



AWARENESS OF SUBANEN RITUALS AMONG SELECTED SUBANEN PUPILS IN DIPOLOG CITY SCHOOLS DIVISION

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the level of awareness of Subanen rituals among selected Grade 6 pupils in the DepEd Dipolog City Schools Division during the School Year 2023–2024. Anchored on the need to preserve indigenous cultural heritage, the study employed a descriptive quantitative research design using a validated researcher-made questionnaire (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.8221). A total of fifty-five (55) purposively selected pupils with at least 50% Subanen ancestry participated in the study. Data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, Kruskal–Wallis H-test, and Mann–Whitney U-test. Results revealed that most respondents were aged 11–12 years, predominantly male, and largely from rural areas. The overall level of awareness of Subanen rituals was interpreted as “Agree” (mean = 3.46), indicating a moderate level of awareness. Respondents expressed stronger agreement on the role of school- and community-based programs in enhancing cultural awareness. Significant differences in awareness were found when respondents were grouped according to age and place of origin, while no significant difference was observed in terms of sex. The study concludes that although Subanen pupils demonstrate a foundational awareness of their cultural rituals, there is a need to strengthen culturally responsive educational initiatives. Integrating indigenous knowledge systems into the curriculum and promoting community-based cultural programs are essential to sustain and preserve Subanen cultural heritage among the younger generation.

Keywords: *Subanen rituals, cultural awareness, indigenous education, cultural preservation, elementary pupils*

INTRODUCTION

Most societies possess distinct rituals and cultural practices that define their uniqueness and identity. These ways of life are expressed through traditions, beliefs, and customs that reflect the collective experiences of a people. Cultural practices transmitted across generations are more effectively preserved when they are systematically documented and recorded. However, the gradual disappearance of rituals in many societies has contributed to the erosion of valuable cultural heritage and identity. Rituals embody the depth of human experiences, ideals, aspirations, emotions, and worldviews; hence, they must be preserved, transmitted to future generations, and utilized as foundations for both individual and societal development. As emphasized by Sappa and Adora (2016), cultural values and beliefs must be explored to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of culture.

Rituals play a vital role in shaping social life, cultural identity, and human behavior, as they consist of formal, symbolic, and traditionally transmitted actions that reinforce shared meanings and group cohesion. They function as expressions of commitment, strengthen social bonds, and provide continuity through repeated practices over time (Rossano, 2012; Garcia-Rada et al., 2019). Moreover, rituals are embedded in various domains of human life—including religion, politics, education, and everyday practices—transforming ordinary actions into meaningful cultural expressions (Hobson et al., 2018). They also serve as mechanisms for social solidarity and adaptation, enabling communities to cope with challenges and sustain collective identity (Mentel, 2022).

Among indigenous communities, rituals reflect both material and non-material culture shaped by ancestral beliefs and interactions with the natural environment (Villanueva & Balgoa, 2023A). The Subanen people, in particular, practice animistic beliefs centered on spirits and a supreme deity, Magbabaya, with rituals serving as a means of interpreting and managing their relationship with nature and the supernatural. Their practices integrate magical, traditional, and empirical elements, especially in farming and healing (Valdez & Canapi, 2015). Subanen rituals are closely associated with agriculture, life events, and spiritual beliefs, including rituals for planting, healing, death, and thanksgiving. Among these, the Buklog stands out as the most significant communal ritual, symbolizing gratitude, healing, and social unity, often involving elaborate ceremonies led by spiritual leaders (National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 2019). These practices, passed down orally by cultural bearers such as the *balian*, underscore the richness of Subanen heritage while highlighting the urgent need for preservation amid changing social conditions (Gangoso, 2023).

This study focuses on the rituals of the Subanen people and examines the level of awareness among Subanen school children regarding these practices. The Subanen are recognized as among the earliest inhabitants of Mindanao, particularly in the northern, western, and southern parts of the Zamboanga Peninsula. Historically residing along riverbanks—derived from the term “suba”—they have gradually migrated to mountainous areas ((Villanueva & Balgoa, 2023B; Daligang, 1981). Despite their rich cultural heritage,

there remains a scarcity of documented literature on Subanen rituals, indicating a significant gap that warrants scholarly attention and preservation efforts.

