Unveiling the Veil:
Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Filipino College Students

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Abstract: This study examined the current knowledge of Filipino college students on the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of the Philippines. The study included 75 college students during the academic year 2022-2023. Through a qualitative approach, the students submitted written essays anchored to the research questions. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data, adhering to the stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The analysis resulted in the surfacing of various themes which are the result of this study: (1) Exposure to art forms, (2) association with indigenous people, (3) essence of values and practices, (4) misunderstandings about ICH, and (5) safeguarding of ICH. Students who came from the provinces experienced ICH through their festivities and local cultures, which are annual celebrations of various communities. There were also students who observed their locality's people, handicrafts, and even familial behaviors. The presence of various art forms, performances, and experiences with indigenous peoples, and local traditions, regardless of whether it is within their families or communities, and their own knowledge of recent social issues *unveiled* the opportunities for the students to be exposed to the concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage and safeguard it. The author proposed a recommendation to further study and formulate a probable teaching and learning approach for college students to be more exposed to the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Philippines.
Keywords: comparativism, culture, Intangible Cultural Heritage, living heritage, Philippines.

The Philippines is a rich country in culture, traditions, and history. One facet of the country's heritage is its living traditions that have been passed down from the previous generations to the next. According to UNESCO (2003), these living traditions, formally known as Intangible Cultural Heritage, include varied customs, traditions, beliefs, and practices and have been expanded into several categories: oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices, festive events, knowledge of nature and the universe (Besmonte, 2022). In the case of the Philippines, this includes folk literature, traditional knowledge systems, social practices and rituals, and performing arts. Eslit (2023) states that practices, beliefs, traditions, and knowledge are contributory to a country's cultural identity. Taking this into account, UNESCO is looking forward to preserving the intangible cultural heritage of different countries through various initiatives like the identification and documentation of intangible cultural heritage, heightening awareness of the importance of intangible cultural heritage, provision of technical assistance to countries for the safeguarding of

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intangible cultural heritage, promotion of the exchange and sharing of intangible cultural heritage, and support for the creation of a global inventory of intangible cultural heritage (Saxer, 2012). Through these initiatives, UNESCO, through its Sustainable Development Goals, was able to gather different interventions to preserve and give emphasis on the importance of living traditions.

Several researchers have focused on the study of the importance and relationship of Intangible Cultural Heritage to the different industries and institutions. It is a prevalent result that ICH has a direct impact on the economy and tourism of a country (Du, 2021; Filipovic, 2018; Starčević et al., 2022; Xiao, 2022). This relationship boosts local economies by providing opportunities to local workers and the hospitality industry and enhancing the cultural infrastructure and services.

The simple exposure to ICH is also deemed to be crucial for developing countries. Several facets of ICH may have been forgotten (Xu & Zou, 2022), and through these exposures, several institutions helped bridge the gap between generations and geographical locations through the facilitation of the transmission of knowledge, skills, and cultural expressions and experiences. This exposure to the innate ICH of a country fosters identity and pride in its citizens.

In the international education sector, numerous studies have concluded that ICH influences the performance of students. When integrated into the curriculum, ICH has affected the academic journeys of the students in positive and sustainable ways (Benichou et al., 2022; Chen, 2022; Lerma et al., 2015; Liang et al., 2023; Ma, 2020). The inclusion of ICH in the curriculum of the institutions fostered a sense of pride, connection to heritage, critical thinking, and intercultural competence to the students, skills which have been deemed to be vital to the current workforce demands.

