

# High School Aetas' Course Experience: Benchmark for Streamlining Curricular Program Management

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## ABSTRACT

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Many of the Aeta students in the province are included in mainstream classrooms. As this causes the Indigenous some difficulty coping, the study analyzed four high schools regarding the course experience of 162 of their Aeta students. The researcher used a survey that he, through referenced studies, localized and translated—"Survey on Aetas' High School Course Experience." The survey yielded the most pronounced needs of Aetas—starting lessons with Aetas' prior knowledge, school-based Indigenous centers, indigenized learning content, and more understandable media of instruction. The study used a quantitative and descriptive design, using a questionnaire to quantify the Aetas' assessment of their high school experience with non-Indigenous classmates, teachers, and administrators. The study's resulting discussion and conclusion suggested improvements through particularized versions of programs that could center on



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Inclusiveness Training for the teachers; school-based Indigenous Centers; the inclusion of indigenous knowledge in lessons; implementation and consistent management of school services and events that reflect inclusive on-campus services; generation of livelihood programs and on-the-job trainings that are mindful of the job-readiness of the Aetas; content training that is coupled with motivational counseling; the integration of technology that democratizes the access to information for all, with no exclusion against the non-mainstream.

## INTRODUCTION

Schools as systems have evolved into multi-dimensional entities that are porous enough to allow in influences from outside and the home front (Scott, 2003). Among the current global challenges prompting educational institutions and governments to arrive at new management models, one of the most pressing appears to be the issue of accessibility. People from different backgrounds, orientations, and ethnicities should be able to provide quality education equally. Discussions such as those in Usher and Cervenak (2005) clarify that without a fair distribution of the opportunity to acquire education, the future of the youth would be unclear, for access to education and training is the basis of the modern information-driven market. As shown in Taylor (2005), to face the factors of change, school administrations need to undergo educational management changes to meet the challenges of maintaining their effectiveness.

Managing the learners' experience of school and its services so that those previously disadvantaged or put aside may enjoy the empowering benefits of education has been one of the key aspirations of learning institutions around the globe. Shoham and Perry (2009) expounded on the need for educational institutions to adapt structurally and culturally to environmental changes, thus becoming innovative. Innovations are, in turn, controlled by factors personnel may or may not be in complete control of. Related to this, Scott (2003) enumerated the factors that influence change in schools. These factors include government funding, resource allocation transparency, stakeholders' rights, and the spread of communications and information technology.

In Australia, access to education for Aboriginal students is assured. However, the students' engagement and continuous participation in their programs still have considerable room for development. The Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) Research Briefing, produced by the Australian Council for Educational Research in 2011, reported that Aboriginal Australian students' attrition, retention, and completion percentages are matters for serious management consideration. Furthermore, the same AUSSE research briefing

cites various entities and researchers reporting on the areas for improvement concerning the engagement of Aboriginal students: (a) the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations said that Indigenous participants currently stand at less than one percent of all tertiary students; (b) the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) seconded this and added that this ratio unfortunately was diminutive to the 2.5 percent of Indigenous people in the broader population; (c) and IHEAC further claimed that the attrition rate for freshman Aboriginal learners is approximately 35 to 39 percent. Finally, Radloff and Coates, in the research briefing cited, stated that native Australian collegiate learners have an overall completion statistic that does not reach 50 percent; this, according to Asmar et al. (2015) in the same research briefing, contrasts with 72 percent among non-Aboriginal Australian students.

In the case of the Sonn et al. (2000) study, the institution catering to the demands of the Aboriginal sector is the Center for Aboriginal Studies (CAS) or Indigenous Center. The center's primary function is to provide bridge courses to students of native descent. The CAS's role is of primary importance to the concerned students as the place where Aboriginal identity is solidified, advice and help are extended, and the gap between the university and the native groups is bridged. Part of the salient points in the research conclusions mentioned included what was established as necessary to support the vitality and uniqueness of Aboriginal culture and its due recognition. Furthermore, the legitimate clamor for scientific inquiry and social action that counteract misinformation and racial bias is stressed. Sonn et al. (2000) give baseline data that point to the necessity of a deeper understanding of the contextual factors that affect the partaking of Aboriginal students in learning with the majority.

Australia and the United Kingdom are considered pioneers in student course experience, with these two countries' objectives centered on accountability in educational practice and enhancement of educational training. This situation was the background for Andrew's study (2010). He delved into the contrast between the universities of Nigeria and those of other countries regarding the quality of course experience among tertiary students. In Nigeria, negligible attention is paid to the students' perspective and the focus is not on the learner's evaluation of their experience of course-related trainings and the conduciveness of the academic community and its circumstances. The measure of excellence in the programs of study in schools is through accreditation by the National University Commission (NUC) through the criteria: 32 points for staffing, 23 points for academic content, 25 points for physical facilities, 12 points for library, five points for funding, and three points for employer's rating.