In the cultural history of the Subanen, indigenous knowledge systems, rituals, and traditional practices have profoundly shaped their way of life. These traditions persist because they embody values that reinforce cultural identity and social cohesion. However, there is growing concern that some of these rituals are gradually losing relevance, particularly among the younger generation. Cultural challenges, including modernization, shifting belief systems, and the influence of formal education, threaten the continuity of these practices. Furthermore, the passing of local cultural bearers—especially the *balian*, who serve as custodians of oral traditions—poses a critical risk, as much of this knowledge remains undocumented (Marquez & Gallardo, 2022).

Given these challenges, there is an urgent need to reconnect younger generations with their cultural roots. Developing awareness and appreciation of Subanen rituals among young learners is essential for sustaining cultural identity and ensuring continuity of indigenous knowledge. In this context, the present study aimed to determine the level of awareness of Subanen rituals among selected Subanen pupils in the DepEd Dipolog City Schools Division during the School Year 2023–2024. The findings are expected to contribute to the preservation of Subanen cultural heritage and provide a basis for developing culturally responsive educational programs.

Research Questions

The study aimed to determine awareness of Subanen rituals among selected Subanen pupils in Dipolog City Schools Division, this school year 2023-2024.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of:
 - 1.1. Age;
 - 1.2. Sex; and
 - 1.3. Place of Origin?
2. What is the level of awareness of Subanen rituals among selected Subanen pupils in Dipolog City Schools Division?
3. Is there a significant difference on the level of awareness of Subanen rituals among selected Subanen pupils in Dipolog City Schools Division when analyzed according to their profile?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design utilizing a custom-designed questionnaire as the primary instrument for data collection. The descriptive method was appropriate as it allowed the researcher to systematically describe the existing level of awareness of Subanen rituals among respondents without manipulating

any variables. It focused on identifying and presenting current conditions, attitudes, and characteristics rather than establishing cause-and-effect relationships.

The participants of the study were Grade 6 pupils from selected public elementary schools under the DepEd Dipolog City Schools Division. A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that only those who met the inclusion criteria were selected. Specifically, participants had to be currently enrolled in Grade 6, possess at least 50% Subanen ancestry, and voluntarily agree to participate in the study. A total of fifty-five (55) pupils who satisfied these criteria were included as respondents.

The research instrument used in this study was a researcher-made questionnaire designed to measure the respondents' level of awareness of Subanen rituals. The instrument underwent validation by experts to ensure content accuracy and relevance. Furthermore, reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.8221, indicating a high level of internal consistency. This result confirmed that the questionnaire was reliable and suitable for data gathering.

Prior to data collection, formal permission was secured from the school principals and Grade 6 advisers of the selected schools. Upon approval, the researcher personally administered the questionnaires to the respondents to ensure proper guidance and accurate completion of the instrument. After the retrieval of the completed questionnaires, the data were organized, tabulated, and submitted for statistical treatment with the assistance of a statistician. Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and respondents' privacy and confidentiality were ensured through anonymity and secure handling of data. No harm was inflicted on the participants, and all research instruments were properly disposed of after the completion of the study to maintain confidentiality.

The data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical tools. The level of awareness of Subanen rituals was measured using a 5-point Likert scale and interpreted accordingly. Frequency count and percentage were used to describe the respondents' profile, while weighted mean was utilized to determine their level of awareness. Additionally, the Kruskal–Wallis H-test and Mann–Whitney U-test were employed to identify significant differences between groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the responses of the purposively selected fifty-five (55) respondents. The responses were treated statistically in order to answer the research questions of the present investigation.

