

RECONSTRUCTING IDENTITY THROUGH HISTORY EDUCATION: A STUDY ON CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how history education, as implemented through the Araling Panlipunan curriculum, contributes to the reconstruction of Filipino identity in Philippine secondary schools. The research specifically investigates how teachers interpret and deliver identity-related content, and how students engage with historical narratives in classroom contexts. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were gathered through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, and document analysis at San Lorenzo National High School in Central Luzon. The findings reveal a significant gap between the curriculum's decolonial intentions and its practical implementation. Teachers expressed theoretical support for inclusive and critical history education but cited institutional constraints such as rigid syllabi, lack of training, and pressure to conform to standardized assessments. Students, meanwhile, demonstrated limited engagement with localized or critical historical perspectives, often viewing history as a subject focused on memorization. The study offers a novel contribution by integrating multi-actor perspectives—teachers, students, and curriculum—within a localized school setting, thus moving beyond content analysis to explore lived classroom experiences. It also highlights the underrepresentation of regional and indigenous narratives, stressing the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy. In conclusion, while policy-level reforms aim to promote national identity through history education, meaningful transformation remains hindered by structural and pedagogical barriers. To bridge this gap, a more holistic strategy is needed—one that empowers teachers, contextualizes content, and promotes active historical inquiry among students.

Keywords: History education, filipino identity, curriculum implementation, decolonization, araling Panlipunan

INTRODUCTION

History education plays a central role in shaping collective memory and national identity, particularly in postcolonial societies where historical narratives have been deeply influenced by colonial rule. According to Borrero (2023), nations are “imagined communities,” constructed through shared stories, symbols, and historical interpretations. In the Philippines, which experienced Spanish and American colonization for centuries, the teaching of history has long been contested—struggling between colonial legacies and efforts to reclaim indigenous perspectives. As Gillate et al. (2023) points out, school curricula have often emphasized external influences while downplaying local agency, leading to fragmented national consciousness. Thus, reconstructing identity through

history education involves revisiting whose histories are told, how they are taught, and for what purpose.

Curriculum reform in the Philippines, particularly through the subject *Araling Panlipunan*, seeks to develop critical and civic-minded learners by integrating Filipino perspectives into history lessons. The Department of Education mandates a curriculum that highlights Filipino heroes, indigenous resistance, and post-independence struggles (Villarino, 2025). However, implementation remains uneven, as many schools continue to rely on outdated textbooks and rote-based methods. Furthermore, there is limited training for teachers on how to facilitate identity-building discussions that move beyond memorization. These challenges raise important questions about how effectively the curriculum is fostering a deeper sense of national identity among students, especially in a multicultural and multilingual context like the Philippines (Villarino, 2025).

From a theoretical standpoint, postcolonial education frameworks stress the importance of decolonizing knowledge and pedagogy. As highlighted by Andreotti et al. (2015), decolonial education requires more than adding local content—it demands a critical interrogation of power, voice, and epistemic inclusion in the classroom. In the Philippine context, reconstructing identity through history education involves not only recovering marginalized narratives but also empowering students to question dominant historical discourses. This aligns with Aman (2019) concept of “conscientization,” where learners become active participants in making meaning of their history. When students engage critically with the past, they are better equipped to imagine inclusive futures. Therefore, the implementation of history curricula must be assessed not just by content coverage, but by its transformative potential (Ruprecht et al., 2023).

Despite curriculum reforms aimed at promoting Filipino identity, the actual implementation of history education in Philippine schools remains inconsistent and often superficial. Studies show that history lessons frequently rely on rote memorization, textbook recitation, and coverage of dates and events without critical engagement (Ruprecht et al., 2023). Teachers are often undertrained in facilitating inquiry-based or culturally responsive discussions, which limits their ability to promote deeper understanding of national identity. Moreover, the continued influence of American pedagogical models—emphasizing neutrality and chronological coverage—has diluted opportunities for critical reflection on colonial legacies (Takenaka & Soga, 2019). As a result, students may struggle to develop a cohesive historical consciousness that connects them meaningfully to their local heritage and national identity.