Studies on the Indigenous that have thus far influenced the current

understanding of the needs of these stakeholders in education are of a wide array of research concerns. In the sense of basing the current course experience of Aetas on what is culturally important and relevant to them, the following works have all been supportive of this research's theoretical framework: tracing the ancient ways and means utilized in educating the youth of the tribes using historical artifacts (Hsu et al., 2011); preservation and development of tribal languages through language immersion programs in school settings and the effects of such in academic performance (Harrison, 1998); differences between indigenous and mainstream education as input to the design of a native studies program (Lambe, 2003).

Suha (2022) veered away from the perspective of the young Indigenous student in that it investigated the stance of the teachers whose cultural competence is assessed. The main findings revolved around the teacher's ability to incorporate cultural competence to engage the community, dispense responsibilities as the teacher, and be knowledgeable regarding the indigenous culture.

Gaps are seen in most current research in Asia as there is a paucity of research focusing mainly on the opinions of the very young Indigenous themselves regarding their satisfaction with high school engagement as a whole and the concrete ways this could be improved. Some evaluative studies concentrate on specific learning contexts involving more mature students. Ismailov et al. (2021) investigated how students in higher education improved their fluency and depth of discourse in a multicultural learning situation when they were given more opportunities to prepare to make themselves more familiar with their respective cultures of origin.

From East Asia, the most recent studies depart from the perspective of the high school Indigenous evaluating the totality of their educational engagement. Liu et al. (2022) presented the viewpoint of healthcare providers' inclusive practice through awareness of the ward's attitudinal and health situation. Lee et al. (2020) dealt with the care and health practitioner relationship dynamic as well. This study relates better to the case of Aetas in that the service providers undergo cultural competence training. This need could be established to be present for the service providers of Aetas.

Very recent Asia-centered papers like Kolagari et al. (2022) proved cultural attitude was exhibited more prominently than cultural competence; Mobaraki-Asl et al. (2019) presented benefits in applying the cultural competence survey to even more professional situations where sensibilities in the culture of Iran are called for to provide service more earnestly; and Mohsen and Sajad (2023) argued that empathy was a prerequisite to cultural competence.

A gap is determined related to literature directly catering to the combination

of concerns in this paper: the evaluation of Aetas regarding aspects of their high school education such as instruction in general, materials used in teaching, services rendered on campus, and the general relationship of the Aetas with the school staff and their peers. Available data from the latest papers are more inclined towards combining the variable of cultural competence with the concerns of higher education and the personnel in the field, if not more common, the medical field and the practitioners in it. Illustrative of this is the work of Oanh (2019), who investigated the interplay between teaching multicultural awareness and the promotion of listening competence to promote more proficient practice in cross-cultural communication, and Yang and Gao (2020) that was in support of reflecting cultural competence as a common core feature among tertiary subjects across curricular programs instead of being a unique feature of limited offerings.

The gap in the research currently available centers on the need to evaluate the potential lack of accommodation for Aboriginal Filipino students' needs. It is a matter of mapping Philippine educational management against those of more developed countries that similarly have Indigenous stakeholders to care for.

The gap is also clearly established owing to the dearth of data pertinent to the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) and its other versions in the country and Southeast Asia. This further established the need for this research.

Studies covering different countries worldwide recognize that there are education-related needs among the Indigenous that are not met when the voices of the same non-mainstream students are not considered in managing teaching and related services. As seen in White and Fogarty (2001), Lambe (2003), Toulouse (2006), Metallic and Seiler (2009), and Hsu et al. (2011), Indigenous learners, Aboriginal culture, and the place these take in the big picture of education are fast claiming their share in the interests of researchers. These mentioned researches described Indigenous learners as belonging to tribes or groups that colonizers have not culturally changed. These mentioned scholarly works referred to Aboriginal culture as a way of life kept distinct from the mainstream, modern society by old folk beliefs and traditions. The mentioned researchers likewise recommend these aspects of the Indigenous culture as important considerations in the education of the Aborigines. In this study, the words Indigenous and Aboriginal are capitalized. In research done in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States, this is to define them with the same respect accorded them—unique cultural groups often referred to as First Nations.

