

Exploring indigenous occupation: Reflections from a fieldwork experience in an Ati Community in Southern Cebu

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Abstract: Framing indigenous activities from an occupational perspective warrant the consideration of pluralistic perspectives. This case study explored the indigenous occupations of an Ati tribe community in Southern Cebu through a fieldwork activity in an occupational therapy undergraduate programme. Data were collected through individual interviews, field notes, and journaling and were analysed using constant comparison. Findings revealed three emergent themes: (1) Indigenous occupations amid urbanisation, (2) Contextually health-compromising indigenous occupations, and (3) Balancing indigenous culture and daily survival. The nuances of the indigenous occupational engagement of the Ati people characterise their activities as gender fluid, promotive, risky, and underpinned by a constant struggle between preserving their culture and survival. Implications of this study include the need for occupational therapy students and practitioners to continue working towards co-creating partnerships with indigenous peoples for learning, praxis, and scholarship. These partnerships can be cultivated by integrating occupational science theorisations in the curriculum, employing decolonising pedagogies, and encouraging interprofessional learning and working.

Keywords: occupational science; occupational therapy; case study; qualitative inquiry; Philippines

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Introduction

In the field of occupational therapy, occupations are defined as meaningful activities that are used for individuals, groups, and populations to promote health and well-being in everyday living (Hocking, 2009; Wilcock, 2006). On the other hand, occupational science is the systematic study of human participation in occupations across the lifespan (Clark et al., 1991). The study of occupations revealed how occupations must be viewed from pluralistic contexts. By considering the social, cultural, political, and historical contexts, a deeper and critical understanding of occupations can be achieved especially when studying occupations of indigenous people. While occupational scientists have been articulating that occupation must be deconstructed from a cultural lens (Beltran, 2011; Iwama, 2010), examining occupations of indigenous people must never assume that the meaning of occupation is universal (Darnell, 2002).

Studies about indigenous people framed within occupational perspectives have been made available in countries like Australia, Canada, United States of America, and New Zealand. Most of these articles employed qualitative and mixed method research designs that focused on reinforcing partnerships (Hooper et al., 2007; Gerlach et al., 2014), promoting cultural safety and human rights education (Hopkirk & Wilson, 2014; Crawford et al., 2016; Jamieson et al., 2017), and recommending practical strategies for indigenous health practices (Watts & Carlson, 2002; Pidgeon, 2015). Given the on-going discourse about the predominance of Western-based knowledge in theorising occupations (Iwama, 2010), it is important to remain critical when constructing occupations to be applied in practice, education, and scholarship (White & Beagan, 2020).

Field education is a pedagogical approach largely attributed to social work educational programmes. Often referred to as 'practice learning' or 'field practicum', field education aims to promote practice competence through students' learning to integrate and apply the knowledge, values, and skills of social work while also offering services to individuals, families, groups, and communities (Bogo, 2017). On the other hand, service learning is an experiential educational approach that allows students to participate in organised service activity that meets community needs and promotes civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). While not specific to social work, service learning principles intersect with some corollary of field education including servicing others, volunteering, and applying theories learned in the classroom within real-world settings. Considered to be a

high-impact pedagogical approach in higher education, service learning is embedded within occupational therapy education and training, commonly referred to as 'fieldwork' or 'internship' (Uy, 2019). One of the objectives of occupational therapy internship in the Philippines is to train occupational therapy interns (commonly final year students) under actual workplace settings (Commission on Higher Education, 2017).

Learning about indigenous culture, peoples, and occupations can be maximised through fieldwork or internship programmes that utilised principles of field education and service learning. In 2019, the Commission on Higher Education released a memorandum that institutes the integration of indigenous peoples' studies in relevant higher education curricula. Although already in writing, demonstrating the study of indigenous peoples and related constructs poses a challenge in the already full curriculum in undergraduate occupational therapy programmes.