In the Philippines, several studies have shown the influence of ICH in the various aspects of the community. Pacio (2023) in his study of the Yakan community oral traditions, mentioned that traditional songs and stories are highly valued as a way of preserving cultural heritage, expressing cultural identity and values, and fostering community cohesion. This is supported by the study of Eslit (2023) when he indicated that the folklore of the Philippines is an integral part of the nation's cultural heritage and should be preserved and promoted because they help to maintain the nation's cultural identity, transmit values and traditions, and encourage diversity and inclusivity. A cross-cultural study by Boer and Abubakar (2014) with 760 young people in Kenya, the Philippines, New Zealand, and Germany has found that music consumption in families and among friends fosters social cohesion across cultures. In the education sector, Lobo (2023) affirms that the interest of higher education students plays a vital part in their education and that ICH provides this opportunity for the students to be engaged with the transmission and strengthening of national identity. This emphasizes the role of ICH in the reality of Filipinos, engaging with the different forms of this heritage through various means.

Despite the prevalence of literature on living traditions, the ICH of the Philippines is currently facing challenges due to various factors, including globalization and modernization, language shifting, lack of institutional support, generational gaps, and lack of awareness (Besmonte, 2022; Lobo, 2023; Pacio, 2023). Addressing these factors is essential to the continued transfer of ICH from the current generations to the next, making this study imperative.

The purpose of this research is to surface the current knowledge of students on the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Philippines. Specifically, this research aimed to answer the following questions: (1) What is the current knowledge of the participants on intangible cultural heritage? (2) How do students perceive the importance of intangible cultural heritage?

Theoretical Framework

To support this study on the current knowledge of students on the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Philippines, the Comparativist Theory (Lassiter, 2014; Peacock, 2001; Tylor, 1889) was used. Lassiter (2014) explained that Comparativism is "the use of diverse information from all the subfields (both biologically and culturally based) from many different populations to make generalizations about the complexity of human beings" (p. 41). Therefore, comparisons in anthropology aim to comprehend the broad patterns defining human existence.

Considering Lassiter's (2014) idea of Comparativism, the current study aims to surface the current knowledge of Filipino students on the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Philippines by comparing their varied experiences and exposures to its local elements. Particularly, by utilizing Comparativism, the researcher aims to provide a deeper understanding of the influences of ICH on the identity of Filipinos and their perception of their society. More importantly, the study will also serve as a gateway towards understanding broader phenomena surrounding the ICH of the Philippines.

Methodology

Research Design

This study was conducted through qualitative research design following a thematic analysis approach. The thematic analysis approach can be used in a variety of research questions to help identify, analyze, organize, describe, and organize themes from the data gathered (Braun & Clarke, 2006 as cited in Nowell et al., 2017). A qualitative approach is essential to surface the students' current knowledge of the intangible cultural heritage of the Philippines, which, in this case, were students of the Far Eastern University, Manila.

Participants and Sampling

The participants of the study were chosen using purposeful sampling with the following criteria: (1) Enrolled in the Far Eastern University at the time of data collection, (2) currently taking the Culture, Society, Ideas, and Innovations elective course, and (3) Filipino students who have been residing in the Philippines for not less than 5 years. Based on the criteria, 120 students were qualified to be part of the study; however, only 75 students were able to provide their papers and consent to be part of this study. The remaining students choose not to submit their essays. The students were guaranteed utmost anonymity and confidentiality for the entirety of the writing of this study and, thus, were referred to as ICH01 to ICH75.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data gathering was conducted through the essays submitted by the students. The students were provided 30 minutes to write and provide their current knowledge of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Philippines. After submitting the essay, the names of the students who indicated their names were blacked out. The qualitative data were analyzed through the three stages of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Creswell, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2017). Through CERES (Ballena & Liwag, 2019), following its (1) conceptual congruence, (2)

exclusivity, (3) responsiveness, (4) exhaustiveness, and (5) sensitivity and the principle of Comparativism (Lassiter, 2014), the author was able to finalize the 5 different categories or themes.

