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Strengthening Community-Based Cultural Education through the Talaandig Flood Story: A Hermeneutic Approach to Indigenous Wisdom Preservation

Christian Jay G. Jarabe, Shaha D. Mustapha, Ruth T. Manco, Maliha H. Z. Disangcopan, Abdulah C. Didato*

Mindanao State University, Main Campus, Marawi, Lanao del Sur, Philippines
*Correspondence: E-mail: jarabechristianjay@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This article presents the Talaandig flood story as an educational resource for strengthening indigenous wisdom preservation and community-based cultural learning. Using a qualitative hermeneutic approach, the study interpreted the folktale "The Flood and the Origin of the Talaandig" to identify cultural values, moral lessons, and symbolic meanings that can support cultural education. The analysis shows that the narrative communicates moral responsibility, reverence for sacred landscapes, ancestral identity, ritual knowledge, environmental ethics, and social order. These findings indicate that indigenous oral traditions can be used in community learning activities to promote cultural literacy, environmental awareness, and identity formation. The article highlights the value of integrating indigenous narratives into community-based cultural education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indigenous oral traditions are important cultural resources because they preserve community memory, moral values, environmental knowledge, and collective identity. In many indigenous communities, stories are not merely forms of entertainment; they function as educational tools that transmit ancestral wisdom, explain social responsibilities, and guide relationships between people, nature, and the spiritual world. Cultural literacy studies show that local texts and oral expressions can serve as learning media for transmitting cultural knowledge to younger generations (Muliawati and Maryanti, 2022). In this sense, indigenous narratives can be used as meaningful resources in community-based cultural education.

In the Philippine context, indigenous communities possess rich oral traditions that reflect their relationship with ancestral lands, local ecology, social organization, and spiritual beliefs. These traditions are closely connected with cultural identity and community continuity. Studies on indigenous cultural communities in the Philippines show that tradition is often maintained through modern forms of recognition, cultural assertion, and community-based preservation efforts (Hirtz, 2003). However, cultural identity may weaken when language, oral memory, and inherited traditions are not actively transmitted across generations (Karmaker, 2027).

The Talaandig community of Bukidnon, Mindanao, is one of the indigenous groups whose identity is deeply connected with oral tradition, ancestral territory, and sacred landscapes. The *Gugud* serves as an important oral tradition that contains stories of origin, community identity, morality, and relationships with the natural world. The flood story known as "The Flood and the Origin of the Talaandig" is especially significant because it explains divine justice, survival, ancestral lineage, sacred mountains, and the moral order of the community (Unabia, 2012). The Talaandig flood story presents more than an account of destruction and survival. It communicates cultural values related to moral responsibility, obedience to divine order, respect for sacred geography, and the transmission of ritual knowledge. The story also connects the community to Mount Dulang-dulang and Mount Kitanglad, which function not only as physical landscapes but also as sacred spaces in the Talaandig worldview. Indigenous knowledge and traditional practices are especially important in communities whose survival, identity, and environmental understanding are closely connected with mountainous landscapes and local ecological conditions (Ali and Kamraju, 2024).

From a community service perspective, the Talaandig flood story can be used as an educational medium for cultural preservation and indigenous knowledge transmission. Community service has been discussed as a strategy for indigenous language and cultural revitalization, especially when educational engagement is directed toward strengthening identity, local knowledge, and community participation (Karmaker, 2025; Sharma, 2026). This perspective is important because many indigenous stories are at risk of being reduced to simple folklore, separated from their cultural, ethical, and ecological meanings. A hermeneutic approach is useful for interpreting indigenous narratives because it allows the story to be understood beyond its surface plot. Hermeneutic interpretation examines how symbols, characters, events, and narrative structures communicate deeper meanings within a cultural context. In the case of the Talaandig flood story, the flood, the mountain, the surviving ancestors, and the rituals can be understood as cultural symbols that express the community's moral and spiritual worldview. Indigenous myths can function as meaning-making systems that help communities interpret crisis, identity, and social relationships (Shaw, 1992). This study is also relevant to cultural education because it demonstrates how