Table 1.
Profile of the Respondents in terms of Age

Respondents' Age	Frequency	Percentage
10 years old and below	1	1.82
11 – 12 years old	48	87.23
13 – 14 years old	3	5.45
15 years old and above	3	5.45
Total	55	100.00%

Table 1 displays the demographic characteristics of the participants in relation to their age. The table indicated that the majority of the participants fell within the age bracket of 11-12 years old, accounting for 48 out of 55 respondents or 87.23%. In contrast, just 1 out of 55 respondents, or 1.82%, was 10 years old or younger. The results emphasized that the majority of the responses were into the age bracket of 11 – 12 years old, indicating that most of the Grade 6 Subanen pupils were in the 11 – 12 age range.

Table 2.
Profile of the Respondents in terms of Sex

Respondents' Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	29	57.73
Female	26	47.27
Total	55	100.00%

Table 2 presented the demographic characteristics of the participants in relation to their gender. The data from the table indicates that most of the respondents were men, accounting for 29 out of 55 respondents or 57.73%. In comparison, the female respondents accounted for 26 out of 55 respondents or 47.27%. This suggests that most of the Grade 6 Subanen kids were males.

Table 3.
Profile of the Respondents in terms of Place of Origin

Respondents' Place of Origin	Frequency	Percentage
Urban	4	7.27
Sub-Urban	2	3.64
Rural	49	89.09
Total	55	100.00%

Table 3 displays the characteristics of the participants in relation to their place of origin. The table indicates that most of the respondents, specifically 49 out of 55 or 89.09%, lived in rural areas. This is followed by 4 out of 55 respondents or 7.27% who lived in urban areas, and 2 out of 55 respondents or 3.64% who lived in suburban areas.

The data emphasized that the bulk of the respondents originated from rural regions, indicating that most Grade 6 Subanen kids resided in rural areas within the neighborhood.

Table 4.
Level of Awareness of Subanen Rituals Among the Respondents

Level of Awareness of Subanen Rituals Among the Respondents	AWV	Verbal Description
1. Grade 6 Subanen pupils may have a varying level of awareness regarding Subanen rituals, depending on factors such as cultural upbringing, community involvement, and access to traditional knowledge.	3.35	Neither Agree nor Disagree
2. Many Grade 6 Subanen pupils may have been exposed to Subanen rituals from a young age through participation in community events, ceremonies, and family traditions.	3.07	Neither Agree nor Disagree
3. Awareness among Grade 6 Subanen pupils about Subanen rituals may include knowledge of ceremonial dances, music, storytelling, and spiritual practices.	3.15	Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Some Grade 6 Subanen pupils may have a deep understanding of the significance and symbolism behind Subanen rituals, passed down through oral traditions and teachings from elders.	3.27	Neither Agree nor Disagree
5. Participation in Subanen rituals plays a crucial role in reinforcing cultural identity and strengthening community bonds among Grade 6 Subanen pupils.	3.55	Agree
6. Awareness of Subanen rituals among Grade 6 pupils may vary depending on their level of immersion in traditional Subanen practices and exposure to modern influences.	3.64	Agree
7. Grade 6 Subanen pupils may have knowledge of specific rituals associated with important life events such as birth, marriage, and death within their community.	3.31	Neither Agree nor Disagree
8. Exposure to Subanen rituals may foster a sense of pride and belonging among Grade 6 Subanen pupils, contributing to their cultural heritage and identity.	3.33	Neither Agree nor Disagree
9. Cultural preservation efforts within Subanen communities may influence the level of awareness among Grade 6 pupils regarding Subanen rituals.	3.87	Agree
10. Grade 6 Subanen pupils may participate in educational programs or initiatives aimed at promoting awareness and appreciation of Subanen rituals within schools or community organizations.	4.05	Agree
Mean	3.46	Agree

The respondents' degree of awareness of Subanen rites is shown in Table 4. The data from the table indicates that the majority of the respondents are in agreement with the idea of participating in educational programs or initiatives that aim to promote awareness and appreciation of Subanen rituals within schools or community organizations. This idea received an average weighted value of 4.05. Following this, the respondents also agree that efforts to preserve the Subanen culture within their communities can have an impact on the level of awareness regarding Subanen rituals. This received an average weighted value of 3.87. On the other hand, the respondents neither agree nor disagree with the notion that many Grade 6 Subanen pupils may have been exposed to Subanen rituals from a young age through participation in community events, ceremonies, and family traditions. This received an average weighted value of 3.07. The average value for this feature is 3.46, which may be verbally interpreted as agreement.

