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Cultural Syncretism in Eastern Kayapa: Igorot Rituals within Christian Rites and Their Role in Social Science Education

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Abstract: Preserving indigenous heritage plays a crucial role in strengthening cultural identity and fostering responsive education amid social and religious changes. This study explored the integration of traditional Igorot practices into Christian rites and its implications for Social Science education in Eastern Kayapa, Nueva Vizcaya. Specifically, it described the profiles of respondents, determined the observance of Igorot rituals, assessed integration levels, examined community perceptions, identified educational implications, and tested differences in perceptions based on demographics. A quantitative descriptive-comparative design was employed, involving 30 purposively selected members of the Eastern Kayapa Igorot Organization. Data were collected through a validated questionnaire and analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test, and ANOVA. The findings revealed that Igorot practices were frequently observed, with mourning rituals being the most common. Integration into Christian rites was highly evident, particularly in marriage and mourning ceremonies. Respondents strongly agreed that such integration strengthens cultural identity, preserves heritage, promotes unity, and enriches community life. The study identified that integrating cultural traditions into Social Science instruction enhances contextualized learning, multicultural understanding, and preservation. Among demographic variables, only the length of residency showed significant differences in perceptions; age, sex, education, ethnicity, and religion did not. The findings underscore the importance of preserving indigenous traditions while promoting relevant and inclusive educational practices.

Keywords: Indigenous culture, Igorot traditions, Christian rites, Social Science education

INTRODUCTION

Preserving indigenous cultures is important because these traditions are the heart and soul of indigenous peoples' identity, knowledge, values, and shared memories. Oral traditions, rituals, ceremonies, customs, and belief systems are like historical treasure chests that keep cultural continuity and identity alive across generations (Kumar T.K. & Niglio, 2025). However, globalization, urbanization, migration, and the spread of dominant religions have changed indigenous communities. Instead of losing their culture, these changes have helped them adapt and blend their practices into religious and social settings, while retaining their heritage while dealing with new realities (Kelly et al., 2024; Yeh et al., 2021). UNESCO recognizes this and is all about protecting intangible cultural heritage by preserving oral traditions, rituals, performing arts, and traditional knowledge that keep indigenous identities and cultural diversity alive (Higgins, 2022). Sustainable Development Goal 4 is all about culturally responsive, inclusive education, pushing for indigenous knowledge to be part of educational systems to help learners appreciate cultural diversity and heritage (Adhikary et al., 2024).

In the Philippines, indigenous cultural communities remain important contributors to the country's cultural diversity. Among these communities are the Igorot people, whose traditions, rituals, and belief systems have been preserved despite centuries of social, political, and religious transformation (Abatayo & Gumapang, 2024). The introduction of Christianity during the Spanish colonial period significantly influenced indigenous communities; however, many Igorot cultural practices persisted

through a process of cultural adaptation and religious integration. Instead of abandoning ancestral traditions, many Igorot communities incorporated indigenous customs into Christian celebrations and ceremonies, particularly in life-cycle events such as courtship, baptism, marriage, and mourning. This cultural syncretism reflects the resilience of indigenous identity while demonstrating the community's capacity to harmonize traditional beliefs with Christian faith (Abatayo & Gumapang, 2024). Complementing these efforts, the Philippine Department of Education, through the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program, advocates for contextualized and culturally responsive instruction that recognizes indigenous knowledge, traditions, and cultural heritage as valuable learning resources (Adhikary et al., 2024).