indigenous narratives can be integrated into learning activities that promote cultural awareness, environmental ethics, and identity formation. The Talaandig flood story offers lessons on moral accountability, respect for nature, sacred geography, ancestral identity, and social responsibility. Community-based educational engagement can support sustainable development when it strengthens indigenous knowledge, cultural resilience, and inclusive learning practices (Al-Zahrani and Bello, 2026; Gil Jr., 2025; Sharma, 2025). Previous studies on Lumad and indigenous communities in Mindanao also show that indigenous cultural concepts are closely related to health, environment, social life, and community identity (Abaya, 1994). This supports the view that indigenous narratives should not be studied only as literary texts but also as cultural resources that reflect the values and practices of a community. When used in community-based education, such narratives can help strengthen cultural continuity and encourage respect for indigenous ways of knowing.

This article, therefore, interprets the Talaandig flood story as a cultural education resource for strengthening indigenous wisdom preservation. Specifically, it examines the cultural values, moral lessons, and symbolic meanings embedded in the story and discusses how these meanings can support community-based cultural learning. Through a hermeneutic approach, the study aims to show how the Talaandig flood story can contribute to cultural preservation, environmental awareness, and identity formation within a community service-oriented educational framework.

2. METHODS

This article used a qualitative hermeneutic approach within a community service-oriented cultural education framework. The approach was selected because the study focused on interpreting the cultural values, moral lessons, and symbolic meanings embedded in the Talaandig flood story. Rather than treating the narrative only as a folktale, the study positioned it as an educational resource that can support indigenous wisdom preservation, cultural awareness, and community-based learning.

The main text analyzed in this study was the Talaandig folktale *"The Flood and the Origin of the Talaandig"* The narrative was examined as a cultural text that contains meanings related to divine justice, moral responsibility, sacred geography, ancestral identity, ritual knowledge, and social order. The unit of analysis included the full narrative structure, key events, characters, symbolic places, moral statements, and passages related to ritual and ancestral transmission.

Data were collected through close reading and textual documentation. The narrative was read repeatedly to identify important symbols, recurring themes, cultural values, and educational meanings. Particular attention was given to the flood, Mount Dulang-dulang, Mount Kitanglad, ancestral figures, divine instruction, survival, renewal, and ritual knowledge. These elements were interpreted in relation to the Talaandig worldview and their potential use in community-based cultural education.

The analysis followed a thematic hermeneutic process. First, the narrative was read as a whole to understand its general cultural message. Second, significant passages were identified and coded according to recurring meanings. Third, the codes were grouped into broader themes, including moral responsibility, sacred landscape, ancestral lineage, ritual transmission, environmental ethics, and social order. Finally, the themes were interpreted as possible learning points for cultural education and indigenous wisdom preservation.

Because this article is community service-oriented, the findings were not limited to literary interpretation. The interpreted themes were also connected to possible cultural learning activities, such as storytelling sessions, cultural literacy discussions, environmental awareness programs, and heritage education. In this way, the hermeneutic analysis was used to show how the Talaandig flood story can serve as a practical educational resource for strengthening cultural identity and respect for indigenous knowledge.

This study did not involve interviews, surveys, field observation, or statistical analysis. The interpretation was based on the selected narrative text and supported by relevant literature on indigenous culture, oral tradition, and cultural preservation. Ethical consideration was observed by treating the Talaandig flood story as a sacred cultural narrative rather than merely as literary material. The analysis aimed to respect indigenous meanings and avoid misrepresentation of Talaandig cultural identity.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The hermeneutic analysis of "The Flood and the Origin of the Talaandig" shows that the narrative functions not only as an origin story but also as a cultural education resource for preserving indigenous wisdom. The story communicates moral responsibility, reverence for sacred landscapes, ancestral identity, ritual knowledge, and social order. These meanings are important for community-based cultural education because they can help learners understand indigenous values through oral tradition, symbolic interpretation, and reflection on community identity. The story is especially relevant because the *Gugud* is part of Talaandig oral tradition and serves as a cultural text that explains ancestry, morality, and the community's relationship with the natural world (Unabia, 2012).

