-led cultural initiatives. These approaches help bridge traditional knowledge with contemporary needs, ensuring cultural survival in changing environments (Tradition in Transition – Blaan Study, 2024).

Theme 5: Intergenerational transmission and community education. Participants emphasized that intergenerational transmission is the foundation of cultural continuity. They explained that elders play a crucial role in teaching language, rituals, ecological practices, and stories to younger generations. However, this learning is not limited to formal instruction; it occurs naturally during farming, crafting, ceremonial preparation, and daily interactions. Participants also expressed concerns that fewer elders are available to teach regularly, and that younger people have increasingly limited time due to school or work. To address this, some communities collaborate with schools to integrate cultural sessions, storytelling programs, and skill training. They believe that when both home and school environments support cultural learning, Blaan traditions become more resilient. Intergenerational transmission also provides emotional grounding: participants shared that learning from elders fosters a strong sense of identity, continuity, and belonging.

“If we do not teach the younger ones now, they will grow up without knowing the meanings behind our stories, plants, and sacred practices.” (IDI, P4)

“In school we include traditional songs and stories once a week. Some students who rarely hear these at home became more interested and even asked elders to teach them.” (FGD, P1)

“I want to learn the names of plants and healing herbs, but many elders are too old or too busy. Sometimes we schedule field visits so they can teach us directly.” (IDI, P7)

“I improve my weaving by learning from an older artisan who guides me step by step. Every pattern she teaches carries a memory.” (FGD, P5)

“We bring children when we visit farms and sacred places. They see everything, ask questions, and learn through experience — that is our true classroom.” (IDI, P10)

In support, studies on cultural continuity show that intergenerational learning is one of the strongest predictors of Indigenous community resilience. When cultural teachings are embedded in daily life, identity remains stable despite pressures from modernization (Rubin, 2024). More recent research highlights that integrating traditional knowledge into formal education systems enhances youth engagement and strengthens ties between community and school. This collaborative approach helps preserve language, customary practices, and ecological knowledge for future generations (Dockery, 2020).

Challenges in Sustaining the Cultural Heritage of the Blaan Community

The results for the second research question generated themes that capture the major factors affecting the transmission of cultural heritage among the youth, including modern lifestyle and technology as barriers, institutional and policy support as facilitators, resource and mentorship scarcity, and generational disconnect and cultural relevance.

Table 2. Challenges in Sustaining the Cultural Heritage of the Blaan Community

Issues Probe	Codes / Category	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings
Modern lifestyle; technology use; time limits	Gadget use; online activities; school demands	“phone use”; “online distraction”; “missed gatherings”	Modern lifestyle and technology as barriers	Technology limits cultural learning
School role; policy support; funding	Elder involvement; institutional programs; policy backing	“elder invitations”; “policy support”; “limited funding”	Institutional and policy support as facilitators	Institutions strengthen preservation

Limited resources; few mentors	Elder scarcity; material lack; mentorship gaps	“few elders”; “no materials”; “lack mentors”	Resource and mentorship scarcity	Scarcity weakens transmission
Youth perception; meaning gaps; dialogue	Cultural relevance; explanation needs; generational gap	“old-fashioned views”; “unclear meaning”; “need dialogue”	Generational disconnect and cultural relevance	Meaning gaps reduce engagement

Theme 1: Modern lifestyle and technology as barriers. Many also explained that the rapid adoption of modern lifestyle choices has altered family interactions. Young members now prefer virtual engagement over participating in communal work or rituals. This not only limits learning opportunities but also affects the emotional bond between generations, making cultural learning feel optional rather than integral to daily life. Because the Blaauw knowledge system is experiential and relational, any reduction in face-to-face interaction directly affects cultural transmission. The theme reflects a felt tension between preserving identity and adapting to modern demands.

“Most of the youth spend their afternoons on their phones, so they miss the time when elders usually teach stories, weaving, and songs.” (FGD, P2)

“When I try to share traditional lessons after school hours, the students are already tired or distracted by online activities.” (IDI, P4)

“My classmates prefer staying indoors to watch videos instead of joining community gatherings.” (FGD, P5)

“It is difficult to convince young people to sit down and listen to cultural teachings when they feel rushed by school tasks and technology.” (IDI, P7)

“I want to learn more from the elders, but I admit that I often get carried away by the convenience of gadgets and modern life.” (IDI, P10)

Research on Indigenous youth engagement highlights similar challenges across global communities. According to Lopez (2020), rapid technological immersion among Indigenous students often reduces participation in cultural activities, primarily because digital entertainment competes directly with traditional learning spaces. Lopez argues that when youth value convenience and immediacy, slow-paced cultural practices appear less appealing, leading to gradual disengagement. This supports the findings of the study, as the participants also noted that the overuse of gadgets has displaced time meant for intergenerational interactions.