Developments that deal with change in school systems as a global phenomenon highlight innovative perspectives that merit local application. In this context and considering the effort by the Philippine government to harmonize with the international educational community in inclusiveness with its K to 12 Program,

as discussed in Sarvi et al. (2015), the question of how the Indigenous student fits into the picture inevitably emerges. This prompted the researcher to investigate the research project.

The term “Indigenous” in this study is used interchangeably with “Aborigine,” “Aboriginal,” “native,” and “ethnic.” Indigenous Filipinos are those native inhabitants in the territory found by the Spanish *conquistadors*, separated from the lowlanders, who were predominantly of Malayan stock and, to a degree, mixed with Indonesian lineage. The Indigenous—either by choice or on account of the isolation of their habitats—did not intermarry with most lowlanders and did not imbibe the Westerners’ way of life. Indigenous individuals in the Philippines number approximately 7.2 million, inhabiting areas in the three main islands of Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. Constituting ten percent of the overall population, certain groups among the Aborigines stay in forest ecosystems, while others are situated in the plains and shores, as stated in Fiagoy (2000). In the same research discussion, what was highlighted as being received by some of the members of the Aboriginal groups is broadly described as adult education. Indigenous individuals whose ages match those of mainstream students are provided non-formal training instead of the usual school education.

A part of the stimulus for the quantitative study was *The Story of the Filipino*, a documentary featuring the life of Judelyn Baluyot, a teacher who is an Aeta, which stated that 56 Aetas graduated from college in the year 2010. This is, as shown in the production, a considerable accomplishment given the difficulties in studying experienced by Aetas, the most numerous Indigenous groups in the Philippines. Judelyn Baluyot was, by all indications in the television feature, an accomplished Aeta student who got the support she needed—other Aetas are not likely to be in the same circumstances. This recalled for the researcher the knowledge gap—the question of how to best manage the education of Aetas.

McHenry et al. (2013) report that the Aetas are consistently put at a disadvantage because they are driven away from their traditional lives by disasters, both natural and man-made. The same research acknowledged how some governments in Asia have been averse to protecting the rights and privileges supposedly accorded to Indigenous groups. The same paper further noted how initiatives to help make the lives of Aetas better have been subjected to intentional delays, such as the proposal to use genetic evidence to legitimize the status of the the Aetas as Indigenous and worthy of a formal acknowledgment as owners of their ancestral domain.

Ferrer (1999) emphasized that the Aetas were the original Filipinos who moved from one area to another, living a semi-agricultural, semi-nomadic life. Their way of life has never been significantly changed by the colonial influences

the mainstream Filipinos embraced. Unfortunately, part of the resistance to colonizers' power is being left out of the innovations that advanced civilizations afford controlled territories. Ferrer (1999) explained that the dole-out mentality had dominated regarding assisting the Aetas. Little development is seen in their economic life, which remains mainly as a subsistence economy. The researcher added that the economic growth of the non-indigenous seems to counter that of the Aetas, with mining being one good example, with the industry encroaching upon the lands of the indigenous with careless damage. The Aetas' subsistence on little material resources is still reflected in more current discussions from the community outreach sectors, such as those in the Opus Dei Newsletter.

According to Serrat (2020), the Philippine Statistics Authority's 2015 population count of the Aetas was 57,707, a very small sector living mostly near Mount Pinatubo in Zambales Province compared to the Philippines' population of 100 million. The National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP) Region III listed seven Indigenous Aeta groups in the region, namely Agta, Alta, Aya Ambala, Aya Mag-antsi, Aya Magbukun, Aya Mag-indi, and Aya Sambal. The commission also acknowledged that the Aeta communities suffer from poor development, inaccessibility, and conflicts. The NCIP has set as one of its strategic directions its coordination with pertinent agencies to promote education for the Aetas that is sensitive and responsive to indigenous culture. The agency has reiterated that quality education should be inclusive for the Aetas and stop their marginalization and disadvantage caused by conflicts of interest.

Reviewed research hinted upon possible merits in integrating the perspectives of Aeta students on their experience of high school and their evaluation of the competence of their schools in serving Aeta students. This motivated the researcher to study these perspectives and venture into measuring concepts that could prove beneficial based on precedent studies and identified needs of the Indigenous. The results generated in the study were projected to have significant implications on how the Aetas might be given high school training. Projected benefits of the survey research include helping promote a quality educational experience for the Aetas and spurring the development of education for the Aetas such that their chance of success might be like that of Judelyn Baluyot, who has chosen to be a professional teacher to her fellow Aetas.

A trend that this research project, in part, evolved from is the evaluation done by learners regarding their own experiences using course experience questionnaires. This practice has been a parcel of the review for quality among learning institutions in the West, coupled with and at times separate from accreditation efforts.