Ethical Considerations

This study declares that there would be no shed biases by the researcher. Although this study considered the research a qualitative instrument for analysis, he still based his analysis using content and thematic analysis. This study did not perpetuate any conflict of interest. Also, the researcher is not affiliated with any publishing company or author of any Intangible Cultural Heritage title.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln et al. (1985) proposed four criteria when establishing the trustworthiness and soundness of qualitative studies: (1) credibility, (2) transferability, (3) dependability, and (4) confirmability. The trustworthiness of this study was established through engagements with participants for extended periods to gain a comprehensive understanding of their experiences. The author also conducted member checking to confirm or correct their understanding. In addition, the author provided a detailed description of the study's context, participants, and data collection procedures, enabling others to assess the applicability of the findings. A systematic data collection and analysis process was employed, ensuring consistency and tracking progress. The results of this study were also shared with the participants and all of them agreed with the themes surfaced.

In addition to the strategies mentioned above, an external audit can also be used to establish the trustworthiness of research. An external audit is an independent review of a research study by a qualified auditor. One external auditor assessed the study's methodology, data collection and analysis procedures, and findings to ensure that they were sound and credible. His comments were also incorporated in this study. Finally, an audit trail was conducted by keeping a record of the research process. This included the validated activity schedule, compiled essays, essays with open-coding notes and comments, a complete list of related studies, and tabulated initial categories that were number-coded with the significant statements under each category. The audit trail made it easier to check and double-check the categories, and to search the transcripts for relevant and material support for each theme.

Results

The themes abstracted from the qualitative data revealed the students' current knowledge of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Philippines. Five major themes were revealed through the process of open, axial, and selective coding: (1) Exposure to art forms, (2) association with indigenous people, (3) essence of values and practices, (4) misunderstandings about ICH, and (5) safeguarding of ICH.

Exposure to Art Forms

Exposure to artforms came out to be the first theme that captures the current knowledge of students on the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Philippines. Students claimed that through various art forms, they were able to know how ICH works in their respective communities as they maneuver to understand their own identity as Filipinos. Most of these exposures took place during

their Junior and Senior High School academic years, with the different school programs, activities, and class discussions highlighting the significance of these art forms in modern times. A participant shared: "My only knowledge about ICH the traditional dances and music that our indigenous people have, since I participated in traditional folk dancing back in junior high school" (ICH71). While another participant mentioned that:

> *I already know some of the intangible cultural heritage in the Philippines. Dances and craftmanship are some of the ICH that I already know as this was taught to us and we practiced it as well during Junior High School. We also had school programs and events that require us to dance folk dances.* (ICH21)

While academic institutions play significant roles in the exposure of the students to the art forms as an ICH, there are also those with immediate families who were exposed to this type of ICH. These exposures took place during their family gatherings, daily interactions, and family businesses. One participant shared his family background that is associated with ICH:

> *As someone who came from La Union, our family is tied up with the Inabel craftmanship of weaving. My grandparents are weavers, and my family is now one of the loom weavers of our town. I have observed and experienced firsthand how to create this craft and its entire process.* (ICH10)

While another participant experienced ICH through stories from family members: "I know that the intangible cultural heritage concerns folklore and legends that our ancestors passed down to us, orally. These are the topics and stories that I heard from my relatives, especially my mother and grandmother, and my teachers" (ICH22).

Finally, the participants emphasized the importance of these art forms they were exposed to as they showcase the culture of their own respective communities. This point was stressed by ICH51 when he said that through his exposure to these art forms, he's able to understand that it "provides identity to a community" and by ICH75 when he mentioned that it is an "avenue to meet other people" therefore, bridging the gap between Filipinos. Hence, comparing these exposures leads to identifying the significance of various ICH to the participants' identities.

Association with Indigenous People

Different elements of Intangible Cultural Heritage are prevalent in indigenous communities. Members of the Indigenous Peoples (IPs) of the Philippines possess traditional practices, medicinal knowledge, spiritual practices, and other forms of cultural heritage that have been passed down through generations, even to those who are members of the urban communities.