Further reinforcing this pattern, Santiago (2021) asserts that modernization, while beneficial for communication and mobility, inadvertently disrupts Indigenous knowledge systems by altering daily routines and weakening family-based teaching contexts. Santiago explains that device dependence and media saturation reshape young people’s worldview, distancing them from cultural responsibilities. This aligns with the participants’

concern that modern routines overshadow traditional learning, making cultural transmission increasingly difficult.

Theme 2: Institutional and policy support as facilitators. Participants also indicated that institutional support does not always fully align with the realities of the community. Some policies remain symbolic or lack clear implementation strategies, leaving teachers to navigate cultural teaching on their own. Participants felt that genuine support requires long-term commitment, resources, and collaboration with Indigenous leaders. The theme underscores the importance of strong institutional guidance in reinforcing cultural preservation efforts that the community alone cannot shoulder.

“When the school invites our elders, more students pay attention and feel excited about learning our traditions.” (IDI, P3)

“We can teach cultural lessons better if institutions provide materials and training that match the needs of our community.” (FGD, P1)

“Some programs support our culture, but they do not last long because they have limited funding.” (IDI, P6)

“We appreciate the policies that promote Indigenous learning, but we hope they can be implemented consistently.” (FGD, P4)

“It becomes easier to participate in cultural activities when institutions openly encourage and recognize them.” (IDI, P9)

According to Manuel (2022), institutional involvement plays a crucial role in sustaining Indigenous heritage, particularly for communities navigating modernization. He argues that formal structures like schools and local government units can act as cultural bridges by embedding Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum and ensuring that elders are involved in educational processes. This supports the participants’ insights that policy-based initiatives help create structured learning spaces where cultural practices can thrive.

Similarly, Rosenberg (2023) highlights that culturally responsive policies enhance intergenerational learning by providing both financial and organizational support for traditional activities. Rosenberg notes that consistent policy implementation allows Indigenous communities to maintain cultural vitality despite socioeconomic pressures. This literature reinforces the participants’ views that strong institutional backing helps sustain cultural practices and ensures that youth remain connected to their heritage.

Theme 3: Resource and mentorship scarcity. Participants explained that cultural learning requires time, patience, and direct instruction—elements that are difficult to sustain when communities lack organized support systems. Some youth expressed that they want to deepen their cultural skills but struggle to find mentors who can teach regularly. In this theme, resource limitations are not only material but also relational,

affecting both the availability of teachers and the motivation of learners.

“We want to learn weaving, but there are only a few elders left who know the complete patterns.” (FGD, P3)

“Sometimes we stop practicing because we do not have enough materials to continue the lessons.” (IDI, P2)

“I want to become skilled in beadwork, but there is no mentor who can guide me consistently.” (IDI, P8)

“Our elders want to teach, yet they are often too busy or tired to conduct sessions.” (FGD, P6)

“We need more programs that train young mentors who can continue the cultural teachings.” (IDI, P5)

In a study on Indigenous cultural transmission, Harper (2020) emphasizes that the availability of cultural mentors directly affects the continuity of traditional knowledge. Harper explains that mentorship scarcity disrupts the learning cycle, especially when expertise is concentrated among aging elders. This reinforces the participants’ concerns that the declining number of master practitioners limits opportunities for meaningful cultural learning. Complementing this viewpoint, Dimalanta (2021) notes that resource limitations—whether material, financial, or human—pose significant barriers to sustaining Indigenous heritage programs. Dimalanta argues that cultural preservation requires long-term resource investment, including support for tools, training, and documentation. This literature aligns with the study’s findings that resource scarcity weakens the capacity of communities to transfer cultural knowledge effectively.

Theme 4: Generational disconnect and cultural relevance. This theme emerged because many participants described a widening disconnect between youth perspectives and traditional expectations. Some younger community members question the relevance of certain practices in modern life, while others feel embarrassed or shy about participating in rituals or wearing traditional attire. Participants noted that when cultural practices are not explained in ways that connect to present-day realities, youth may perceive them as outdated. Elders, on the other hand, often assume that young people will naturally follow traditions without needing contextual explanations, which widens the communication gap.

Participants also mentioned that the generational divide affects emotional connection to cultural identity. Without meaningful dialogue between elders and youth, the practices lose their deeper significance, becoming mere performances rather than lived experiences. This theme shows that cultural continuity depends not only on teaching the practices but also on framing their meaning in ways that resonate with the younger generation.