Context

The word 'indigenous' refers to the notion of a place-based human ethnic culture that has not migrated from its homeland and is not a settler of colonial population (Stewart, 2018). In this article, we will focus on the indigenous people called 'Ati' from the Philippines. To avoid linguistic confusion, it should be noted that in this article the term 'Ati' may refer to Ati people either individually or as a tribe. The Ati is an indigenous tribe based in the Philippines who were commonly called *Negritos* during the Spanish colonial era due to their skin colour (*negro* is just the Spanish word for colour 'black'). Ati people are described as being generally short in stature, with dark skin, and curly hair (Padilla, 2013). Also known as Agta, Ita, or Aeta, this nomadic people predominantly reside in the northern Luzon Island encompassing the provinces of Cagayan, Pampanga, Tarlac and Zambales (Gaillard, 2006). Like any indigenous groups, the Ati people are considered ethnic minorities in modern-day Philippines and are among the poorest and most disadvantaged groups in Filipino society due to disproportionately poor access to education, health, and human rights (Grey, 2016; United Nations Development Programme, 2010; Gaillard, 2006). As a result, some members of the Ati tribe are left with no choice but to emigrate to other islands and urban cities to find ways to live.

In this case study, the Ati people under investigation come from Cebu in

Central Visayas. They are one of the indigenous groups from Panay Island who emigrated to Cebu in the year 2000 in search of better employment and living opportunities. Historically, the original *Negritos* were located mainly in the lowlands and were pushed gradually to the hills and mountains as a result of colonisation (Amper, 2014; Balilla et al., 2013). According to Kress (2006), the *Negritos* were much more visible during the Spanish colonial era as they were seen in large groups along the coastlines of the archipelago. It can be inferred that they were the predominant group before the Spanish colonisation. Presently, they are in *panun-panun* (bands) and are scattered all over the islands in the Visayas (Nova-Morales, 2011, as cited in Amper, 2014).

Maintaining a nomadic lifestyle, Ati people make a living primarily through fishing, hunting and food gathering. They are also experts in making ethnomedicines and medicinal concoctions made from flora and minerals found in nature (Amper, 2014; Zanoria & Villavelez, 2016). These occupations are considered indigenous as these activities represent ethnocultural activities that are unique in comparison to the activities of mainstream society. Henceforth, we will refer the ethnocultural activities of the Ati people as 'indigenous occupations'. Due to the increased economic development in the Philippines and inevitable encroachment of non-Ati living in their traditional lands, their way of living and occupational orchestration had been threatened in unprecedented ways (Balilla et al., 2013). In order to exercise basic human rights and achieve their desired quality of life, the Ati people are increasingly required to participate in formal and informal non-indigenous economical activities within and outside their traditional lands (Balilla et al., 2013). Despite the perils of acculturating to mainstream society, the knowledge and practices of ethnomedicinal trade remains (Amper, 2014).

Knowing that the meanings of occupations are not universal, it is important to disseminate such conceptualisations through fieldwork and internship opportunities underpinned by field education and service learning principles. The integration of indigenous studies into the occupational therapy curriculum entails deliberate educator training on occupational science and decolonising pedagogies. The realities of the lives of Ati people living in Cebu revealed how they have preserved their self-identity while evolving continuously despite the threats towards their ethnocultural lifestyle brought about by economic development and continuous colonisation.

Purpose

This case study aims to explore a nuanced understanding of the Ati people's way of living through their indigenous occupations using a qualitative inquiry within the context of fieldwork opportunities in an occupational therapy educational programme.

Method

A descriptive qualitative approach was utilised in this case study that collected and analysed data sets from interview transcripts and field notes producing qualitative data. Additionally, the fieldwork experience served as the research site where data sets were collected to ensure nuanced and deeper understanding of indigenous cultures (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Research site

Following the approval of the course fieldwork by Velez College, ethical clearance and entry permission to the site were obtained. The entry permission to the traditional lands was obtained from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) Provincial Office (2019-1406). Thirty-six first-year occupational therapy students who were accompanied by three occupational therapy faculty members (two of whom are the first and second authors of this article) participated in the fieldwork experience in July 2019. Throughout the fieldwork, the group was accompanied by one NCIP personnel to serve as the group's guide and interpreter. The activity began with a series of courtesy calls, one at the city hall to inform the local government unit about the visit and another one at the research site to inform the Ati local chieftain about the purpose of the fieldwork activity. Outcomes of the fieldwork were shared with the NCIP personnel who also served as the community gatekeeper.