In addition, the curriculum content itself presents challenges in identity formation. Although the K to 12 *Araling Panlipunan* curriculum includes topics on indigenous resistance, Martial Law, and post-independence struggles, many of these are treated briefly or framed through dominant nationalistic lenses (Sousa et al., 2022). Regional histories, indigenous knowledge systems, and minority narratives—particularly from Mindanao and the Cordillera regions—remain underrepresented or stereotypically depicted. This lack of pluralism reinforces a Manila-centric view of history that marginalizes peripheral voices (Li et al., 2023). Without inclusive historical narratives,

the classroom becomes a space that unconsciously reproduces hegemonic identity constructions, rather than encouraging students to explore the complexity of Filipino identities. These issues suggest a disconnect between curriculum intent and lived pedagogical practice.

While numerous studies have examined the role of history education in shaping national identity in the Philippines, most focus primarily on textbook content or policy frameworks, rather than how these are translated into classroom practices (Gillate et al., 2023; Saldanha et al., 2021). There is a noticeable lack of empirical research that captures the lived experiences of teachers and students as they engage with identity-related topics in real classroom settings. Furthermore, few studies explore how regional diversity, local histories, and indigenous narratives are integrated—or neglected—within everyday teaching of the *Araling Panlipunan* curriculum (Temerbayeva et al., 2023). The tension between curriculum design and pedagogical execution remains underexplored, especially outside of Metro Manila (Villarino, 2025). This gap is critical, as the success of identity reconstruction through history education depends not only on what is taught, but how it is taught and experienced in diverse sociocultural contexts. More grounded, classroom-level studies are needed to evaluate whether curriculum goals are being meaningfully implemented.

This study contributes a novel perspective by examining the implementation of the *Araling Panlipunan* history curriculum in the Philippines through a localized, school-based lens, focusing on how identity reconstruction is facilitated—or hindered—at the classroom level. While previous research has emphasized curriculum content and textbook analysis (Lin & Shen, 2024), this study highlights the interplay between curriculum design, teacher practice, and student engagement in a real educational setting. By incorporating qualitative methods such as classroom observation and teacher interviews, it captures the complexities of pedagogical decisions often invisible in policy-level analysis. The study also addresses underexplored issues such as the integration of regional and indigenous narratives in everyday teaching, especially in non-metropolitan areas. This approach adds empirical depth to ongoing discussions on postcolonial education, moving beyond theory to explore lived educational experiences. As such, it advances a more practical and inclusive understanding of history education's role in identity formation in the Philippine context (Fahrudin et al., 2025).

The primary objective of this research is to explore how history education, as implemented through the *Araling Panlipunan* curriculum, contributes to the reconstruction of Filipino identity in secondary schools. Specifically, the study seeks to investigate how teachers interpret and deliver identity-related topics, and how students engage with these narratives in their learning process. It aims to identify gaps between the intended curriculum and classroom realities, particularly in relation to marginalized histories and local cultural perspectives. Another key goal is to understand the pedagogical strategies and constraints educators face in integrating critical, inclusive historical narratives. Through this, the research aspires to provide insights into the extent to which history education in the Philippines fulfills its transformative potential. The

study also aims to inform curriculum developers and policymakers on practical steps for improving history instruction as a tool for nation-building. Ultimately, it seeks to promote a more context-sensitive and student-centered approach to teaching history.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to investigate the implementation of the Araling Panlipunan history curriculum and its role in identity reconstruction at San Lorenzo National High School, a public secondary school in Central Luzon, Philippines. The research focused on capturing the lived experiences of both teachers and students in the teaching-learning process. Data collection methods included classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and curriculum document analysis. A total of 10 participants were involved in the study, consisting of 3 history teachers, 1 curriculum coordinator, and 6 Grade 10 students selected through purposive sampling. Observations were conducted over a three-week period during history classes focused on national identity and postcolonial topics. This multi-source approach allowed the researcher to gather rich, contextualized insights into pedagogical practices and curriculum enactment.