Andrew (2010) stressed that the outcomes of the accreditation processes do

not always pan out such that there is a heightening in the level of excellence among the schools, effects of excellent assessment procedures, and highly favorable ratings for course experience and educational environment. This was seen in the Nigerian educational milieu, where criteria for accreditation other than course experience were initially given a premium. In part, this study drew from Andrew (2010) the idea of verifying the generalizability for the Philippine context of findings from foreign studies that inquired about the course experience of Indigenous students. Determining whether Andrew's findings (2010) apply to Indigenous Filipino participants, particularly the Aetas, would be worthwhile. Generally, in the Philippines, local schools rely on accreditation proceedings to judge the quality of course experience, normally with the actual evaluative perspective of the students relegated to the back seat. To explore and have a deep conversation about the possible weakness in the Philippines' catering to the educational demands of the Indigenous Filipino clientele, it would do Filipino teacher-researchers well to evaluate the local cases alongside the scenarios in the developed countries who are also caring for First Nation learners.

More advanced universities abroad have more profitably chosen as a measure of educational excellence the student's viewpoints and ratings for the quality of the teaching-learning interaction and various aspects of the learning experience. This is done using the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ), a survey material designed from a paradigm maintaining that the way students tackle their academic tasks is dependent on their previous exposures to teaching-learning situations and that their perspective on the present learning situation is, in turn, likely to influence learning results. A variation of the CEQ, which has similar features but displays more clarity for appropriate use with undergraduates, is the Students' Course Experience Questionnaire (SCEQ).

Later studies concretized through quantitative questionnaire items the aspects that constitute Aboriginal students' satisfaction with the experience of their participation in mainstream learning. Shah and Widin (2010) used the "Indigenous Student Experience Survey" (ISES), a version of the CEQ that has design elements that make it possible to gather not only quantitative but also qualitative data. In the same research, the authors reported on the results of a study undertaken by a large Australian University to determine aspects for further development in the management of the course experience of Indigenous students. The discussion emphasized how important it is that native students evaluate their educational experience favorably. The satisfaction of the native students ensures their achievement of academic goals and, eventually, their employment goals. This redounds to the Indigenous individual's self-sufficiency and active partnership with other community-building sectors. On the other



hand, from the school's point of view, maintaining the number of Indigenous students assures the school's close relationship with Aborigine-centered agencies that provide needed extraneous income for the school's programs. The research's discussion underscores this mutually beneficial agenda of raising the quality of training and experience of Aboriginal learner stakeholders through empirical research endeavors.

## **FRAMEWORK**

From the work of Hellsten (2011), this study gleaned the aspects that serve as determinants of favorable course experience: (a) encouragement of the Indigenous student's personal identity that includes his/her Aboriginal culture; (b) assistance regarding language needs; (c) merging of academic knowledge with cultural knowledge in course content; (d) opportunity to challenge racism and ethnocentrism (promoting the belief in equality, instead of certain races' superiority); (e) cultural support networks; (f) reinforcement of the process of emotional healing; (g) help with time management; (h) institutionalizing support through offices that conspicuously service unique needs of the Indigenous; (i) rapport with the Indigenous family of the student that ascertains support for the latter; (j) accessibility of resources; and (k) technology as a tool for academic and social advancement, not an impediment due to meager training.

In double-checking the appropriateness of the questions in prompting the Aetas to feel free to share their answers, the research saw appropriate insights as well from Sashkin and Egermeier (1993), Ely (1999 a, b) and Sha and Widin (2010). The mentioned works were in sync with this research in that they focused on streamlining improvements in the training given to the Indigenous informants. The researcher also found contributory the outlining of necessary considerations on analysis as delineated and clarified in Abhojailan (2012). The research also included in its paradigm insights on the same analytical typology from the pertinent reflections in Braun and Clarke (2006).

In addition, this study was also enlightened by findings that have been reported by other field professionals (or entities) such as Metallic and Seiler (2009) on the use of Indigenous knowledge to inform subject area education and the development of curricula and pedagogy; Toulouse (2006) on the connection between aboriginal student success and self-esteem; the Review of Aboriginal Education (2004) on policies and programs for Aboriginal students and the resulting enhancement to the learners' academic performance; and White and Fogarty (2001) on the educational effects of values held by aboriginal students. These works' innovative insights provided the current research with points of reference in gathering and analyzing local data.