Igorot migrant families in the Eastern Kayapa District of Nueva Vizcaya preserve their ancestral traditions while participating in Christian religious life. Their practices demonstrate the integration of indigenous rituals and Christian beliefs during community events and family ceremonies. These localized experiences provide valuable opportunities for Social Science education by offering authentic, community-based examples that enhance learners' understanding of Philippine history, cultural diversity, indigenous identity, and religious pluralism. Incorporating these practices into classroom instruction can strengthen contextualized teaching, promote intercultural understanding, and encourage appreciation of Indigenous heritage and contemporary cultural realities (Abatayo & Gumapang, 2024; Adhikary et al., 2024). Although there is a growing body of literature on Igorot culture and indigenous traditions, studies have primarily examined traditional rituals, indigenous beliefs, and Christianization separately, mainly within communities in the Cordillera Administrative Region. There is limited empirical research exploring the integration of Christian rites among migrant Igorot communities outside their ancestral homeland, particularly in the Eastern Kayapa District, or their educational value for culturally responsive Social Science instruction. This study explores these integrated practices, community perceptions of this cultural synthesis, and the implications for culturally relevant, contextualized learning experiences.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aimed to examine the integration of traditional Igorot practices into Christian rites and determine its implications for social science education in the Eastern Kayapa District, Nueva Vizcaya. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

- What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, educational attainment, length of residency, ethnic group, and religious affiliation?
- What is the extent of the observance of traditional Igorot ritual practices in terms of courtship, baptism, marriage, and mourning?
- What is the extent of integration of traditional Igorot practices into Christian rites in terms of courtship, baptism, marriage, and mourning?
- What are the perceptions of the Igorot community regarding the integration of traditional Igorot practices into Christian rites?
- What are the educational implications of integrating traditional Igorot practices into Christian rites for Social Science education?
- Is there a significant difference in the respondents' perceptions of the integration of traditional Igorot practices into Christian rites when grouped according to their demographic profiles?

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed quantitative descriptive-comparative research design. The descriptive method was utilized to determine the demographic profile of the respondents, assess the extent of observance of traditional Igorot ritual practices, examine the integration of these practices into Christian rites, and identify the perceptions of the Igorot community regarding such integration. Meanwhile, the

comparative method was used to determine whether significant differences existed in the respondents' perceptions when grouped according to their demographic characteristics. This research design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to describe existing cultural practices systematically while comparing variations in perceptions among different groups of respondents.

Local of the Study

This study was conducted in the Eastern Kayapa District, Nueva Vizcaya, Philippines. The district is home to members of the Eastern Kayapa Igorot Organization, composed primarily of Igorot migrants originating from various provinces in the Cordillera Administrative Region. Although residing outside their ancestral homeland, these community members continue to observe many traditional Igorot customs while actively participating in Christian religious practices. The locality provides an appropriate setting for examining the integration of indigenous cultural traditions into Christian rites and for identifying their educational implications within the context of social science instruction.

Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study consisted of 30 members of the Eastern Kayapa Igorot Organization. The participants included adult and elderly members who possessed adequate knowledge and experience regarding traditional Igorot rituals and Christian religious practices. Their participation was considered essential because they had firsthand experience in observing, practicing, and preserving indigenous traditions while participating in Christian ceremonies. Their insights provided reliable information necessary to achieve the objectives of the study.

Sampling Procedure

The study employed purposive sampling to select the respondents. Participants were intentionally chosen because they met the established inclusion criteria: they were registered members of the Eastern Kayapa Igorot Organization, at least 18 years of age, had resided in Eastern Kayapa for a considerable period, and possessed sufficient knowledge of both traditional Igorot customs and Christian religious rites. This sampling technique ensured that only individuals capable of providing relevant and accurate information regarding the cultural integration being investigated were included in the study.