The cultural values, moral lessons, and symbolic meanings identified from the Talaandig flood story are summarized in **Table 1**. The first major theme is divine justice and moral responsibility. The narrative presents the flood as a consequence of human moral decline, not merely as a natural disaster. This is shown in the passage:

"When they had multiplied in great numbers and had scattered throughout the earth, they neglected God's laws. They became less faithful and they sinned grievously against Him. To punish the sinners and to wash away their sins, Magbabaya, the Supreme Being who wills all things, caused the great flood."

This excerpt frames the flood as a moral event and teaches that human conduct has consequences for the wider community. In community-based cultural education, this theme can be used to discuss ethical responsibility, social discipline, and the relationship between moral behavior and collective well-being.

Table 1. Themes for cultural values, moral lessons, and symbolic meanings of "The Flood and the Origin of the Talaandig".

ESSENTIAL THEMES	KEY CODES
Divine justice and moral responsibility	Moral decline; divine punishment
Reverence for sacred geography	Sacred refuge; protected landscape
Ancestral lineage and ethnogenesis	Survival; ancestral dispersal
Preservation of rituals and sacred knowledge	Ritual transmission; indigenous healing

The second theme is reverence for sacred geography. The story presents mountains not only as physical places but also as sacred spaces associated with survival and divine protection. This is reflected in the lines:

"Agbibilin was ordered to climb Dulang-dulang, the highest mountain which was given different names at different times," and "Through this experience, the succeeding generations learned that Mt. Kitanglad was never covered by water."

These passages show how geography becomes part of cultural memory and spiritual identity. This theme is important for environmental education because it teaches that land is not simply a resource but a sacred and cultural inheritance. Indigenous knowledge and traditional practices can strengthen community understanding of environmental risks and mountain-related hazards when local ecological knowledge is treated as a living resource (Ali and Kamraju, 2024).

The third theme is ancestral lineage and ethnogenesis. The story explains human renewal through the survival and union of ancestral figures. The narrative states:

"Agbibilin and Ginamayun lived as husband and wife and they had eight children, four boys and four girls."

It also explains the dispersal of descendants across Mindanao:

"Alauya's offspring went to the west and settled in what is now Lanao; Saguntuan's went to the south to Cotabato; Sabuntung's scattered throughout the eastern borders in Butuan; but Saulana's kindred remained in Bulan-bulan."

These lines show that the story functions as a cultural explanation of origin, kinship, and ethnolinguistic diversity. In cultural education, this theme can help learners understand that identity is rooted in ancestry, place, and shared memory.

The fourth theme is the preservation of rituals and sacred knowledge. The story presents healing practices as knowledge that must be transmitted to future generations. This is shown in the passage:

"Before I leave, I want you to learn some healing rituals. Go and gather all kinds of roots and leaves of grasses and trees," followed by "Finally, he taught them the panawal, a brief ritual which entails blowing and mock spitting accompanied with whispered prayers or spells."

These excerpts show that indigenous knowledge includes spiritual, ecological, and healing dimensions. In community-based learning, this theme can support cultural literacy by helping learners understand rituals as part of a structured knowledge system rather than as isolated traditional practices. Indigenous cultural concepts in Mindanao are often connected with health, environment, social life, and community identity (Abaya, 1994).

The narrative structure of the Talaandig flood story also conveys the community's worldview. The structure moves from moral decline to destruction, survival, renewal, and the establishment of social order. This structure helps learners understand how indigenous narratives organize cultural meaning and explain the relationship between human action, divine order, and community continuity. The main narrative structure and worldview themes are presented in **Table 2**. The story follows a cycle of destruction and renewal. It begins with

moral failure, continues through divine punishment, and ends with the restoration of human life. The destructive phase is described in the passage:

"When they had multiplied in great numbers and had scattered throughout the earth, they neglected God's laws. They became less faithful, and they sinned grievously against Him," followed by

"To punish the sinners and to wash away their sins, Magbabaya, the Supreme Being who wills all things, caused the great flood."

The renewal phase appears when the flood recedes, and humanity continues through Agbibilin and Ginamayun. This structure teaches that a crisis can lead to renewal when moral order is restored.