Also supportive of the framework of this research in positioning the point of view of the Indigenous students in the rating, analysis, and improvement of the academic training provided by institutions of learning were the principles applied in the methodology used widely in mainstream student-centered evaluative analysis which is the course experience survey questionnaire. One instrument adjusted for the case of the Indigenous was the “Course Experience Questionnaire” (CEQ), as used by Downie and Möller (2002). Ramsden contrived the questionnaire in Downie and Möller (2002) to measure students’ satisfaction at the University of Sydney. This study shares the CEQ’s purpose: to measure the quality of the experience among students within the stretch of their course of study, as opposed to the limited scope of a specific subject or unit. It was considered appropriate to quantify the disparities among various units of an organization feasibly in terms of accommodating the needs of Indigenous students.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study aimed to accomplish the following aims: (1) Adapt a survey questionnaire that would appropriately provide data for the analysis needed in the study; (2) gather data on the course experience of the Aetas in the study who share their classroom and school resources with non-Indigenous learners and school personnel; (3) and draw conclusions on the favorable aspects of the Aetas’ course experience as well as areas for improvement.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The quantitative-descriptive survey research combined quantitative method guidelines from Mertens (2014) and Creswell (2012). It utilized quantitative research to describe the course experience of Aeta students, taking note of the strengths and weaknesses of their high school education experience. As observed in Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), Creswell (2012), and Creswell (2007), the statistical data analysis yielding percentages and averages from tallied responses was followed by the interpretation of the results with appropriate theories as guides.

The research approach involved first considering relevant discussions from related literature and studies, after which the need for numeric evidence was addressed through the phases of data collection tool design, data retrieval and analysis, interpretation of quantitative results, and finally, the systemic discussion

clarifying the answers to the research questions.

The research used the “Survey on Aetas’ High School Course Experience” (SAHSCE) for the adopted CEQ. The Filipino translation was utilized in the actual data gathering. The SAHSCE has its sections corresponding to eleven themes namely: acceptance of Aeta identity; help with language-related needs; starting lessons with Aetas’ prior knowledge; connecting lessons with Indigenous beliefs; acceptance of all cultures; support from fellow Aetas; group Study with fellow Aetas; promotion of emotional health; sufficiency of time for tasks; schedule of tasks; office for the needs of Aetas; Aeta family-school relations; books; facilities; and technology training.

Points in the SAHSCE that align with Sha and Widin’s (2010) conclusions regarding Indigenous students’ experiences include the need for support from peers who maintain communicative contact, the multifarious assistance given by adequate support structures in schools, and the quality of teachers. The descriptions related to the favorable course experience of Indigenous students as clarified by Hellsten (2011), King et al. (2012), Diller and Moule (2005), Robinson (2012), and the National Education Association (2008) guided the current researcher’s preparation of the “Survey on Aetas’ High School Course Experience” (SAHSCE) in English and “Sarvey ukol sa Karanasan ng mga Aeta sa Mataas na Paaralan” (SKAMP) in Filipino. For the SAHSCE, the means and descriptive equivalents were: 0 - 1.54 = very unfavorable; 1.55 – 2.54 = unfavorable; 2.55 – 3.54 = moderately favorable; 3.55 – 4.54 = favorable; 4.55 – 5.00 = very favorable.

### **Research Site**

The research site was District 2 of the Division of Pampanga of the Department of Education, Philippines. Four high schools agreed to participate in the study because they accommodated Aeta students who take classes with mainstream learners. Anonymity of the schools was requested.

### **Participants**

The participants were Aeta High School students. They came from four high schools referred to in the study as schools A, B, C, and D. The number of Aeta student participants for each school were: School A, 52; School B, 23; School C, 66; and School D, 21. The Aboriginal students have the following unique circumstances: (a) they are Aetas who have complied with elementary education prerequisites, qualifying them for secondary education, not just informal education for the Indigenous; (b) the curricular programs they are in were designed for the academic engagement of mainstream—not Aboriginal—

students; and (c) they experience education under non-ethnic teachers, staff, and administrators who have not received training to handle Indigenous students in particular. Aetas from School A were coded as SAPA, representing School A Participant Aeta. Participants were also numbered; for example, School B Participant Aeta Number 1 was coded as SBPA1, and the second student was coded as SBPA2, and so on.

### **Data Collection**

The survey's generated data made possible the necessary descriptive statistics. The data from the survey constituted the quantitative information that could point to necessary changes and improvements in the Indigenous inclusiveness of the schools.

The researcher reviewed the concept of course experience from related literature and studies. Following this, the researcher sought the target students' participation as data sources. The administration of the questionnaires was a uniform procedure for all the groups involved, with care taken not to obscure the measurement of variables with extraneous influences.