The findings emphasized that the majority of respondents agreed to engage in educational programs or initiatives that aim to promote awareness and appreciation of Subanen rituals in schools or community organizations. This implies that young Subanen individuals were introduced to Subanen rituals either through schools or community organizations, thereby increasing their awareness. Gangoso (2023) highlights the significance of cultural education and awareness initiatives for the younger indigenous members of the Subanen community in the Philippines. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of Subanen rituals, which include customary observances, rites, and traditions unique to the Subanen community. Schools and community groups are two viable channels for fostering knowledge of Subanen ceremonies. Schools have the option to include Subanen cultural education into their curriculum via the inclusion of dedicated classrooms, cultural festivals, or specialized programs. Community groups can safeguard, advance, and enlighten people about Subanen culture by means of workshops, seminars, or cultural events. The declaration highlights the need of ensuring that young Subanen folks are both connected to and well-informed about their cultural history.

Table 5.

Test of Significant Difference on the Level of Awareness Among Respondents on Subanen Rituals When Analyzed According to their Profile

Profile	Level of Awareness Among Respondents on Subanen Rituals				
	U-Value	H-Value	p-value @ 0.05	Action	Interpretation
Age		13.768	0.00427	Ho Rejected	Significant Difference
Sex	471		0.1143	Ho Accepted	No Significant Difference
Place of Origin		7.9142	0.00192	Ho Rejected	Significant Difference

* p-value is lesser than 0.05 level of significance = significant; Reject Ho

* p-value is greater than 0.05 level of significant = not significant; Accept Ho.

The finding that age shows a significant difference in the level of awareness of Subanen rituals suggests that cultural awareness varies across developmental stages. This result is supported by recent literature indicating that middle childhood (approximately 10–12 years old) is a critical period for the development of cultural identity and awareness. Research shows that children’s understanding of culture and identity becomes more complex during this stage as they gain cognitive maturity and increased social exposure (Renshaw, 2019). Furthermore, studies highlight that children progressively develop awareness of cultural diversity and meaning through education and social interaction, reinforcing that age influences how cultural knowledge is acquired and interpreted (Mondano, 2024). Thus, the significant difference in awareness by age is expected, as older pupils tend to have broader experiences and deeper understanding of cultural practices compared to younger ones.

On the other hand, the finding that sex shows no significant difference indicates that both male and female pupils have comparable levels of awareness of Subanen rituals. This is consistent with recent studies emphasizing that cultural learning and identity formation are influenced more by shared social environments—such as family, school, and community—rather than biological sex differences. Culture shapes children’s attitudes, behaviors, and understanding through socialization processes that apply similarly across genders. Additionally, it suggests that opportunities for cultural exposure in school settings are generally equal for boys and girls, leading to relatively equal levels of awareness (Alampay, 2024). Hence, the absence of significant difference by sex aligns with existing research that cultural awareness development is largely gender-neutral.

Meanwhile, the finding that place of origin shows a significant difference implies that geographical and community context plays a crucial role in shaping awareness of Subanen rituals. This is supported by studies indicating that children’s cultural identity and awareness are strongly influenced by their immediate environment, including family, community practices, and exposure to cultural traditions. Research further highlights that engagement with local cultural practices—such as participation in rituals, storytelling, and community activities—enhances children’s understanding and appreciation of their heritage (Baumert et al., 2023). Therefore, pupils from areas with stronger cultural immersion or proximity to indigenous communities are more likely to demonstrate higher awareness compared to those with limited exposure.

Thus, these findings confirm that age and place of origin are significant determinants of cultural awareness, while sex is not a determining factor, reinforcing the importance of developmental and environmental influences in shaping students’ understanding of indigenous rituals.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that the majority of the respondents were Grade 6 Subanen pupils within the 11–12 age range, predominantly male, and largely originating from rural areas. This profile reflects a developmentally

appropriate group and a population that remains closely connected to indigenous community settings.