These various forms of knowledge, including the prejudice towards the ICH of indigenous people, influenced the students' knowledge of the ICH of the Philippines, which came out as the second theme. The participants revealed that when they hear the word "heritage," they automatically associate it with the IPs due to their observation of their community practices. One participant shared his idea due to his close associations with the Mangyan IPs:

I have knowledge about Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Philippines because I lived in Oriental Mindoro, known to be the home of the Mangyans Indigenous Group. I always hear the insights of other people about the Mangyans and their practices. (ICH74)

While another participant shared:

The idea that comes into my mind when I heard of it was studying history of a particular indigenous group like the Aetas. Also, knowing about their traditions and practices. To know the roots and Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Philippines of each indigenous community, is necessary in its preservation. (ICH42)

Although some of them failed to identify the specific IPs they were able to encounter, the participants were still able to observe their practices. One participant raised her observation:

The only knowledge that I have about Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Philippines is that it is filled with traditions and practices of various ethnolinguistic groups. I honestly don't know the names, but I can identify the practices of these ethnolinguistic groups, and that it is actually part of the intangible cultural heritage of the Philippines. (ICH32)

While another participant was exposed to the IPs' tales and community structure:

The things that I know about Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Philippines is that all ethnolinguistic groups have their own behaviors and identity. I also know that there are legends and they do have different talents and rules that they emphasize, and the community needs to follow. (ICH66)

While other participants are observers, some interacted with the IPs in various ways, including tourism, education, and as part of their daily lives. One participant shared:

I know about the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Philippines when I visited the ethnolinguistic groups in Baguio, they were wearing their traditional attires. I also interacted with them. I also had a classmate who is an Igorot and (she)shared their traditions with me. (ICH68)

The popularity of specific IPs also served as an avenue for them to influence the knowledge of the participants regarding ICH. ICH52, who came from Northern Luzon and currently studying in the National Capital Region shared, "I only know about the intangible cultural heritage of the Philippines through my ancestors. I also know that some people or indigenous groups before, the Badjaos, Ifugaos, and Butbut group." While ICH13 highlighted, "I only know that the Philippines does have different economic systems and that the Igorot and Ifugao were the ones that is very well-known ethnolinguistic groups with different practices."

Furthermore, the location of the IPs communities influenced the views of the participants on ICH. One participant mentioned that:

> *Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Philippines is isolated from the urban society and is only done by elders of a community. My previous perception on Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Philippines is that these indigenous peoples are in the mountains and rivers that are untouched by the modern society.* (ICH44)

The immediate association of "heritage" with IPs, as mentioned by the participants, highlights the profound imprint of IP community practices on their schema. While some participants interacted directly with IPs, either through personal experiences or educational engagements, others passively observed these practices and learned their principles. Despite this comparison, it is evident that the Indigenous Peoples of the Philippines are stewards of our culture, and their influence on the students, whether through mere observation or experience, has surfaced the important transmission of ICH to the non-members of their communities.

Essence of Values and Practices

The third theme that surfaced in this study is the Essence of Values and Practices. Participants shared that they were exposed to the different ICH through the values and practices being conducted in their immediate and exposed environment. While it is a fact that there are various similarly structured communities in the Philippines, unique community practices are still prevalent. These practices, ranging from family traditions, work-related tasks, superstitions, rituals, and festivals, exposed the participants to the various traditional knowledge systems that are part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Philippines.

Families often serve as the first layer that exposes Filipino children to ICH, with parents and grandparents providing interventions and education on how things work and how one should act. ICH31 shared their experiences with traditional medicine, "I only know about the superstitious beliefs my mother and grandmother told me. I also experienced traditional healing because I was vomiting and severely sick before."