The second structural theme is the centrality of sacred landscapes. The movement of the characters toward mountains shows that elevated spaces function as places of safety, meaning, and divine protection. The commands are

"Agbibilin was ordered to climb Dulang-dulang, the highest mountain,"

and

"Go, climb that other mountain, for there a woman has survived the flood"

These show that sacred geography organizes the movement of the narrative. The naming of places, including *"Henceforth, that mountain was called Kalatungan,"* also shows how memory becomes attached to landscape. For community education, this theme can be used to connect oral tradition with environmental awareness and heritage preservation.

Table 2. Narrative structure and worldview themes of "The Flood and the Origin of the Talaandig".

ESSENTIAL THEMES	KEY CODES
Cycles of destruction and renewal	Moral decline → flood → renewal
Centrality of sacred landscapes	Movement toward sacred mountains
Mythic foundations of social order and leadership	Divine naming; establishment of authority

The third structural theme is the mythic foundation of social order and leadership. The story connects leadership with divine naming and ancestral authority. This is expressed in the declaration:

"Then he turned to Saulana and said, 'You Saulana, your generation will increase… I shall name your eldest brother Talaandig,'"

followed by the statement

"Famous leaders ruled the tulugans around the Bulan-bulan."

These passages show that social organization is presented as sacred, ancestral, and morally grounded. In community learning, this can support discussions about leadership, responsibility, and the role of cultural memory in sustaining social order.

From a community service perspective, the findings can be translated into cultural education activities. Indigenous narratives can serve as teaching materials for cultural literacy, environmental awareness, identity formation, and intergenerational learning.

Community service has been discussed as a strategy for indigenous language and cultural revitalization, especially when educational engagement strengthens identity and local knowledge transmission (Karmaker, 2025; Sharma, 2026). The possible community-based cultural education applications of the Talaandig flood story are presented in **Table 3**. The story can be used as a practical cultural education resource. Storytelling sessions can preserve oral tradition and introduce younger learners to indigenous narratives. Symbol interpretation discussions can help participants move beyond surface-level storytelling and understand deeper meanings. Environmental reflection can connect sacred geography with present concerns about ecological protection. Cultural literacy activities can strengthen identity and appreciation of indigenous wisdom. Community dialogue can support intergenerational learning and help prevent indigenous narratives from being separated from their cultural context. Cultural literacy studies show that local texts and oral expressions can function as learning media for transmitting cultural knowledge to younger generations (Muliawati and Maryanti, 2022).

The Talaandig flood story should be understood as a living cultural framework rather than a static myth. It preserves ancestral memory, communicates moral values, explains sacred geography, and supports cultural identity. When used in community-based cultural education, the story can strengthen indigenous wisdom preservation, environmental awareness, and identity formation. Community-based educational engagement can also support sustainable development when it strengthens indigenous knowledge, cultural resilience, and inclusive learning practices (Al-Zahrani and Bello, 2026; Gil Jr., 2025; Sharma, 2025).

Table 3. Community-based cultural education applications of the Talaandig flood story.

ACTIVITY	FOCUS	EXPECTED OUTCOME
Storytelling session	Retelling "The Flood and the Origin of the Talaandig"	Strengthened cultural awareness and oral tradition appreciation
Symbol interpretation discussion	Flood, mountain, ancestors, rituals, and leadership	Deeper understanding of indigenous meanings
Environmental reflection	Sacred geography, Mount Dulang-dulang, and Mount Kitanglad	Improved environmental ethics and respect for ancestral landscapes
Cultural literacy activity	Moral lessons, ancestral identity, and ritual knowledge	Stronger appreciation of indigenous wisdom
Community dialogue	Cultural continuity, modern challenges, and youth learning	Increased respect for indigenous knowledge systems

4. CONCLUSION

The Talaandig flood story is not only an origin narrative but also a cultural education resource for preserving indigenous wisdom. Through hermeneutic interpretation, the story reveals important values related to moral responsibility, sacred geography, ancestral identity, ritual knowledge, environmental ethics, and social order. These meanings can support community-based cultural education by helping learners understand indigenous narratives as living sources of knowledge, identity, and ethical guidance. The story can be used in storytelling sessions, cultural literacy activities, environmental reflection, and community dialogue. Future community service activities may apply this approach through heritage education programs that involve indigenous elders, educators, and young learners in preserving and interpreting local oral traditions.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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