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Intergenerational Cultural Transmission: A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Experiences of an Ilokano Filmmaker

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ABSTRACT

This study explores Ilokano filmmaking within the broader context of Philippine regional cinema, referring to film practices outside the capital, including Ilocos, Visayas, and Mindanao. Regional films, particularly Ilokano works, reflect local heritage, traditions, and history in the face of modern challenges. Through a phenomenological inquiry into the lived experiences of Ilokano filmmaker Melver Ritz Gomez, the study sought to understand “What is filmmaking to an Ilokano filmmaker?” Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, transcribed, and analysed using the six-step thematic analysis of Lindlof and Taylor (2011). The findings revealed that Ilokano filmmaking is (a) collaborative work, (b) raw and authentic, (c) a medium for storytelling, (d) awareness and learning, (e) cultural preservation, (f) intra-cultural communication, and (g) appreciation of Ilokano culture. Collectively, these themes define filmmaking as a process of intergenerational cultural transmission that preserves and communicates Ilokano identity and values. This study emphasizes that filmmaking extends beyond entertainment and serves as a vital means of cultural expression and continuity. However, the single-participant design of this study limits its generalizability. Future research should include multiple participants or comparative regional analyses to deepen the understanding of regional cinema’s role in cultural preservation and identity formation.

Keywords: Ilokano film, regional cinema, thematic analysis, heritage preservation, identity formation

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1.0 Introduction

The impact of films on society has been widely acknowledged, with their language considered a significant art form of our time (Cherrier & Rabiger, 2020). Meunier (1960) even went as far as to call it a veritable institution because of its extensive production and large audience (Hanich & Fairfax, 2019). As both art and a social mirror, films reflect people’s lives, culture, and political and spiritual concerns (Sherak, 2009, as mentioned in Shah, 2011). In the Philippines, films are a popular entertainment platform that presents various Filipino narratives told in different genres.

However, the landscape remains dominated by tales of romance, sex, and violence (Dorsch, 2018) and by a Manila-centric orientation (Gancio, 2017). Most films use Tagalog, making Filipino films synonymous with Tagalog movies. This Manila-centricity has raised concerns among film scholars, who argue that ethnolinguistic groups across various regions deserve representation. According to Mallari (2021), regional narratives highlight the diversity of Filipino experiences and amplify voices essential to the nation's identity. Thus, regional cinema has the potential to showcase the cultural richness of the Philippines and offer an alternative to the dominant Metro Manila perspective. Despite some regional filmmakers' contributions, many fail to explore the depth of cultures outside Metro Manila, perpetuating the dominance of their perspective in Philippine cinema (Hernandez, 2014).

Regional films challenge the Manila-centric notion of artistic creation by portraying specific Filipino narratives through digital technology (Hernandez, 2014). Rapatan (2017) identified regional cinema's contexts: geographical (the filmmaker's birthplace), ethnolinguistic (language as a cultural component), thematic (focus on local culture regardless of ethnicity or language), and professional (cultural familiarity based on career). Teddy Co (1987), as cited by Grant (2020), emphasized regional filmmaking's role in introducing diverse narratives, enriching Philippine cinema as a dynamic social force. Batislaong (2022) further noted that the vibrancy of Philippine cinema relies on stories waiting to be told by storytellers across the country.

The National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) established Cinema Rehiyon in 2008 to decentralise artistic activity by showcasing films from various regions (Groyon, 2014). Today, regional films thrive in many parts of the country (Batislaong, 2022), offering marginalised cinematic voices the platforms they need.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 The Rise of Ilokano Films

In Ilocos, passionate young filmmakers have created award-winning regional films to showcase their culture to a broader audience. Dairo (2021) highlights notable examples such as *Dagiti Tallo a Virgen* and *Iyallatiw*, directed by Melver Ritz Gomez, which won awards at the Kolkata Online International Film Festival and the International Film Festival Manhattan Virtual Events. Similarly, Mark Lucas Moneda's film *Miss You, George!* and *Ang Mga Nawalang Pag-asa at Panlasa* gained recognition, the former winning Best Short Film at the International Film Festival Manhattan Spring 2021 and the latter qualifying for the Cinemalaya Philippine Independent Film Festival (Ilokano short film joins 2016; *Ilokano-made short film* 2021).

These cases demonstrate how Ilokano films are beginning to transcend regional boundaries. It is then circulated on national and global platforms. Clearly, the growing visibility not only broadens audience reach but it also contributes to the recognition and preservation of Ilokano cultural identity within the wider cinematic landscape.