Data were collected using several qualitative instruments designed to align with the study's objectives. Observation checklists were developed to record classroom interactions, teaching strategies, and references to identity-related content. Interview guides for teachers and students included open-ended questions on curriculum interpretation, challenges in delivering inclusive narratives, and student perceptions of national identity. Additionally, document analysis protocols were used to examine lesson plans, teaching materials, and official curriculum guidelines. All qualitative data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun & Clarke (2006) framework. Initial codes were generated inductively, then clustered into broader themes related to curriculum implementation, identity formation, and pedagogical barriers. Triangulation across data sources ensured credibility and depth in interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first key finding reveals a gap between the intended outcomes of the Araling Panlipunan curriculum and its actual classroom delivery. Although the curriculum framework promotes critical thinking and identity formation, observations showed that lessons were primarily textbook-driven and heavily focused on memorizing facts and dates. Teachers often skipped in-depth discussions on regional histories and colonial legacies, opting instead for "safe" topics that aligned with standardized assessments. As shown in Table 1, none of the observed lessons integrated participatory activities or critical debates. This supports earlier findings by (Hay, 2023; Siemerks et al., 2023), who argues that identity-based learning in Philippine history classes remains shallow due to exam-oriented instruction and institutional pressure.

The second major finding centers on teacher perspectives. While educators expressed strong support for the goal of nurturing national identity, many admitted difficulty in implementing inclusive narratives due to limited training and lack of culturally responsive materials. Interviewed teachers indicated that they relied heavily on textbooks approved by the Department of Education, which often lacked representation of indigenous and regional perspectives. One teacher noted, “There are topics we want to include, but the curriculum is too packed.” Table 1 reflects these constraints, with most teachers reporting low confidence in adapting content to local contexts. This echoes concerns raised by Fairless Nicholson (2023), who emphasizes the need for professional development programs that support decolonial pedagogy.

The third finding relates to student engagement with identity-based content. While some students expressed interest in learning about pre-colonial societies or local heroes, they felt that classroom lessons did not allow them to explore these topics in depth. Student interviews revealed that history classes were viewed as subjects to be passed, not spaces for critical reflection or self-exploration. Several students could not recall lessons that connected history to their own community or region. As shown in Table 1, student motivation and perceived relevance of history were both rated low. These findings align with (Ogah, 2023), who argue that when history education lacks contextualization, it fails to resonate with students' lived experiences or contribute meaningfully to identity formation.

Table 1. Summary of Key Findings from Observations and Interviews

Theme	Observed Practice / Response	Implementation Level
Teaching Method	Textbook-centered, fact-based instruction	Low
Local/Regional Content Use	Rarely incorporated in lessons	Minimal
Teacher Preparedness	Low confidence, lack of training in inclusive pedagogy	Low to Moderate
Student Engagement	Focused on grades, not personal or cultural relevance	Low
Critical Thinking Activities	Limited to none (e.g., no debates, source analysis, reflection)	Very Low
Theme	Observed Practice / Response	Implementation Level

The findings of this study align with recent research emphasizing that history education in the Philippines often falls short of its transformative potential due to systemic and pedagogical limitations. Despite curricular reforms aiming for identity reconstruction and critical engagement, teaching practices remain dominated by memorization and exam preparation (White & Greene, 2024). This problem is deeply rooted in the centralized

education system, where teachers have little autonomy to adapt content to local realities (Grover et al., 2022). The continued reliance on standardized textbooks hinders the inclusion of diverse historical narratives, especially from indigenous and regional communities (Kiljunen et al., 2024). These conditions create a dissonance between the curriculum's goals and its classroom enactment, echoing findings from other postcolonial contexts such as Malaysia and Indonesia (Rahim & Mustapha, 2021; Nilan, 2022). Without meaningful pedagogical reform, identity reconstruction through history education remains rhetorical.