The research site was located within the traditional lands of the Ati tribe residing in Southern Cebu. These traditional lands are protected and assigned to the indigenous peoples by the NCIP and local government to recognise their rights of ownership of their ancestral lands where they can freely participate in their indigenous customs, ways of living, and activities

(NCIP, 2020). The research site could be reached in 15 minutes from the main highway. The path towards the site was filled with lush vegetation and upon reaching the Ati settlement, one would see that the community was near the beach. Some houses were built along the belt of mangroves beneath the coastline. Their dwellings were largely made from a mixture of concrete cement and light materials such as plywood, bamboo, and tarpaulin. To ensure that their homes are safe from flooding due to high tides, the dwellings were elevated using wooden or bamboo stilts. The community environment included a Christian chapel, a small tribal hall, and a public toilet.

The fieldwork

Before the actual fieldwork, the conceptualisations of indigenous occupations were introduced through a module as part of a course in the undergraduate occupational therapy programme. The module aimed to describe the dynamic relationships between occupations and human development across the lifespan and to intersect these understandings to occupational therapy dimensions including occupational profiling, client factors, performance skills, and contexts. Moreover, the module intended to scaffold the development of cultural competencies among first-year students in preparation for clinical courses and internships which would involve direct client care. One of the teaching-learning strategies utilised in the module was a fieldwork in a local indigenous community. As an educative experience, the fieldwork activity was perceived to be an opportunity to witness the indigenous occupations that are unique to the members of the Ati people and recognise the various factors that influence the sense of belonging to the tribe and those factors that affect participation and engagement in indigenous occupations. As a research activity, the fieldwork reported in this article refers to the exposure and immersion of occupational therapy students in a local indigenous community.

Participants

Twelve ($n = 12$) Ati individuals (aged 24 to 74 years old) served as research participants. A purposive sampling was employed to ensure maximum variation and to minimise disruptions to the communal routine (Creswell

& Poth, 2018). The inclusion criteria included participants who were above 18 years old and able to communicate verbally in *Binisaya*. Those who obtained membership of the Ati community through inter-marriage were excluded. To maintain anonymity, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. The demographic information of the participants was obtained with permission and signed informed consent (see Table 1).

Table 1
The research participants from the Ati community under study ($n = 12$)

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Occupation Focused
Rosauro	24	Male	Child rearing
Nimfa	74	Female	Shrimp and shellfish gleaning
Natividad	47	Female	Babysitting
Gani	28	Male	Cycle rickshaw driving
Rizalia	46	Female	Making herbal medicine
Jesusa	30	Female	Making herbal medicine
Jovelyn	28	Female	Making herbal medicine
Lucia	63	Female	Sewing
Soledad	28	Female	Home management
Efren	49	Male	Electronics repair
Rizalino	44	Male	Home management
Niño	70	Male	Porter

Data collection and analysis

Interview transcripts, field notes, and journal notes were used as data sets for analysis. The interviews were based on the components of occupational analysis set by Mackenzie and O'Toole (2011). The interview guide examined the meaning, purpose, and participation of the individuals in their occupations; how the person fitted the occupation; and the context that supported all the components. The interviews were conducted in the respective homes of the research participants or in locations where they usually perform their occupations. Pre-assigning the interviewers with the

research participants eased the logistics and avoided disruptions within the community.

To enforce triangulation, field notes data were also extracted from observing participants while engaging in their indigenous occupations embedded in their ethnocultural lifestyle. Specifically, observations must evoke the skills essential for performing the observed occupation(s), the constitutive activities and tasks, and the contexts and environments where the occupation(s) were transacted. These observations were translated into written notes for easier interpretation during data analyses. To further enrich the data gathered, both students and faculty members took journal notes in order to document reflections throughout the fieldwork experience. The reflective process was guided by Rolfe's Reflective Model (Bishop & Blake, 2007) that enabled peers to discuss about their learning experience from the fieldwork, build on current knowledge about the situation and understanding on indigenous occupation, and encourage critical reflexivity.