Two participants shared their observations and experiences with different practices associated with death, ICH2 mentioned their family practice on preventing misfortunes after the death of a relative:

> *We have been doing rituals in our province. I noticed that my family is doing it whenever there's a dead person, there must be a type of ritual in which they have to kill a chicken or pig, or both, and the blood will be spilled on the doorstep. After that, the casket will be spined 3 times and a small child will be carried and transferred from one side of the casket to the other so that no other members of the family will die.* (ICH2)

ICH33 mentioned their family's compliance with the 'gulgol' ritual in reverence for their deeply departed:

> *I personally experienced 'gulgol' ritual, a practice to "drive away the spirit of a dead relative and to bring the dead straight to heaven", since I am from the north. There were stories that struck me when I was questioning what we are doing including the practice of this ritual of my family.* (ICH33)

Digging deeper into the mythological aspect of ICH, ICH57 mentioned their exposure to the different community practices through their family:

> *I am fascinated with world history especially when it comes to blood compacts, exorcisms, and rituals like the traditional healers and many more since I am from Tarlac city and most of these ideas that I obtained are from my relatives living in the provinces. I also learned about 'pamahiin' and different practices that tend to protect us from evil spirits or 'engkantos.'* (ICH57)

Going beyond family traditions and influences are the immediate social practices and beliefs the participants are exposed to, either as a part of the practice or as an observer. ICH63 mentioned that their community celebrates the Moriones and Bila Bila Festivals; she highlighted that "both festivals are (being) participated by the community members, who contribute to the success of the activities" (ICH63). The schools also played a significant role in exposing the community members to the different festivals of other provinces; ICH3 shared that their school conducted an activity that featured festival dances:

> *We had a competition (in high school) presenting festival dances and we saw each other's performances. We learned a bit of knowledge about it. It's about how they started celebrating it and how, until now, it is still being preserved. I have visited a place where they celebrated the Sinulog Festival as well.* (ICH3)

It is evident in this theme that the participants were exposed to the different ICH of the Philippines through the values and social practices being conducted in their immediate environment. These values and practices, which ranges from family traditions to community festivals, are deeply rooted in Filipino culture, and upon comparison, both are aiming to promote social cohesion. This is supported by the statement of ICH3, when he said, "I have encountered happy people and saw how they worked really hard just to participate in the activities."

Misunderstandings about ICH

While exposure to the ICH of the Philippines has become widespread in contemporary times, several participants believe that they misunderstood this facet of heritage or that they do not know what it is called. These misunderstandings about ICH turned out to be the fourth theme that surfaced in this study. The participants' place of residence, confusion about ICH concepts, and initial understanding of ICH are a few of the ideas shared during the analysis of the data.

The place of residence of the participants played a role in their lack of knowledge of the ICH. For example, students who lived in rural areas were more likely to have heard of ICH than students who lived in urban areas. This is because ICH is often more closely associated with rural communities, where it is often passed down from generation to generation. ICH46 mentioned, "I'm ashamed that I don't know much about Intangible Cultural Heritage. I have been living in Metro Manila my whole life, and our family is focused on the complexities of the city."

Other participants shared their initial understandings of ICH. The participants mentioned specific facets without mentioning the other elements of this type of heritage, highlighting the influence of the current curriculum related to Philippine Culture. ICH8 shared their confusion

between tangible and intangible cultural heritage by mentioning that, "My only knowledge about ICH is that it is about cultural knowledge, like the museums, parks, churches, buildings, schools and others, nothing more."

On the other hand, ICH45 mentioned their confusion about the types of heritage treasures that can be found inside a museum, limiting their perception of ICH:

> *I do not know anything about Intangible Cultural Heritage. My first thought is that it will be about cultural items that can be found inside of a Filipino museum. I did not even know the difference between intangible and tangible cultural heritage.* (ICH45)

In relation to the ICH elements available inside academic institutions, the students, although some of them can experience it, are still confused about the features of ICH. ICH5 shared their experience during their secondary education:

> *I am entirely clueless about ICH. I only know the word "culture". But whenever I read "intangible" I cannot think of a certain example. Other Intangible Cultures were not being focused on during my junior and senior high school. I also did not know if I am doing those said ICH in my daily life.* (ICH5)

Despite these confusions on ICH, the participants still shared their interest in learning the ICH of the Philippines. This is supported by the statement of ICH67, "I have always been interested in learning about various cultures and always wanted to experience them firsthand. I wanted to interact and learn more about the different cultures here in our country."