After giving the necessary orientation and successfully securing the participants' consent, the researcher accomplished the second phase of the research—quantitative collection and analysis.

### **Research Ethics Protocol**

As for the permission to survey the Aeta students, the researcher secured the appropriate approval from the pertinent Department of Education local authorities, the survey participants, and their parents' consent.

The researcher designed the SAHSCE for the research and subjected it to validation. Content validation of the questionnaire was part of the procedures, and the researcher carried these out through consultations with fourteen (14) education experts, leaders from the administration and teaching departments of reputable local schools, and representatives from the Department of Education, Schools Division of Pampanga.

Cronbach's alpha results for the survey were 0.821, pointing to good internal validity. The items were proven consistent with the overall objective of the questionnaire. This, coupled with the content validation by the education experts, constituted the rigor that the research went through to ascertain validity and reliability.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Aspects Affecting Aetas' High School Experience.** Among the aspects affecting Aetas' high school experience surveyed, foremost among favorable ones was the "Aeta Family-School Relations" aspect, with a mean of 4.54. This was followed by two other means: 4.45 for "Promotion of Emotional Health" and 4.34 for "Acceptance of Aeta Identity."

Table 1 shows that the aspect affecting Aetas' course experience with the lowest mean (3.52) was "Starting Lessons with Aetas' Prior Knowledge." The second to the lowest mean of 3.65, interpreted as favorable, corresponded to "Office for the Needs of Aetas."

The third lowest among the means, 3.70, was interpreted as favorable and corresponded to Books. Finally, the fourth mean of 3.77, also interpreted as favorable, was "Help with Language-related Needs."

**Table 1**

*Means for Aspects of Aetas' High School Course Experience (n=162)*

Aspects Affecting Aetas' High School Experience	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
Acceptance of Aeta Identity	4.34	Favorable
Help with Language-related Needs	3.77	Favorable
Starting Lessons with Aetas' Prior Knowledge	3.52	Moderately Favorable
Connecting Lessons with Indigenous Beliefs	3.99	Favorable
Acceptance of all Cultures	4.15	Favorable
Support from Fellow Aetas	3.98	Favorable
Group Study with Fellow Aetas	4.04	Favorable
Promotion of Emotional Health	4.45	Favorable
Sufficiency of Time for Tasks	3.81	Favorable
Schedule of Tasks	3.92	Favorable
Office for the Needs of Aetas	3.65	Favorable
Aeta Family-School Relations	4.54	Favorable
Books	3.70	Favorable
Facilities	3.85	Favorable
Technology Training	3.96	Favorable

In describing the aspects affecting Aetas' high school course experience, what appeared to have been most favorable to the informants stated, "The school communicates with my family well, especially regarding the importance of my engagement in school." Two others followed this: "My abilities and self-confidence are improved because of tasks I accomplish" and "I am encouraged to be proud of myself as an Aeta with an important culture."

The aspect affecting Aetas' course experience with the lowest rating was the descriptive statement—"At the beginning of each lesson, the discussion is started with things the Aetas are familiar with." Pointing to the merits of using the aborigines' perspectives in their education, Hsu (2011) favorably highlighted the utilization of the traditional customs of tribes and realia with historical value. The Aetas' attention may be ascertained, and their lessons commenced better in class if this same principle is applied. The Aetas' schools can indeed do well to take after institutions that truly show concern for respecting and preserving Indigenous knowledge, as acknowledged in Lambe's discussion (2003). The research stressed that schools conscientious about using Indigenous knowledge and the unique perspectives of aborigines, such as the Aetas, accumulate knowledge about the perspectives of the Indigenous that through the same, they are even able to eventually offer native studies programs based on the research.

To start the lesson using motivational elements derived from the prior knowledge of the Aetas would call for the teacher's competence in catering to the culture of the Aetas. In agreement with the results of this research, Suha (2022) underscored the necessity of having the teacher ready to engage with the Indigenous learners in a manner that reveals his or her having been substantially informed of the culture and traditions, as well as current situations of the native students. This knowledge and competence pertinent to the culture of the students translates to narrative hooks upon which motivating lesson introductions may effectively be anchored.

The second to the lowest rating corresponded to the descriptive statement—"At school, there is an office that is conspicuously located and may easily be accessed for assistance regarding the needs of Aetas." The schools studied in the research would benefit from taking a cue from Sonn et al.'s (2000) study, offering insights on having in the campus an office that looks after the needs of the Indigenous members of the community. Bridge courses provided by the Indigenous center would further the success of the Aetas and signify to them and the rest of the school that the Aetas matter, especially regarding the difficulties they face in their studies. The Indigenous center will also legitimize the research agenda, which will center on the Aetas and their concern for wellbeing. This could be handled through a center where they could receive advice and other

related services.