Data sets were analysed using constant comparison (Parry, 2004; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) to identify patterns across coded data that would eventually generate emergent themes pertinent to addressing the research aims. A manual method was selected for employing the analyses. Data sets were collated and organised in document files with one document assigned for each participant. The first and second authors performed the initial reading and re-reading of data to become familiarised with the data before initial open coding. The process of open coding involved the extraction of meaning from the transcripts and quotations read resulting to a set of codes. A 'code' constitutes a word, phrase, or sentences that represent the meanings and interpretations extracted from the quotations embedded within the transcripts. The patterns and themes were then compared across the participants in an iterative manner to examine trends and contradictions (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). After a series of constant comparison, final themes were formulated along with the third author.

As part of responsible qualitative inquiry, rigor and trustworthiness components were employed based on the proposed strategies of Guba and Lincoln (1989) and Elo and associates (2014). *Credibility* was ensured through the process of acquiring consent from the NCIP, the city hall, and Ati Tribe chieftain prior to conducting the educative and research activities. Orientations were also undertaken to ensure that the students and faculty members would demonstrate cultural sensitivity throughout the fieldwork activity. Additionally, a peer debriefing led by an external consultant (a

community-based occupational therapist) was held to enrich the processing of the fieldwork experience. The purposive recruitment of participants and use of semi-structured interviews supported the *dependability* of the study. Also, the processes of transcribing, translating and coding of data were done collaboratively between the student- and faculty-researchers to consider diverse perspectives while mitigating biases. *Confirmability* was accomplished by using field notes for constant comparison analyses. *Transferability* was ensured by providing clear descriptions of the method, participant characteristics, recruitment, research setting, and data gathering and processing. Samples of the translated texts were also illustrated in the findings section to ascertain the data *authenticity*.

Findings

The data collected and analysed from the field work produced three themes describing the Ati tribe's occupational participation and engagement that influenced their overall health at the individual level and community level of living, namely:

1. (*Theme 1*) Indigenous occupations amid urbanisation,
2. (*Theme 2*) Contextually health-compromising indigenous occupations,
3. (*Theme 3*) Balancing indigenous culture and daily survival.

Quotations, translated from the Ati people's language to English, were included to characterise the emergent themes.

Theme 1: Indigenous occupations amid urbanisation

Exploring occupations beyond mainstream activities underpinned by modern society revealed how indigenous occupations are formed and transformed by time, environments, and social structures. Through our findings, we were assured that indigenous occupations shape and preserve the identity of the Ati people. Theme 1 underscores that indigenous occupations are formed through generations of heritage, performed without gender bias, and transformed by urbanisation.

One of the valued indigenous occupations of the Ati is making traditional herbal remedies, also known as ethnomedicines, mainly based on *himag*

(herbal oil). Apart from that, some Ati are also skilled in the craft of making talismans and amulets, which are known to give them supernatural healing and protection from unwanted spirits. These practices have been passed down to the Ati people from their forefathers in previous generations. Three makers of these traditional remedies, Rizalia, Natividad, and Jovelyn, shared that their engagement in this indigenous craft started when they were young, gave them a sense of pride as a tribe, and allowed them to preserve their culture until the next generation. Rizalia narrated, ‘...when I was still young, this is what we have been doing and [herbal medicine making] became our business...’ She also shared that the craftsmanship of herbal medicine is a collective activity that allowed them to learn from their parents and other members of the tribe who are skilled in the craft. Natividad expressed her pride in their heritage in making herbal remedies, ‘...[we] preserve it by passing them down to our children... We take pride in [it] because we can only make [them] from plants found in our homeland...’ One of the craftswomen, Jovelyn, articulated that making accessories (talismans, amulets, and hand-made accessories), was pivotal for them to perform communal rituals that include singing, chanting, and dancing. She added that through performing traditional dances and customs and wearing hand-made accessories, the elders of the Ati tribe could offer the younger generation a vivid witnessing and deliberate conserving of their tribal roots.