These varied perceptions and misunderstandings of ICH revealed that geographical locations and educational experiences shaped the participants' confusion and misunderstandings of the ICH of the Philippines.

Safeguarding of ICH

The research questions are anchored on the surfacing of the current knowledge of the ICH of the Philippines and several participants enthusiastically shared their insights on the importance and current challenges being faced by this facet of heritage. More importantly, the participants also shared their opinions on possible solutions to further preserve the ICH of the country. This resulted in the last theme, the Safeguarding of ICH.

Several participants shared the importance of ICH, as supported by the statement of ICH23, "I think Intangible cultural heritage is important to the Philippines because it is our identity and pride as a Filipino." Although the rapid growth of development, both through modernization and globalization, has affected its presence. As Filipinos venture into more "practical" fields, often taking into their sights the opportunities to work outside the country, ICH has been left in the hands of a few preservation advocates. ICH12 mentioned these challenges by arguing that "Because of modernization and globalization, we will have to face challenges in learning ICH, as people are set to explore more things that are not within our country."

Considering the facets of modernization and globalization, another participant shared their insight on the waning practices of the IPs:

The Intangible Cultural Heritage practices of our indigenous people are slowly dying because of the various types of globalization and modernization that we are experiencing. The people of this country prefer other cultures over our own culture. We tend to entertain new and trendy things those other countries brought to us. (ICH16)

As possible solutions, several participants emphasized the role of the whole country and different communities in the preservation of ICH. One participant understands that the current curriculum needs to integrate more ICH elements into its design, "Intangible Cultural Heritage was not part of most lessons that we had before. We need to include this so that we can learn from these topics, so it will not be forgotten and will not vanish" (ICH42).

In relation to the integration of ICH into the curriculum, one participant shared the benefits of ICH, specifically the folk stories as lessons for the next generation:

To preserve our identity, we must preserve our culture, especially the type of culture that cannot be placed in a box to see and acknowledge. The stories or folklore shared to us when we were kids are vital lessons that a Filipino must have and pass down to the next generation. (ICH58)

The roles of the government institutions were also highlighted by the participants. ICH52 mentioned that "The government needs to put or invest funds and taxes from the Philippines to preserve Intangible Cultural Heritage. This will allow them to maximize their crafts and resources," while ICH12 recommended the role of government officials, "What I would recommend is for the government officials to act based on their positions, to follow their responsibilities and obligations in preserving and promoting our cultural heritage." (ICH12)

It can be seen from this theme that the participants are aware of the possible safeguarding methods for culture as a whole. The ideas shared by the participants illustrate the different interventions that cater to the challenges being faced by ICH of the Philippines. Its inclusion in the school curriculum and the role of government institutions are vital ideas to share with future advocates of ICH.

Discussion

The living heritages of the people do not only share the community's current state of being nor pressure them to be the subjects of various research inquiries. In fact, this facet of heritage is a corroboration of the years of community engagements, tales of heroes that transcend into values, artworks that also serve as entertainment and avenues for communication, and ties that transcend transactional significance.

The present study investigated the current knowledge of Filipino college students regarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of the Philippines. Through a qualitative research approach and thematic analysis, the researcher surfaced the current knowledge of students in relation to ICH. These findings are essential in mapping the status of living heritage in the Philippines, which is beneficial in anchoring the Sustainable Development Goals of UNESCO to academic and non-academic institutions (Legusov et al., 2021). Furthermore, the value of ICH became evident in this study by following the Comparativism theory (Lassiter, 2014). Comparisons of the influences on the current knowledge of the participants provided a gist in understanding the broad patterns defining their living heritage experiences.