Research Instrument

The researcher utilized a researcher-made questionnaire developed based on the objectives of the study and supported by relevant literature on indigenous culture, cultural integration, Christianity, and social science education. The questionnaire consisted of four parts. The first part gathered the demographic profile of the respondents, including age, sex, educational attainment, length of residency, ethnic group, and religious affiliation. The second part measured the extent of observance of traditional Igorot ritual practices in the areas of courtship, baptism, marriage, and mourning. The third part assessed the extent of integration of these traditional practices into Christian rites, while the fourth part determined the respondents' perceptions regarding such cultural integration. Prior to administration, the instrument underwent content validation by experts in social science, Indigenous studies, and educational research. Necessary revisions were incorporated based on their recommendations. A pilot test was subsequently conducted to determine the reliability of the instrument using Cronbach's alpha, with a reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher considered acceptable.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to conducting the study, the researcher secured approval from the Graduate School and obtained permission from the officers of the Eastern Kayapa Igorot Organization. After the necessary approvals were granted, the purpose and objectives of the study were explained to the prospective respondents, and informed consent was obtained before the questionnaire was administered. The researcher personally distributed and retrieved the questionnaires to ensure a high retrieval rate and provide

clarification whenever necessary. Upon collection, the complete questionnaires were checked for completeness, organized, encoded, and prepared for statistical analysis using the appropriate software.

Statistical Treatment of Data

The data collected were analyzed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Frequency and percentage were used to describe the demographic profile of the respondents. Mean and standard deviation were employed to determine the extent of observance of traditional Igorot ritual practices, the extent of integration of traditional practices into Christian rites, and the perceptions of the Igorot community regarding such integration. To determine whether significant differences existed in the respondents' perceptions when grouped according to their demographic profile, an independent samples t-test was used for sex, while a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to age, educational attainment, length of residency, ethnic group, and religious affiliation. Finally, the educational implications of the findings for social science education were synthesized using thematic analysis, drawing from the quantitative results to formulate recommendations for culturally responsive instruction.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result and discussion

Profile Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age	18–39 years	12	40.00
	40–59 years	11	36.67
	60 years and above	7	23.33
Sex	Male	14	46.67
	Female	16	53.33
Educational Attainment	Elementary	6	20.00
	High School	10	33.33
	College	11	36.67
	Postgraduate	3	10.00
Length of Residency	Less than 5 years	4	13.33
	5–10 years	6	20.00
	11–20 years	8	26.67
	More than 20 years	12	40.00
Ethnic Group	Bontoc	7	23.33
	Ifugao	8	26.67
	Kankanaey	9	30.00
	Ibaloi	6	20.00
Religious Affiliation	Roman Catholic	17	56.67
	Protestant	9	30.00
	Other Christian Denominations	4	13.33

Table 1 presents the demographic profiles of the respondents in terms of age, sex, educational attainment, length of residency, ethnic group, and religious affiliation. The findings show that most respondents were aged 18–39 years, female, had attained a college education, and had resided in the Eastern Kayapa District for more than 20 years. The respondents also represented different Igorot ethnic groups, with the Kankanaey having the highest representation, and the majority were Roman Catholic. These findings indicate that the respondents came from diverse demographic backgrounds but possessed sufficient knowledge and experience of both traditional Igorot practices and Christian beliefs. Their varied characteristics provide a reliable basis for understanding how indigenous traditions are integrated into Christian rites and support the credibility of the study's findings.

Table 2 Extent of Observance of Traditional Igorot Ritual Practices

Traditional Igorot Ritual Practices	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Courtship Rituals	3.34	0.46	Often Observed
Baptism Rituals	3.18	0.42	Often Observed
Marriage Rituals	3.42	0.39	Often Observed
Mourning/Death Rituals	3.51	0.44	Always Observed
Grand Mean	3.36	0.43	Often Observed

Table 2 shows strong adherence to traditional Igorot rituals. Mourning rituals are "Always Observed," with a mean of 3.51 (SD = 0.44), indicating their critical role in the Igorot framework. This aligns with anthropological views that death rituals reinforce cultural identity and cohesion. Marriage (mean = 3.42, SD = 0.39), courtship (mean = 3.34, SD = 0.46), and baptism (mean = 3.18, SD = 0.42) are "Often Observed," reflecting high, though slightly less universal, frequency. This suggests that while life transitions maintain significance, their observance allows for variation in contemporary contexts. Socioeconomic pressures or modernization may cause shifts in practice, consistent with studies where observance varies across social strata(Xygalatas & Maňo, 2024). The grand mean of 3.36 (SD = 0.43) classifies overall observance as "Often Observed," highlighting the persistence of these practices despite external pressures. This persistence underscores rituals' role in maintaining ethnic identity. Research on other indigenous groups emphasizes how ritual continuity functions as an anchor and a dynamic system that adapts without losing symbolic meanings(Sadikov, 2025). Furthermore, the prominence of mourning rituals reflects the social importance of grief ceremonies in fostering communal healing, echoed in studies highlighting ritual as critical in coping with loss and preserving social fabric(Cherblanc et al., 2025).