Within the Ati community, the males are usually responsible for poultry farming and chopping wood from the forests, while females perform gleaning (a fishing method used in coasts and estuaries during low tide) and making herbal remedies. However, several participants attested that in their culture, they do not follow specific gender roles. Nimfa, a female member of the community, said that ‘...[we] do things on [our] own and work on [our] own. As long as we are able to help each other and provide for our family’s needs, that is what matters the most...’ A male member, Rizalino, also shared, ‘[I’m] the one who takes care of my daughter ... two years...and youngest son ... six months old. My girlfriend works in the city selling *porseras* [bracelets] ...’ While indigenous occupations require a lot of hard work and physical labour, gender does not get in the way when everyone needs to work and do things to live and survive.

Preserving these indigenous occupations could be challenging especially with the convenience brought about by urbanisation. Although valuable to their culture, these indigenous occupations have been transformed unknowingly into occupations that contain elements underpinned by

modernisation. The pressure of balancing the preservation of culture and adaptation to modern activities has become more apparent especially when some of them need to receive services from the rural health clinics, or to send their children to the local public school. Engaging in occupations that are not indigenous in nature is generally accepted within the community, especially those that involve health care and education. However, some members of the tribe underscored the value that they place on using traditional herbal remedies as part of their health management and maintenance. Rizalino emphasised, ‘...herbal medication [is the] primary means of treating illnesses for [our] children because it has been effective... [we] relied on it for generations and the results have satisfied [us]...’ To further clarify this complex occupation on health management, Natividad explicated, ‘We first rely on [our] herbal medicine and would only consult professional practitioners when [our] medicines won’t work.’ Moreover, pursuing work in mainstream society has become more evident in recent years due to financial demands. Niño, a breadwinner, shared that he ‘...[picked] this type of job (manpower) since it only requires physical labour... In our [Ati] culture, we focus working with our hands and that makes me fit for the job.’ Given the industrious nature of the Ati people, Gani narrated that he performed alternating roles with his wife when there was no work available. He added, ‘I drive a *trisikad* [a type of rickshaw] ... so I can provide for the family, [but] I still make herbal medicine at home...’

Theme 2: Contextually health-compromising indigenous occupations

The first theme characterised indigenous occupations as health-promoting and being formed and transformed by culture, time and societal changes. However, it is impossible not to notice that some of the occupations of the Ati people could pose health risks not only to individuals but to the community due to some contextual changes. The second theme posits that there are indigenous occupations that may compromise the health of the community due to contexts which have been altered by modernisation.

Participation in basic activities of daily living, such as eating and drinking, are highly depends on available resources. While water and food are available, concerns about its potability and sustainability were recurrent throughout the narratives. Rizalia recalled that before settling in their current community, they were used to drinking water directly from

mountain springs as well as taking baths from the nearby sea. Living in the community afforded some electricity to gain water supply, but Rizalino expressed:

... mineral water and electricity supply are not readily available; it is too expensive. Sometimes, [we] go to houses that have electricity to get water... I prioritised [my] children to use the water I collect... sometimes, the older ones just drink water from the faucet...

Soledad, one of the dwellers, further described Rizalino's plight. She said

For household chores and bathing, the water is taken from my neighbour... For drinking, we usually get water from the store. The big size costs 25 pesos¹ ... The water from the gripo (faucet) may upset our stomachs.

While the Ati people have their own sanitary practices, they still practice open defecation. Although this is respected as part of their traditional ways of living, this is a concerning public health issue that needs to be addressed. The encroachment of urbanisation allowed for the community to have its own latrine situated in the community's tribal hall. However, Rosauo verbalised his concern that

there's only one toilet for all... [my] family doesn't use it... we do these private activities (defecation, urination, and menstrual hygiene) in the aromahan (an open area).