The third lowest rating was with the descriptive statement—“Books are new, sufficient in number, and featuring information accurately related to the way of life and situation of the Indigenous.” As noted in Lambe (2003), the Indigenization of learning materials, which is the process of highlighting information pertinent to the way of life of the Aborigines to ascertain the achievement of learning objectives, is also a prerequisite to the Indigenization of the curriculum. Also, White and Fogarty (2001) mentioned Indigenization of learning content and the curriculum not only satisfies the need for skills pertinent specifically in the case of Aetas, but it also considers the Indigenous values and the educational implications these values hold. This non-reflection of the culture and social situation of the Aetas in the content of their lessons echoes the observations featured in White and Fogarty (2001), Lambe (2003), Toulouse (2006), Metallic and Seiler (2009), and Hsu et al. (2011) where there certainly are indications of the lack of acknowledgment and even less tangible appreciation for the Indigenous perspective in books and other learning materials. The same discussions, however, point to the recently starting interest in non-discrimination in education as a whole, which the studied schools of the Aetas would do well to keep in mind as a guiding principle in preparing learning references.

Finally, the fourth descriptive statement with the lowest rating was—“Sufficient help is extended to me when I experience difficulty with the language used for the study. Studies like Harrison (1998) may lend important insights to teachers when dealing with concerns related to using a more comprehensible medium of instruction and providing assistance when learners have language difficulties. Teachers may go even further and use elements from the Indigenous language. Harrison (1998) put substantial emphasis on support for maintaining the utilization of tribal languages through their active promotion to help with performance in school.

None of the course experience aspects registered a mean value corresponding to “very favorable.” Furthermore, the apparent complexity of the mix of needed improvements and the variety of sectors associated with the possible implementation of the suggestions could confirm the need for an Indigenous center described as an expediting office for the various needs of Aboriginal students (Sonn et al., 2000). This center, coordinating with the other stakeholders in the curricular training of the Aetas, could help investigate addressing areas for further development, such as appealing to the student’s prior knowledge through content that is richer in information related to Indigenous culture. The schools studied, therefore, would benefit from insights such as those in Yang and Gao (2020) that advocated the wide promotion of competence in accommodating the multi-

faceted learning needs of the indigenous in all programs of the school, not only in selected subjects.

Considering that this study yielded results where none of the indicators were very satisfactory for the Aetas, the schools researched may be considered similar to cases in Sarvi et al. (2015), where adjustment to K-12 may be made even more effective if the concerns of the Indigenous were to be more efficiently addressed. Now that the principles espoused by the K to 12 curricula are more established locally, the psychological opportunity is appropriate for the promotion of the academic interests of the Aetas. Sarvi et al. also suggested that the K to 12 curriculum presents a fitting philosophical framework to meet the idiosyncratic needs of the Aetas. Implementing a curriculum structured deeply in innovation and openness to appropriately new philosophies presents a momentum where curricular innovations for the Aetas could be hinged upon to ensure their upscale accommodation.

Discussions such as those in Downie and Möller (2002), Andrew (2010), and Shah and Widin (2010) reflect the results on the situation of the Aetas in that measurement of their satisfaction with their engagement in the academic institution resulted in an assessment that is less than what is hoped for. The papers also agreed on the need to put a premium on the viewpoint of the Indigenous in efforts to improve the quality of instruction and school management in general.

The evidence from the study's results points to the need to work towards a higher degree of satisfaction among Aeta students. Sources of important insights on ensuring teaching professionals exhibit the cultural sensibilities needed in this respect may not be limited to studies directly related to teaching and the Western standards in education. Works from Asia like Lee et al. (2020), Kolagari et al. (2022), Morabaki-Asl et al. (2019), and Mohsen and Sajad (2023) all indicate that professionals may contribute to the satisfaction of their clientele when the culture of their wards is respected. The same practitioners of their field are sensitized to the culture-related needs of the individuals and groups they provide services to.

According to the Aetas' survey, the following could be judged as the second and third, respectively, among the favorable aspects of course experience: Promotion of Emotional Health with the descriptive statement—My abilities and self-confidence are improved because of tasks I accomplish, and Acceptance of Aeta Identity with the descriptive statement—I am encouraged to be proud of myself as an Aeta who has an important culture.