Furthermore, the Tan-ok ni Ilokano Film Festival, launched in 2018, celebrates Ilokano storytelling, highlighting heritage, traditions, history, and the environment while addressing contemporary challenges (Mugas, 2021). The documentaries presented at the festival showcase Ilocos Norte's culture, including food heritage, local industries, free-diving communities, and icons like National Living Treasure Magdalena Gamayo. Similarly, the Lila Cuntapay Short Horror Film Festival, organised by the Provincial Government of Ilocos Norte, provides a platform for young filmmakers. Celebrating its tenth anniversary in 2021, the festival honored the late Ilokano actor Lilia Cuntapay, queen of horror in Philippine cinema, while nurturing the skills of aspiring filmmakers (Adriano, 2021).

While such developments illustrate the growing recognition of Ilokano cinema, scholars of Philippine regional cinema have noted that similar cultural movements have emerged elsewhere. For instance, Cebuano films have been studied as crucial articulations of linguistic identity in the Visayas (Mojares, 1976). In contrast, Ilokano cinema remains relatively underexplored in academic discourse, particularly in terms of how filmmakers articulate cultural identity through narrative and aesthetic choices.

This lack of critical attention suggests a gap not only in regional film historiography but also in phenomenological approaches to understanding how filmmakers interpret their lived experiences. Scholars such as Hjort and Mackenzie (2005) and Ellis (2021) acknowledge the important role of film in promoting identity, noting that filmmakers' personal approaches can significantly impact the process. However, in the Ilokano context, while festivals and award-winning films provide evidence of a vibrant and expanding Ilokano film culture, existing scholarship has yet to examine Ilokano cinema with the same depth as other ethnolinguistic film movements in the Philippines. By situating Ilokano films in the context of broader regional cinema studies and grounding the discussion in phenomenological perspectives, this paper addresses this gap. This highlights how filmmakers' lived experiences become central to narrating cultural identity.

3.0 Methods

3.1 A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Ilokano Filmmaker's Experiences

This is a qualitative study that followed the transcendental phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. In this framework, researchers set aside assumptions and preconceptions to engage directly with participants' lived experiences. This method makes it easier to uncover the essence of a phenomenon—in this case, the filmmaker's experience with local filmmaking. Phenomenology provides a lens through which the filmmaker's subjective reality can be investigated and understood by focusing on participants' lived experiences.

This study draws on concepts from Lindlof and Taylor (2011), who emphasized the importance of systematic coding and categorisation in interpreting qualitative data. Key themes in the filmmakers' experiences were identified by applying their thematic analysis framework to the interview data. This study also draws from De Vera and Saludadez (2021), who emphasized the importance of phenomenology in examining sociocultural contexts and personal creativity. Their perspective emphasizes that filmmaking, especially in a local setting, is a culturally situated practice that links individual experience with collective identity and is an individual undertaking.

By bringing these concepts together, the study shows how regional filmmaking both reflects and contributes to cultural identity, drawing attention to how a filmmaker's creative choices are shaped by and respond to the cultural and social environment around them.

3.2 Exploring the Muted Voice of an Ilokano Filmmaker

The increasing popularity of Ilokano films highlights the need for further research in this area. Ilokano filmmaking has been the subject of a few studies, such as Galeon's (2020) research on the function of documentaries in cultural preservation. Research is still lacking, especially in understanding filmmaking from an Ilokano perspective. According to Saludadez (2021), marginalised voices, or those muted in dominant narratives, offer distinctive viewpoints. According to De Vera and Saludadez's (2021) application of Linda Putnam's work, such voices are essential for comprehending neglected or misinterpreted contexts. By going beyond content and production values to investigate the contextual significance of Ilokano filmmaking through lived experiences, this study elevates the voices of Ilokano filmmakers. This advances our knowledge of filmmaking as a socially significant, culturally situated art.

The subject of this study is Melver Ritz Gomez, a filmmaker from Paoay, Ilocos Norte, Philippines, who began his career in 2014. Gomez has directed over ten films, focusing on documentaries and short films that reflect the societal and cultural issues of Ilocos. His notable works include "Iyallatiw," which won Best Director and Best Story Writer at the 2021 Reels International Short Film Festival and received awards from the International Film Festival Manhattan and the Viddsee Juree Awards. Other works, such as "Panaglaga," premiered internationally at the 2021 International Film Festival in Manhattan (Mugas, 2021). His documentaries, "Tumba" and "Dagiti Tallo a Virgen," have been featured at notable film festivals, including the NAKEM International Conference and Pista ng Pelikulang Pilipino. Furthermore, his film, *Naisangsangayan a Daga*, was selected as a finalist at the 2022 Tan-Ok ni Ilokano Film Festival. Gomez's contributions exemplify the rich potential of Ilokano filmmaking to highlight regional narratives and cultural identities.