Table 3 Extent of Integration of Traditional Igorot Ritual Practices into Christian Rites

Traditional Igorot Ritual Practices	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Courtship Integration	3.26	0.41	Moderately Integrated
Baptism Integration	3.15	0.39	Moderately Integrated
Marriage Integration	3.38	0.43	Highly Integrated
Mourning/Death Integration	3.47	0.37	Highly Integrated
Grand Mean	3.32	0.40	Highly Integrated

The data in Table 3 indicate the notable integration of traditional Igorot ritual practices into Christian rites, reflecting a syncretic landscape. Specifically, mourning or death rituals and marriage practices show the highest integration, with mean scores of 3.47 and 3.38, respectively, categorized as "Highly Integrated." This suggests that these life-transition rituals are particularly receptive to assimilation within Christian contexts, possibly because of their social and spiritual significance. Courtship and baptism rituals register lower mean scores of 3.26 and 3.15, respectively, both interpreted as "Moderately Integrated." This moderate integration may reflect the differences between indigenous and Christian formulations of these rites or varying community acceptance. The grand mean of 3.32, interpreted as "Highly Integrated," underscores the strong synthesis between Igorot traditions and Christian practices. Such syncretism is consistent with observations across cultural settings where indigenous rituals blend with Christian rites. For instance, studies on syncretistic funeral practices in postcolonial African contexts highlight how traditional rites adapt by incorporating Christian elements while preserving indigenous cultural identity and values(Aluede & Ikhidero, 2024). Similarly, Cordillera research underscores indigenous spiritual practices merging with Christian beliefs, promoting a holistic cultural and environmental ethic(Jacoba, 2025). This integration facilitates resilience and continuity, enabling communities like the Igorot to maintain heritage amid shifting religious landscapes while enriching Christian ritual expression with local meaning.

Table 4 Perceptions of Igorot Community Members on the Integration of Traditional Igorot Practices into Christian Rites

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Integration strengthens the cultural identity.	3.58	0.46	Strongly Agree
Traditional practices can coexist with Christian beliefs as well.	3.61	0.43	Strongly Agree
Cultural integration preserves the Igorot heritage.	3.54	0.48	Strongly Agree
Christian practices respect Indigenous traditions.	3.36	0.51	Strongly Agree
Integration promotes unity among community members.	3.49	0.44	Strongly Agree
Integration should be preserved for future generations to come.	3.67	0.39	Strongly Agree
The blending of traditions enriches community life.	3.45	0.47	Strongly Agree
Grand Mean	3.53	0.45	Strongly Agree

Igorot community perceptions of the integration of traditional Igorot practices into Christian rites are positive, as reflected in Table 4's mean scores and "Strongly Agree" interpretations. The highest endorsement is "integration should be preserved for future generations" (mean = 3.67, SD = 0.39), emphasizing commitment to sustaining cultural-religious synthesis. Similarly, strong agreement that "integration strengthens cultural identity" (mean = 3.58) and "traditional practices can coexist with Christian beliefs" (mean = 3.61) highlights harmony through syncretism, where indigenous heritage and Christian faith reinforce each other. This affirmation aligns with ethnographic insights on syncretism, where indigenous practices adapt and merge with Christian elements without losing cultural meanings. For example, the coexistence and evolution of burial rites with Christian funerary practices among the Esan people of Nigeria demonstrate how such integration maintains cultural identity while accommodating religious frameworks (Aluede & Ikhidero, 2024). Likewise, studies in the Cordillera region reveal that these blends foster spiritual continuity and support environmental stewardship and community resilience (Jacoba, 2025). Moreover, agreement that integration "promotes unity among community members" (mean = 3.49) and "the blending of traditions enriches community life" (mean = 3.45) underscores the social and cultural benefits of this syncretism. Integration appears as an active process promoting cohesion, identity, and cultural vitality. Overall, the data suggests that the community values this integration as essential for sustaining both heritage and faith in a dynamic landscape.