Theme 3: Balancing indigenous culture and daily survival

The first two themes described the nuances of indigenous occupations, revealing that these occupations are shaped by cultural, political, and temporal contexts with health-promoting benefits and health-compromising risks. Along these characterisations of indigenous occupations, the Ati people, like any other groups of people, participate in them not without challenges and experiences of injustice. The last theme reveals that the Ati people constantly engage in balancing culture and survival through these indigenous occupations.

Even though the Ati people are known for their industriousness and capability of completing laborious work, they generally do not have

sustainable income streams, making it difficult for them to engage in their indigenous occupations and basic activities of daily living. For instance, Jovelyn shared to the researchers how a *trisikad* fare to the public market would compromise her earnings from making herbal medicine:

...[we] need to ride a trisikad which is 20 pesos¹ for a one-way fare. A day's fare could've been spent on house supplies and food. In times when we have no money to pay for a ride, we just walk to the public market to sell our herbal medicine.

She added that preserving the traditional ways of making herbal medicine can also expose them to financial pressure. Some of the materials to make the concoction are not readily available in the city, and must be shipped from the neighbouring province. This process is costly, leaving them with marginal profit from selling their herbal products.

These examples illustrate how promoting indigenous occupations – selling herbal medicine from traditional practices – might cause more harm than good to a family within the Ati community. When selling herbal medicine does not make ends meet, some of the Ati people would start looking for work in the city. Jesusa shared that she began to work as a laundress to augment the family income. To families who send their children to the nearby public school, engaging in mainstream jobs that pay more than selling amulets and herbal remedies is perceived as a viable solution to their survival. Similarly, Natividad, who also took on mainstream jobs in the city, said

[I am] still concerned about other expenses like books and supplies for [my] youngest son... his grades were not enough to get full scholarship.

The narratives of the Ati people within this case study revealed the nuances of indigenous occupations. Going beyond journalistic understandings of their activities, the Ati people have shared with us the richness of their cultural heritage including the spectrum of indigenous occupations that promote, compromise, and preserve their health, activities, and cultural identity. These narratives also indicated that there are some indigenous occupations that were being abandoned over mainstream activities for the survival of the self and community.

Discussion

This study presents the Ati people's way of living through their indigenous occupations using qualitative inquiry by means of fieldwork education within an occupational therapy programme. The findings unearthed three themes that characterise the Ati people and their indigenous occupations revealing the constant struggle of transacting across contexts, culture, and survival.

Apart from understanding that indigenous occupations of the Ati people are communal in nature (Wilson, 2011), these occupations were seen to be formed through inheritance from previous generations and it is expected that they will be passed on to the next generations of Ati. Indigenous occupations such as making ethnomedicinal remedies, talismans, and amulets are pivotal to their traditions and communal rituals. Another interesting finding is the fluidity of gender in the Ati community, as women healers are a common sight and highly revered in their communities (Torres, 2016). This implies that women are not just home makers, they are also expected to earn a living for their families just like men.

Within the first theme, the need for the Ati tribe to 'preserve' their culture is apparent, which indicates that their tribal roots and culture have been damaged through time by Western colonisation (White & Beagan, 2020). Although we have seen how the Ati people in this case study have welcomed modernisation by participating in mainstream health services and education, it is important to acknowledge that a reluctance to modernise may still be present. This reluctance can be due to a variety of reasons such as past experiences with colonisation, socio-economic difficulties, and the dilemma between prioritising survival rather than seeking external health services including occupational therapy (Nelson et al., 2007). Indigenous people view health differently since they consider their community as 'healthy' when they can perform activities that support their tribal identity, connect them to nature and their place of origin, and foster positive relationships with the rest of the community (Mackenzie & O'Toole, 2011). Hence it is important to recognise that health professionals, including occupational therapists, who intend to work with indigenous people need to be cautious in discussing 'occupations' and 'environments' as if telling them that these concepts are intended to 'fix' them (Canadian Association of Occupational Therapist, 2018; Nelson & Allison, 2007). Rather, the entry point of occupational therapy should include casual conversations, fostering partnerships, and active listening to their stories,

experiences, and needs (White & Beagan, 2020; Booth & Nelson, 2013) through field education.