The participants of this study are culture bearers: students who hail from different parts of the country and chose to study in Manila, Philippines, a melting pot of culture due to its cultural heterogeneity (Soriano, 2021). As students at a student-centered university, the participants learned to develop their collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and self-directed learning skills (Garcia et al., 2020). It can be assumed that these skills are anchored to their individual traits and personal values, allowing them to survive the demands of higher education. For this reason, the students became active participants in the study and were engaged in sharing their experiences and insights towards ICH for more worthwhile academic journeys.

Exposure to art forms, association with indigenous people, essence of values and practices, misunderstandings about ICH, and challenges of modernization and globalization are the five major themes that surfaced in this study following the rigorous qualitative data analysis. These themes, serving as the results of this study, showcased the current knowledge of the participants on this facet of heritage. By examining the similarities and differences between the participants' knowledge, this study bridged the gap between the challenges of ICH in the Philippines and the future advocates who can formulate applicable interventions.

Art forms are the results of one's imagination that is anchored to the interpretation of reality. Various individuals and civilizations have shown evidence and interest in recording their lived experiences through mediums that range from cave pigments, weavings, paintings, and even pottery. In the case of the Philippines, some were the indigenous weavings, tattoos, and literature (Clariza, 2019). Considering the current study, the participants' exposure to ICH may be attributed to cultural diffusion, which, in this case, is the transfer of ICH knowledge through various art forms. In light of this, the participants were able to view the value of art forms to their own identity as community members.

An additional characteristic of the first theme is its value in communicating the ICH of the participants to non-community members through observation, education, and engagement. The unique advantage of art forms in different countries contributes to cross-cultural comparisons and education by allowing the foreign audience to observe, participate, and appreciate the art performances of ICH practitioners (Boer & Abubakar, 2014; Chen, 2022; Jing, 2022; Stavrou et al., 2015). As mentioned by the participants of the current study, they were able to observe the essence of their art forms during the interactions between the community members and observers. This highlights the vital role of art forms in cultural dissemination.

The participants also raised that most of their knowledge on ICH are rooted in the influence of the Indigenous People. According to a report by the United Nations Development Programme (2013), there are more than 17 million indigenous people in the Philippines, with most of them living in different regions. The indigenous people of the Philippines contributed to the safeguarding of biodiversity (Catibog-Sinha, 2011; Salvaña & Arnibal, 2020), tourism (Alejandria-Gonzalez, 2016), and possesses their own agency (Eder, 2013). This supports the second theme of the study due to the varied experiences of the participants with the indigenous peoples they have encountered.

Cultural transmission is widely evident in indigenous communities through various practices and community traditions, allowing community members to preserve and communicate their ICH across the globe (Eyssartier et al., 2008; Gosnell-Myers, 2022; Landry et al., 2019). It can be argued that the cultural diffusions that took place had a significant influence on the knowledge of the participants. Therefore, these interactions highlighted the role of indigenous peoples in safeguarding and educating the general public about ICH.

Moving beyond the influences of indigenous communities are the diverse social practices that aid the participants' understanding of the world. Participants emphasized the importance of these values and practices by mentioning their transmissions through generations, often guided by practitioners, elders, or immediate family members. This aligns with the assertion of UNESCO (2003) that social practices play a crucial role in shaping group identity by marking significant events and life stages, both in public and private spheres.

The diverse knowledge of the participants regarding this facet of ICH has revealed the multifaceted nature of social practices, where religious and non-religious forms alike contribute to their realities. This concept is further supported by numerous studies exploring the unique significance of social practices for various communities (Aguila & Coldovero, 2020; Gabriel et al., 2020; Hosokawa et al., 2022; Lawangen & Roberts, 2023). Hence, the diverse social practices in the Philippines enabled participants to honor their differences, adjust their values, and adapt to the evolving demands and standards of their environment.