Table 5. Educational Implications of the Integration of Traditional Igorot Practices into Christian Rites for Social Science Education

Theme	Educational Implication	Suggested Classroom Application
Cultural Heritage Education	Indigenous rituals can be incorporated into lessons on Philippine culture and local history.	Localized learning materials, heritage mapping, and case studies of Igorot traditions were used.
Values Education	The integration of traditional and Christian practices reinforces respect, unity, family solidarity, and an appreciation of cultural heritage.	Conduct reflective activities, value integration, and collaborative discussions.
Multicultural Understanding	The coexistence of indigenous traditions and Christian beliefs promotes the appreciation of cultural diversity and religious tolerance.	Facilitate comparative cultural discussions and intercultural learning activities.
Contextualized Teaching	Local cultural practices make Social Science instruction more meaningful, relevant, and learner centered.	Elderly community should be invited, storytelling should be used, and cultural immersion activities should be organized.
Cultural Preservation	Schools can help preserve Indigenous knowledge and traditions through curriculum integration and community partnerships.	Develop cultural documentation projects, heritage exhibits, and school-community extension programs.

Table 5 presents the educational implications of integrating traditional Igorot practices into Christian rites for social science education. The findings suggest that indigenous cultural practices can enrich classroom instruction by promoting cultural heritage education, values formation, multicultural understanding, contextualized teaching, and cultural preservation. Incorporating local traditions into social science lessons enables learners to better appreciate their cultural identity while fostering respect for cultural diversity and religious tolerance. The use of localized learning materials, storytelling, cultural immersion activities, and partnerships with community elders can further enhance meaningful and culturally responsive learning experiences. These findings support the Department of Education's Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program, which promotes the integration of indigenous knowledge and local culture into classroom instruction, and are consistent with studies emphasizing that culturally responsive education strengthens learner engagement and appreciation of cultural heritage (Adhikary et al., 2024; Abatayo & Gumapang, 2024).

table 6 Test of Significant Difference Between the Respondents' Demographic Profile and Their Perceptions of the Integration of Igorot Practices into Christian Rites

Profile Variable	Statistical Test	Test Statistic	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Age	One-Way ANOVA	F = 1.52	.237	Fail to Reject H_0	Not Significant
Sex	Independent Samples T-test	t = 0.84	.409	Fail to Reject H_0	Not Significant
Educational Attainment	One-Way ANOVA	F = 2.16	.118	Fail to Reject H_0	Not Significant
Length of Residency	One-Way ANOVA	F = 3.41	.031	Reject H_0	Significant
Ethnic Group	One-Way ANOVA	F = 1.28	.299	Fail to Reject H_0	Not Significant
Religious Affiliation	One-Way ANOVA	F = 0.96	.394	Fail to Reject H_0	Not Significant

Table 6 presents the results of the test of significant differences between the respondents' demographic profile and their perceptions of the integration of traditional Igorot practices into Christian rites. The findings reveal that age (p = .237), sex (p = .409), educational attainment (p = .118), ethnic group (p = .299), and religious affiliation (p = .394) did not show significant differences since their p-values were greater than the 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that respondents generally shared similar positive perceptions of the integration of Igorot traditions into Christian rites regardless of these demographic characteristics. However, length of residency showed a significant difference (p = .031), suggesting that the number of years respondents had lived in the community influenced their perceptions of cultural integration. Individuals who had resided longer in Eastern Kayapa were likely more familiar with the evolution and preservation of both indigenous traditions and Christian practices. This finding supports previous studies which emphasize that prolonged community involvement strengthens cultural identity, participation in traditional practices, and appreciation of indigenous heritage despite changing social and religious influences (Kelly et al., 2024; Yeh et al., 2021)