Utilising the term 'occupation' is problematic as it has a negative connotation among indigenous people. For occupational therapists and scientists, the term 'occupation' can denote engagement in meaningful occupation, but for indigenous groups, this term can be taken literally as 'occupation of their tribal lands' and 'devastation of their livelihoods, values systems and cultural practices' (White & Beagan, 2020). An example of this is being complicit with the imposition of programmes such as hygiene and grooming, using money, and sanitation without fully understanding how indigenous people actually engage in these activities. In other words, when bartering is exercised in the indigenous community, imposing money amelioration schemes may need to be adapted otherwise the money can be used in a way different from its intended purpose.

Sensitivity to the term 'occupation' should be exercised by both students and practitioners when working with indigenous groups. Educators who intend to integrate indigenous studies within occupational therapy education may also need to be trained in using decolonising pedagogies and occupational science conceptualisations in classrooms and fieldworks. A decolonising pedagogy aims to inform learners about the works of non-Western authors and intellectuals who foreground the voices, ways of thinking, and ways of doing of people from the colonised world (Simaan, 2020). However, it is important to be cautious yet intentional in employing such pedagogical content (occupational science) and principles (decolonisation/indigenisation) within orthodox curricula since there are risks to be considered including being ostracised, burdened, and contradicted as teachers (Phillips et al., 2005). Therefore, it is imperative to co-create safe places where teachers can challenge students' learning (Gibson & Farias, 2020) and employ critical reflexivity (Simaan, 2020; White & Beagan, 2020) when introducing indigenous studies in the occupational therapy curriculum. Nonetheless, the memorandum drafted by the local Commission on Higher Education, which suggests the inclusion of indigenous studies in higher education curricula, allows for the cultivation of innovation and promotion of role-emerging practices within the field of occupational therapy.

Furthermore, our findings unearthed that indigenous occupations have been transformed largely by modernisation. Although viewed negatively, a counter stance on this transformation allows us to appreciate that indigenous

people are adaptive and resilient. The contemporary Ati people are now able to engage in both indigenous and mainstream occupations to signify their welcoming attitude towards modernisation. However, it is important to note that people from the mainstream society must intentionally reciprocate this attitude by welcoming their indigenous activities as phenomenological threads weaved into the tapestry of modern Filipino society.

In this paper, we have established that indigenous occupations are laden with rich cultural meanings that reinforce their value and uniqueness. However, we have identified that some Ati people engage in occupations that are potentially risky and health compromising because of altered contexts (Theme 2) as demonstrated in the forms of their eating, drinking, and toileting routines. While community development allowed the Ati people under study to have their own water pump, this is not free and not of good quality. Amper (2014) noted that potable water could be purchased at a cost of roughly 10 to 20 Philippine pesos¹ per 5-gallon container. This is expensive for them considering that they used to have their own lands where water is free from streams and the sea. While it is a fact that water is becoming increasingly limited and expensive especially for people from disadvantaged backgrounds (United Nations, 2015), clean running water is more difficult to obtain when one lives near river deltas where high tide and flooding is common (Combest-Friedman et al., 2012). This water dilemma is not only affecting their eating and drinking occupations, but more so their sanitation. The fieldwork experience attested that a latrine has been provided by the local government for use by the whole community. However, having a single public toilet could have resulted to reluctance rather than promotion towards hygienic toileting. This leads to more of them performing open defecation that could increase the level of surface water contamination and severely contaminate the water used for drinking, bathing, cooking, and household cleaning. Water and sanitation is one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations (2015) and the practice of open defecation is seen not only as a public health concern, but a major determinant in negatively affecting social outcomes, wellbeing, ecosystems, and the economy (Gribabu et al., 2019). Given the need to have a more sustainable source of income, the Ati people under study are left without a choice but to engage in mainstream occupations such as driving a trisikad, doing laundry for settlers, and engaging in manual labour. Although these mainstream occupations are generally welcomed, such engagements can pose risk to their desire to preserve their culture, traditions, and customs, but taking this risk means survival (Theme

3). On one hand, having no steady income stream can affect their ability to participate in indigenous occupations. On the other hand, preserving their traditional ways can financially put them at risk.