Despite the known significance and influences, Living Heritage is still challenging to preserve due to its intangibility. The mere idea of ICH confused the participants as they often associated it with the general idea of culture alone. Furthermore, the absence of a clear and accessible definition, its limited integration into the curriculum, and its geographical locations affected the participants' knowledge of ICH. Despite the current presence of digital media and the internet, individuals still face challenges in learning this facet of heritage (Huang et al., 2018; Isa et al., 2018; Menkshi et al., 2021; Sun, 2022; Xu & Zou, 2022). Through examination of the different responses of the participants, we can infer that increased awareness, curriculum reformation focused on Living Heritage, and close collaboration with practitioners is essential to safeguarding ICH for future generations.

It is evident, however, that the participants understand the importance of ICH. Thus, they offered solutions and opinions relevant to the topic. Taking into consideration that it is not only the ICH of the Philippines that is encountering the same challenges of modernization and globalization (Aziz et al., 2022), the lack of finances for various ICH programs, urbanization, and poor attitude towards ICH (Besmonte, 2022; Lobo, 2023; Mekonnen et al., 2022; Pacio, 2023). It is only reasonable to acknowledge the different insights of the participants and the aforementioned studies that are anchored in involving the whole country and stakeholders to further safeguard ICH.

One of the aims of Comparativist theory (Lassiter, 2014) is to examine patterns of differences and similarities between the lived experiences of individuals, particularly in relation to their culture. The themes that surfaced align with the principles of comparativism as they provided various perspectives on how knowledge on ICH is being transmitted and valued across individuals. Moreover, the results of this study facilitated cultural understanding by highlighting perspectives on the influences of different parties on the understanding of ICH. The different art forms, more than their aesthetic values, also contribute to healthy communication within and outside the community. The Indigenous Peoples, often misunderstood as exclusive, also showed their roles as keepers and tellers of culture through cultural diffusion. The examination of cultural practices also emphasized its importance in the characterization of communities and the idea that values and traits evolve. More importantly, the surfaced misunderstandings, challenges, and possible interventions elicit the urgency of safeguarding the ICH not just in the Philippines but in the other countries as well.

In essence, the findings of this study do not only align with the concepts of comparativism theory (Lassiter, 2014). It also surfaced the significance of ICH to the daily lives of the participants by understanding how it is being transmitted and valued to answer the challenges of modern times.

Conclusion

This research delved into the current knowledge of Filipino students on the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Philippines. While 75 participants shared their insights, certain views expressed recurrent ideas, thus the surfaced themes. Quotes were selected to emphasize the core of these identified themes, ensuring that the featured narratives cover the insightful illustrations that exemplify the participants' collective experiences.

The themes, exposure to art forms, association with indigenous people, essence of values and practices, misunderstandings about ICH, and the safeguarding of ICH, have offered valuable insights into how students perceive and engage with their cultural heritage. These themes are consistent with existing scholarly discourses emphasizing the roles of various exposures in communicating cultural heritage. More importantly, the study emphasizes the significance of honoring indigenous populations' contributions as cultural ambassadors, as well as the critical links between cultural practices, values, and the creation and understanding of Filipino identity, therefore unveiling the veil.

To ensure the preservation and promotion of ICH, educational institutions should give emphasis on this facet of our culture by integrating it into the different parts of the curriculum. This way, the students will be more engaged in learning while enjoying the discovery of the identity of their own people. Through the UNESCO (2017) Sustainable Development Goals with the support of the government, through legislation and collaborations with communities, ICH education can be more prevalent in the different parts of the country. Lastly, in the advent of modernization, cultural advocates can collaborate with different media to create different opportunities to expose the general population to the different elements of ICH. This includes its inclusion in movies, theater, art galleries, and workshops.

One notable limitation of this study is the data gathering technique used. However, this limitation can allow the replication of this study using other methods like survey questionnaires and interviews. Another limitation of this study is its participants. This study can be replicated with an in-depth analysis of the current knowledge of teachers and other community members regarding ICH and perhaps create a framework that will link different elements of the community.

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