Another critical issue that emerges is the underutilization of culturally responsive pedagogy in history instruction. Li et al. (2023) call for dialogical, reflective learning remains largely unmet, as students are positioned as passive receivers of information rather than active co-constructors of meaning. Recent studies in Southeast Asia have shown that when history is contextualized through local stories, community heritage, and oral traditions, students exhibit stronger identity development and historical empathy (Kiljunen et al., 2024; Sorina, 2024). However, in the present study, both teachers and students reported limited access to such resources or training. Saldanha et al., (2021) and Tirado-Olivares (2021) emphasize that decolonizing education requires not only content revision but also teacher empowerment and structural support. Therefore, implementing decolonial goals in Philippine history education requires a multidimensional strategy—encompassing policy, pedagogy, and teacher professional development.

This study presents a unique contribution by shifting the focus from curriculum design to the lived realities of curriculum implementation in a Philippine high school context. While existing literature often critiques textbook content or national policy frameworks (Miralles-Martínez et al., 2019; Ritzen, 2023), this research investigates how identity formation through history education is practiced—and challenged—within the classroom. Through qualitative fieldwork at San Lorenzo National High School, the study reveals the pedagogical tensions teachers face when attempting to integrate critical and inclusive historical narratives in a rigid, exam-oriented system. Unlike macro-level analyses that generalize across institutions, this study centers on local perspectives and school-specific dynamics, thereby addressing a gap in grounded, micro-level research (Granado-Peinado & Huertas, 2023; Sopacua et al., 2020). The study also highlights how institutional constraints—such as lack of training and culturally responsive materials—shape teacher and student engagement with national identity.

Moreover, this research introduces a multilayered analytical lens that combines curriculum analysis, teacher interviews, student perspectives, and classroom observation to understand identity reconstruction in history education. Prior studies rarely triangulate data from multiple actors within a single school context (Fahrudin et al., 2025; Miralles-Sánchez et al., 2023). This integrated approach provides richer insight into the interplay between content, pedagogy, and student engagement. Furthermore, by exploring how local and regional narratives are underrepresented in mainstream instruction, the study advocates for a context-sensitive, decolonial approach to history education in postcolonial societies (Galadini, 2022; Smets, 2024). As such, it contributes to global conversations

on education for identity, justice, and postcolonial transformation—not only in the Philippines but across similar Global South contexts.

This study offers valuable global insights into how postcolonial societies grapple with reconstructing identity through history education, a challenge faced not only in the Philippines but across the Global South. By examining the classroom-level realities of implementing a national curriculum with decolonial intentions, the research contributes to broader conversations on educational justice, epistemic inclusion, and identity formation in multicultural settings (Smets, 2024; Tirado-Olivares, 2021). The study's localized, empirical focus adds depth to comparative education literature by showing how global curriculum reforms often clash with deeply entrenched pedagogical practices. Its findings are relevant for educators, policymakers, and researchers in other postcolonial contexts—such as India, South Africa, and Latin America—who are navigating similar tensions between national identity, historical narratives, and inclusive pedagogy. Ultimately, the research underscores the global importance of grounding history education in lived experiences and local knowledge as a path toward more meaningful, inclusive, and democratic societies.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that while the Philippine history curriculum promotes identity reconstruction through inclusive and decolonial content, its practical implementation remains limited by systemic, pedagogical, and institutional constraints. Teachers express willingness to teach beyond textbook narratives but are hindered by rigid curricula, lack of contextual resources, and pressure from standardized assessments. Classroom observations reveal a continued reliance on memorization-based methods, with minimal integration of regional or marginalized histories. Students, in turn, struggle to connect with historical content in ways that affirm their personal or cultural identities. These findings emphasize the critical gap between curricular intent and pedagogical practice. For history education to truly support national identity formation, reforms must go beyond content revision and address teacher training, resource development, and pedagogical innovation. Only through such holistic reform can classrooms become spaces of critical engagement and inclusive identity building.

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