To capitalize on what is seen as favorable by the Aetas and to take them even further, schools with Aeta learners can modify their existing models in serving the Aetas. One way is to adapt current training to reflect the principles



followed in Abejuela (2005). In this pioneering research mentioned, Adult Education for Indigenous Peoples (AEIP) is described as a comprehensive set of learning processes that combine knowledge of the Aborigines and other systems of knowledge. This type of education considers the people's cultures and experiences as its foundation. It simultaneously teaches them to critically analyze and examine their unique circumstances to empower them to make informed choices and courses of action. Adult education--which to an extent can be like that needed by the high school Aetas--should be more than learning how to read and write and participating in livelihood workshops. It must ensure that peoples of ethnic origin are invested with the capacity to play an active role in the upkeep or building of a just and democratic society in which their cultural integrity and their search for self-determination are ascertained and duly acknowledged.

Cases of AEIP that can serve as inspiration in concretizing the suggestions of this research of the high school Aetas can include the Schools for Indigenous Knowledge and Traditions (SIKAT) set up in a few locations in the country. As discussed by Abejuela (2005), typical of these is the Sagu-Ilaw (SIKAT) of the Bukidnon Tribe in Northern Mindanao, which was founded as a type of tertiary teacher-training center wherein its students provide instruction to the children of the tribe in their home villages. The students in the school who are training to be para-teachers go to class only once a week--only on Fridays. For the rest of the week, they serve as kindergarten teachers in their respective villages of origin.

Much more proximate to education that accommodates the needs of Indigenous clientele is the instance of Pamulaan Center for Indigenous Peoples' (IP) Education. As seen on the center's website, the center is an educational institution catering to the needs of indigenous peoples, and it is pioneering in its design. Its primary objective is to ensure that its pathways and formation for the IPs meet the demands of the society of Aborigines in their current milieu and are apt to cherished Indigenous norms.

Learning arrangements like those in the SIKAT schools and the Pamulaan Center presented ideas and practices that could serve as reference points in looking into what could work for the case of high school Aetas in Pampanga, the chosen locale of this study. Nevertheless, a significant difference between the current study and the cases of the SIKAT schools and the Pamulaan Center is that the current research turns its attention to teaching-learning set-ups where the Indigenous students must contend with programs, environments, and personnel in high school arrangements that have not been intended to specifically serve the needs of the Aboriginal learners.

## CONCLUSIONS

The course experience of Aetas in the study is generally described as favorable through the research's quantitative analysis. The database analysis also suggested possible areas for further improvement in the Aetas' engagement in high school. What could be considered as opportunities for further development were: indigenized learning content, with lessons starting with the stimulation of the Aetas' prior knowledge; school-based Indigenous centers that include among their services culture-sensitive counseling for Aeta students and their families; and the establishment of social entrepreneurship linkage that provides the Aetas both livelihood and hands-on learning; resources for effective learner-centered, technology-enhanced teaching and learning situations; more comprehensible media of instruction; and an Indigenous-inclusive environment where the personnel are well trained in cultural competence, and where the Indigenous way of life is highlighted in on-campus cultural activities. The schools could work on these aspects of change since there is still room for growth to reach the point where the Aetas view the school even more favorably. Since none of the aspects investigated were excellent, the conclusion supports Shoham and Perry's (2009) and Taylor's (2005) exposition on the need for the schools to modify their services so these could go beyond just being favorable. Furthermore, the research concludes that schools would do better in the areas investigated if greater attention is paid to these management elements, particularly resource allocation, as stated in Scott (2003).

## TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

This research may guide schools with Aetas of similar circumstances in using the suggested improvements that could be derived from the conclusions of the study. Schools with Aeta students, with their unique circumstances, would do well to determine the details of possible innovations that could be particularized to suit the local needs. This can be done in part by using the study in print and digital form in the context of the institutions' seminar trainings, school-based research congresses, and practical research class sessions—all for the aim of putting the voices of the Indigenous in the front line along with other stakeholders.

The study may be localized, adapted, or presented as a reference in conferences. It could be deemed helpful as part of the rationale for spearheading innovations in the administrative, instructional, and research agenda centered on indigenization of lessons with content commencing with the unlocking of the

Aetas' experiences; prioritization of the needs of the Indigenous through a center in the school that subsumes research and psychology-informed counseling; fortification of the economic independence of the Aeta communities; ensuring relevant on-the-job training; long-term mobilization of sponsored or school-generated resources that promote learner-centeredness; technology integration; greater familiarization with the languages used for teaching; maintenance of the school; making sure school workers have knowledge and skills in adapting service to the Indigenous; and providing school events and festivities that reflect on the Aeta way of life and values.

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