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that traditional Igorot practices remain widely observed among members of the Eastern Kayapa Igorot community and have been successfully integrated into Christian rites, particularly marriage and mourning ceremonies. The respondents strongly agreed that this cultural integration strengthens cultural identity, preserves Indigenous heritage, promotes community unity, and allows traditional practices to coexist with Christian beliefs. Furthermore, the findings highlight

that integrating Indigenous cultural practices into Social Science education can promote culturally responsive, contextualized, and meaningful learning experiences. While most demographic variables did not significantly influence respondents' perceptions, length of residency was found to have a significant effect, indicating that prolonged community involvement contributes to a deeper appreciation and understanding of cultural integration. Overall, the study demonstrates that integrating Igorot traditions and Christian practices serves as an effective means of preserving Indigenous heritage while enriching Social Science education through culturally relevant instruction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that social science teachers integrate traditional Igorot practices and local cultural heritage into classroom instruction to make learning more meaningful, contextualized, and culturally responsive. The Department of Education and school administrators should strengthen the implementation of the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program by developing localized instructional materials and providing professional development opportunities that promote the inclusion of indigenous knowledge in teaching. Community leaders, cultural organizations, and local government units should continue to preserve and document Igorot traditions through cultural activities, heritage programs, and partnerships with schools to ensure that these practices are passed on to future generations. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to conduct similar studies involving larger populations, other indigenous communities, and qualitative or mixed method approaches to further examine the integration of indigenous traditions into Christian practices and their implications for education.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was limited to members of the Eastern Kayapa Igorot Organization in the Eastern Kayapa District, Nueva Vizcaya, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other Igorot communities or Indigenous groups in the Philippines. This study employed a quantitative research design using a researcher-made questionnaire; therefore, the findings relied on the respondents' self-reported perceptions and experiences. In addition, the study focused only on the integration of traditional Igorot practices into Christian rites in the areas of courtship, baptism, marriage, and mourning, and did not examine other cultural practices or religious traditions that may also influence cultural integration

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future studies should involve a larger and more diverse sample of Igorot communities from different provinces or regions to provide broader perspectives on cultural integration. Researchers should also employ qualitative or mixed-method research designs to gain deeper insights into the lived experiences, beliefs, and practices of Indigenous communities. Future research may explore other aspects of Igorot culture, examine the integration of indigenous traditions into other religious practices, and evaluate the effectiveness of incorporating indigenous cultural heritage into Social Science instruction and other learning areas. Such studies can contribute to the preservation of Indigenous knowledge and the development of culturally responsive education.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Prior to the conduct of the study, permission was obtained from the Graduate School and the officers of the Eastern Kayapa Igorot Organization to conduct the research. The purpose, procedures, and significance of the study were clearly explained to all participants before data collection. Informed consent was obtained from each respondent, and participation was entirely voluntary. Respondents were assured that their identities and responses would be treated with the utmost confidentiality and anonymity, and that all information gathered would be used solely for academic and research purposes.

The researcher also respected the cultural beliefs, traditions, and values of the Igorot community throughout the research process, ensuring that the study was conducted ethically and in accordance with the accepted principles governing research involving human participants and indigenous communities.

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AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

During the preparation of this work, I used ChatGPT to assist in generating draft texts, improving grammar, enhancing language clarity, refining sentence structure, and supporting the organization of the manuscript. After using this tool, I carefully reviewed, revised, and edited the content to ensure its accuracy, originality, and academic integrity. I take full responsibility for the content of this published work.

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