There is always a possibility that occupational therapy students and practitioners will encounter a person in the clinic or community health centre with an indigenous background. Hence, a decolonising pedagogy is warranted to ensure that students and practitioners alike are prepared to learn about and partner with indigenous peoples and communities. While occupational therapy curricula around the world are starting to integrate decolonising pedagogies (Simaan, 2020), it is important to note that in the Philippines a memorandum has been instituted to integrate indigenous peoples' studies into relevant higher education curricula (Commission on Higher Education, 2019). Although, there is a dearth of accounts that document the integration of indigenous studies within occupational therapy curriculum, what we have done in this case study was to describe our experiences in piloting an indigenous studies module for occupational therapy students. We recognise that the module used was limited to contents within occupational therapy ontologies and epistemologies. Hence, our results and associated interpretations can aid in redesigning the module by including topics on historical construction of being and becoming indigenous, gender and sexuality systems, global and public health, local health systems and policies, social welfare system and policies, environmental science, dark side of occupations, occupational justice, sustainable development goals, and the concept of 'kapwa' (a recognition of a shared identity, an inner self, shared with others) from Filipino psychology among others. Furthermore, occupational therapy education and training could allow students to explore theories and models developed by non-Western scholars and expand advanced reading assignments on non-Western authors and occupational therapy journals (Simaan, 2020; Mahoney & Kiraly-Alvarez, 2019). Decolonising teaching and learning strategies can include field trips, film viewing, role-emerging practice placements and internships, inviting guest speakers from the indigenous community, debates, storytelling, and shared circles (Garneau et al., 2021; Mahoney & Kiraly-Alvarez, 2019; Sanford et al., 2012) as well as interprofessional field practicum with social work and occupational therapy students. These strategies can be adapted for online learning as well. While assessment of learning at the intersections of health professions education and indigenous studies is deemed challenging (Garneau et al., 2021), students can then be assessed through submission of reflective

journals (formative), perceptual surveys (formative), portfolio (summative and output-focused), or organising a forum on indigenous health (process-focused) among others.

The limitations of this case study include: having a very small sample size from one local community; qualitative data collection procedures which could have reinforced social desirability bias affecting the results and their interpretation; and the authors' lack of formal knowledge and training in indigenous studies. Nevertheless, this case study attempted to offer an evidence-informed description of indigenous occupations among the Ati Tribe in Southern Cebu that can articulate educative propositions in enriching occupational therapy education and training within the Philippines and in other countries.

Conclusion

This case study aimed to explore the conceptualisations of indigenous occupations through a fieldwork experience among occupational therapy educators and students in an Ati community in Southern Cebu, Philippines. Using qualitative inquiry, three themes emerged: (Theme 1) Indigenous occupations amid urbanisation, (Theme 2) Contextually health-compromising indigenous occupations, and (Theme 3) Balancing indigenous culture and daily survival. Indigenous occupations are largely enabled from a collectivist perspective. Activities are inherited from generations, preserved for the next generations, and pivotal in performing their traditional customs and rituals. Additionally, gender is seen to be a fluid concept as women and men both work to earn a living for the family. Although indigenous peoples generally welcome modernisation, occupational therapists must be cautious in using the term 'occupation', whether during interactions and care planning, because it has deep-seated negative connotations underpinned by historical colonisation. It is also important to acknowledge that engaging in both mainstream and indigenous activities have implications in the preservation of their cultural heritage, thereby warranting the need to expand understanding beyond occupational therapy ontologies and epistemologies. Hence, it is imperative that occupational therapy students and practitioners recognise that partnering and working with indigenous peoples require the understanding

of interdisciplinary concepts and engagement in decolonising pedagogies and interprofessional practices.

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Disclosure of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Note

1. In March 2022 there are approximately 52 Pesos to the US Dollar, and 68 to the Pound Sterling.

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