The study further concludes that the respondents demonstrated a generally positive level of awareness of Subanen rituals, as evidenced by an overall mean interpreted as “Agree.” This indicates that while awareness exists among the pupils, it is moderate rather than deeply rooted, suggesting that exposure to cultural knowledge is present but not yet fully internalized. The findings highlight the important role of schools and community-based programs in enhancing cultural awareness, as pupils showed strong agreement regarding the influence of educational initiatives and cultural preservation efforts.

Moreover, the study established that age and place of origin significantly influence the level of awareness of Subanen rituals. This implies that developmental maturity and cultural exposure within the community are key factors in shaping pupils’ understanding of indigenous traditions. In contrast, sex was not found to be a significant factor, indicating that awareness of Subanen rituals is equally developed among male and female pupils.

Thus, the study concludes that while Subanen pupils possess a foundational awareness of their cultural rituals, there is a need for strengthened and sustained cultural education efforts to deepen their understanding and appreciation. Enhancing culturally responsive programs in both school and community contexts is essential to ensure the preservation and continuity of Subanen cultural heritage among the younger generation.

Recommendations

Considering the findings of the study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the awareness and preservation of Subanen rituals among young learners.

First, schools under the DepEd Dipolog City Schools Division are encouraged to strengthen the integration of indigenous knowledge systems and practices (IKSP) into the curriculum. This may be done through contextualized lesson plans, inclusion of Subanen cultural content in subjects such as Araling Panlipunan and Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao, and the conduct of cultural immersion activities that allow learners to experience rituals and traditions firsthand.

Second, school administrators and teachers should design and implement culturally responsive programs such as cultural festivals, storytelling sessions, and school-based workshops that promote awareness and appreciation of Subanen rituals. Collaborating with local cultural bearers, particularly *balian* and community elders, can ensure authenticity and deepen learners’ understanding of indigenous traditions.

Third, local government units and community organizations are encouraged to intensify cultural preservation initiatives, including documentation of Subanen rituals, oral histories, and traditional practices. Establishing partnerships between schools and

indigenous communities can help bridge formal education and cultural transmission within the community.

Fourth, considering that place of origin significantly influences awareness, targeted interventions should be developed for learners in urban and less culturally immersed areas. These may include exposure programs, community visits, and the use of multimedia resources to ensure equitable access to cultural knowledge.

Fifth, since age significantly affects awareness, educators should adopt age-appropriate and developmentally suitable teaching strategies that gradually deepen learners' understanding of cultural concepts. Activities should be designed to match the cognitive and social readiness of learners, particularly those in late childhood.

Lastly, future researchers are encouraged to conduct further studies exploring other variables such as parental influence, language use, and participation in community rituals, as well as employing qualitative approaches to gain deeper insights into the lived experiences of Subanen learners in relation to their cultural heritage.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This study was conducted in full adherence to established ethical principles in educational research. Prior to data collection, formal permission was obtained from school authorities under the DepEd Dipolog City Schools Division. Participation of the respondents was strictly voluntary, and informed consent was secured from both the pupils and their parents or guardians, considering that the participants were minors.

The researcher ensured that the rights, dignity, and welfare of all participants were protected throughout the study. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the research, their right to withdraw at any time without penalty, and the confidentiality of their responses. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all data were treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes.

The study also adhered to the principles of non-maleficence and beneficence, ensuring that no physical, psychological, or emotional harm was inflicted on the participants. Cultural sensitivity was observed, particularly in handling information related to Subanen rituals and indigenous practices, by respecting community values, beliefs, and traditions.

Furthermore, all data collection instruments were securely handled, and collected data were properly disposed of after the completion of the study to maintain confidentiality. The researcher likewise ensured academic integrity by properly citing all sources and avoiding any form of plagiarism.

In addition, the researcher acknowledges the responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, such as Quilbot, solely for language enhancement and organization of ideas. All interpretations, analyses, and conclusions remain the original work of the researcher, ensuring the authenticity and credibility of the study.

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