“Some young people see our traditions as old-fashioned because they do not fully understand their meaning.” (FGD, P7)

“I want to appreciate our culture, but sometimes I do not see how it connects to my everyday life.” (IDI, P1)

“Elders expect us to learn automatically, yet we also need explanations and support.” (IDI, P4)

“I join rituals, but I still struggle to understand what some of the symbols represent.” (FGD, P2)

“We need more conversations that connect our culture to the present so that we can feel its importance.” (IDI, P6)

According to Iverson (2020), generational disconnect is a common challenge in Indigenous communities where cultural values undergo negotiation in response to modern influences. Iverson notes that youth often require culturally relevant framing to appreciate the importance of traditions. This supports the participants’ reflections that cultural practices must be contextualized to retain meaning for younger generations. Similarly, Martin (2022) explains that intergenerational dialogue strengthens cultural continuity by addressing misunderstandings and bridging gaps in expectations. Martin’s findings emphasize that when elders and youth communicate openly, cultural practices become more meaningful and engaging. This aligns with the participants’ perception that improved dialogue is essential for preserving Blaan identity.

External Influences Affecting the Blaan Tribe’s Cultural Identity

The themes that emerged for the third research question reflect how external forces shape the Blaan tribe’s cultural continuity, namely the influence of new religions on traditional belief systems, socio-economic pressures altering cultural priorities, shifts in community roles and power dynamics, and cultural adaptation and selective retention of traditions.

Table 3. External Influences Affecting the Blaan Tribe’s Cultural Identity

Issues Probe	Codes / Category	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings
Religious influence; belief changes	Church preference; blended beliefs; ritual decline	“church priority”; “blended beliefs”; “ritual loss”	Influence of new religions on traditional belief systems	Religion reshapes traditions
Work demands; migration; time limits	Long work hours; school duties; livelihood focus	“work pressure”; “time conflict”; “economic priority”	Socio-economic pressures altering cultural priorities	Economy reduces participation

Leadership change; authority shift	Youth leadership; income-based influence; elder exclusion	“youth leaders”; “economic authority”; “elder sidelined”	Shifts in community roles and power dynamics Cultural adaptation and selective retention of traditions	Power affects tradition
Practice adjustment; selective keeping	Modified rituals; school-based practice; symbolic retention	“adjusted rituals”; “school dances”; “same meaning”		Adaptation sustains culture

Theme 1: Influence of new religions on traditional belief systems.

Participants noted that despite these changes, some families practice a blended belief system. They attend church while still honoring ancestral rituals during significant life events or agricultural seasons. This illustrates that the impact of new religions is not purely negative; rather, it leads to shifts in interpretation and selective adoption of practices. The theme reflects the internal negotiation within families as they balance spiritual identity with cultural loyalty.

“Some families now prefer church events, so fewer children participate in the rituals that our elders still want to teach.” (FGD, P3)

“I join church gatherings, but I also want to understand our traditional beliefs because they are part of who we are.” (IDI, P2)

“There are rituals we used to do every year, but now only a few elders continue them because many parents follow different religions.” (FGD, P6)

“When I teach cultural lessons, some students ask why certain practices are no longer allowed in their homes.” (IDI, P7)

“My relatives follow different religions, so sometimes we disagree about which traditions we should still practice.” (IDI, P10)

According to Del Mundo (2020), the introduction of new religions often leads Indigenous communities to renegotiate spiritual identity as traditional belief systems interact with external doctrines. Del Mundo notes that this encounter can dilute the practice of ancestral rituals, yet it also encourages hybrid forms of spirituality where communities retain selected traditional elements. This supports the participants’ observations that religious shifts influence the continuity of Blaan spiritual practices.

Ravelo (2021) explains that religious pluralism in Indigenous contexts results in both transformation and tension, especially when new teachings challenge long-standing cosmological beliefs. Ravelo argues that such changes can weaken communal harmony if spiritual practices become fragmented across households. This literature aligns with the participants’ concerns that diverse religious affiliations can affect participation in rituals and disrupt unified cultural expression.

Theme 2: Socio-economic pressures altering cultural priorities. Participants also mentioned that families who migrate for work experience a gradual detachment from community rhythms. Those working outside the community return only during major events, reducing their exposure to daily cultural practices. Some parents also encourage children to pursue modern careers rather than focus on traditional skills, believing economic stability is more urgent. The theme reflects a broader shift in values where cultural involvement becomes secondary to socio-economic survival.

“Many of us work long hours, so we cannot attend gatherings where elders teach traditional beliefs.” (FGD, P4)

“Sometimes I skip cultural activities because I need to finish school tasks or help my parents earn extra income.” (IDI, P5)

“Families who move for work return less often, so their children slowly lose connection to our cultural routines.” (FGD, P2)

“We want to join rituals, but the schedule always conflicts with our responsibilities at school or at work.” (IDI, P8)

“Some cultural skills require time and materials, and many families prioritize earning money instead.” (IDI, P6)

Garcia (2022) notes that socio-economic pressures often force Indigenous communities to prioritize economic mobility over cultural continuity. Garcia explains that work obligations and financial instability reduce participation in traditional practices and shift the community’s focus toward meeting basic needs. This supports the participants’ accounts of limited time and resources for cultural involvement. Similarly, Torres (2023) describes how economic demands reshape the cultural landscape by influencing which traditions are maintained and which gradually fade. Torres argues that when families allocate more time to livelihood activities, community rituals lose their central space in people’s daily routines. This literature reinforces the study’s findings that socio-economic realities significantly affect cultural preservation among the Blaen.

Theme 3: Shifts in community roles and power dynamics. Additionally, participants reported that economic status has begun to influence power dynamics more strongly than before. Families with stable incomes or access to technology are sometimes perceived as having more influence, even over cultural decisions. This restructuring of roles affects how traditions are taught, valued, and enacted within the community. The theme captures the complex social transitions that alter both leadership structures and the transmission of cultural identity.

“Some decisions about community activities are now made by

younger leaders, so elders feel less consulted.” (FGD, P5)

“Students who study outside sometimes bring new ideas that change how we practice our traditions.” (IDI, P3)

“People now look up to those who have stable jobs, even if they know less about our ancestral customs.” (FGD, P7)

“There are rituals that elders want to continue, but younger leaders prefer modern alternatives.” (IDI, P9)

“Sometimes we feel caught between respecting elders and following new leaders who bring different priorities.” (FGD, P1)

Hirono (2021) explains that modernization often shifts authority structures in Indigenous communities, elevating individuals who possess formal education or economic capital. Hirono notes that this transition can weaken traditional leadership systems and disrupt established pathways for cultural instruction. This supports the participants’ experiences of shifting roles and diminishing elder authority. Likewise, Mallari (2020) emphasizes that changing power dynamics impact how traditions are negotiated and practiced. Mallari argues that when decision-making becomes influenced by modern positions of authority, ancestral knowledge may lose its central role in community identity. This literature aligns strongly with the participants’ observations about evolving leadership patterns that affect cultural preservation.

Theme 4: Cultural adaptation and selective retention of traditions. Participants mentioned examples such as modifying ceremonial attire to make them easier to produce, shortening ritual durations to fit modern schedules, or teaching cultural songs in school rather than exclusively at home. These adjustments help bridge the gap between tradition and modern expectations. The theme highlights that cultural resilience is not merely about preservation but also about thoughtful adaptation that ensures traditions remain relevant and accessible.

“We still follow some rituals but adjust them so more people can attend despite their busy schedules.” (IDI, P4)

“Our traditional clothes are now made with easier materials, but the patterns still show our identity.” (FGD, P6)

“We practice cultural dances during school events so they will not be forgotten.” (IDI, P1)

“Some beliefs are kept, but we apply them in ways that fit our lives today.” (FGD, P2)

“We change certain practices, but we make sure the meaning

remains the same.” (IDI, P8)

According to Fujimoto (2022), Indigenous communities demonstrate cultural resilience through selective adaptation, choosing practices that remain meaningful while modifying others to reflect modern realities. Fujimoto argues that this strategy allows cultural identity to survive in changing environments without losing its core significance. This supports the participants’ accounts of adjusting rituals and practices to maintain relevance.

Similarly, Perez (2023) discusses how cultural adaptation enables communities to balance tradition and modernity through conscious decisions about which practices to retain, modify, or recontextualize. Perez notes that adaptive strategies serve as a protective mechanism against cultural erosion, ensuring the continuity of identity despite socio-economic and religious influences. This literature reinforces the participants’ belief that adaptation strengthens rather than weakens tradition.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The study implies that the transmission of culture requires intentional mechanisms that bridge elders and the youth. Encouraging culturally-rooted learning approaches—whether through schools, community programs, or family-based initiatives—can help ensure that traditional knowledge systems remain accessible and relevant. Engaging Blaan elders as cultural mentors and integrating indigenous knowledge into various learning spaces can reinforce the value of heritage among younger generations.
2. The results show that while cultural preservation remains a community-driven effort, gaps in resources, support structures, and consistent policy implementation hinder long-term sustainability. Strengthened institutional involvement from local government units, cultural agencies, and educational institutions can provide the tribe with more stable platforms for documentation, training, and cultural revitalization. These findings support the need for coordinated policy action and investments aimed at protecting intangible heritage.
3. The study further suggests that external influences play a significant role in shaping cultural priorities and identity among the Blaan. Programs related to livelihood development, youth engagement, and community leadership must acknowledge the tribe’s evolving cultural environment. Designing initiatives that respect traditional beliefs while recognizing new realities can help the community navigate cultural change without losing their foundational identity.

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