This qualitative study explores the communicative act of filmmaking from the perspective of Ilokano filmmakers. The research followed a phenomenological approach to examine filmmakers' lived experiences and uncover the essence of their creative processes within a sociocultural context. An in-depth, in-person interview with Mervin Ritz L. Gomez, an Ilokano filmmaker, was conducted on November 11, 2022, in Ilokano, Filipino, and English languages. The interviews were recorded with the participants' consent, transcribed, and analysed following the six-step process of thematic analysis by Lindlof and Taylor (2011). First, the researchers thoroughly immersed themselves in the data transcript through several reading and re-reading sessions to allow complete immersion and comprehension of the content. The coding process was performed manually; interesting features from the data that were responsive to the research objectives were labelled with codes. After the codes were finalised, the researchers grouped them into potential themes that were then reviewed. A comprehensive review was conducted to check the accuracy and relevance of the themes in relation to the coded extracts from the transcript. After ensuring the accuracy of each theme, a clear definition of its scope was provided that was responsive to the research objectives. After this process, the analysed data were returned to the participant to check whether the researchers accurately interpreted his experiences. This process, known as member-checking, is a technique in qualitative research that helps verify the accuracy of participants' experiences (Birt et al., 2016) and lessen the possibility of misrepresentation during the data analysis process (Candela, as cited by McKim, 2023). The participant provided minor comments that the researchers addressed. After the participant agreed on the theme's presentation, a robust immersion with the themes was conducted to come up with a concept that would describe the experiences of an Ilokano Filmmaker, defining what filmmaking means to him.

This phenomenological study used a single-participant design that centered on Gomez's lived experiences. Rather than trying to form broad or universal claims, the study sought to understand how the phenomenon takes shape within one person's particular context as discussed in a YouTube video uploaded by Qualitative Researcher Dr. Kriukow (2022). In addition, Gaya and Smith (2016) explain that in-depth qualitative single-case study research is considered one of the most suitable approaches for obtaining rich data, as it allows for full immersion in understanding the participant's lived experiences. While data saturation is common in some qualitative approaches, such as grounded theory, it is not required in phenomenological studies, as they are based on participants' unique lived experiences. Hale et al. (2007) stated that interpretative phenomenological analysis is concerned with obtaining 'full and rich personal accounts', which highlights the analytical focus within individual accounts in this approach.

Van Manen et al. (2016) dissociate saturation from phenomenological research more generally. They expounded that the practice of saturating the data does not make sense when conducting phenomenology. Hence, member checking (Birt et al., 2016; McKim, 2023) and data triangulation (Carter et al., 2014) were employed to ensure the credibility of the results.

In summary, the single-participant design of this study restricts the scope of perspectives that can be analysed. While the narrative provides insights into Ilokano cinema and its cultural significance, the findings cannot be generalised to represent the broader experiences of filmmakers in the regional film industry as a whole.

The study protocol was approved by the University Research Ethics Review Board of a state university in Northern Philippines, and Gomez consented to the use of his name in the study.

4.0 Results

4.1 Sub-themes: Filmmaking from the Experiences of an Ilokano Filmmaker

4.1.1 Theme 1: Collaborative Work

Collaboration in Ilokano filmmaking does not always follow a typical production setup. Instead of fixed crews or long-term partnerships, filmmakers typically assemble a team of people who are available at the moment, possess the necessary skills, or are simply excited to join. This creates a communal atmosphere, as if everyone shares the responsibility for finishing the film. However, this type of setup raises concerns about sustainability and consistency. Because teams form quickly and change just as

fast, it can be harder to keep a clear creative direction, and authority within the group is not always defined. The openness of this approach brings in more participants, which is a strength, but it also makes it difficult to maintain a stable artistic vision in the regional filmmaking scene.

The Ilokano filmmaker stated:

In terms of collaboration, nu sinno ti adda nga available a tao mabalin a tumulong or mang-contribute into something to produce the film, isu lang talaga. (In terms of collaboration, we only team up with people who are available and can contribute to the film production.)

Ilokano filmmakers often lean toward ad hoc, project-based collaborations rather than formal or long-term partnerships. Teams are usually formed based on who is available, what skills they can offer, and their interest in the project. This setup challenges traditional ideas of collaboration and highlights the value of a more flexible, community-rooted approach to filmmaking. In many ways, this mirrors Hernandez's (2014) discussion of independent digital cinema, where filmmakers work through horizontal structures and shared ownership instead of strict hierarchies. Hernandez's observations about creative autonomy under commercial pressure also connect well to the Ilokano experience. Many Ilokano filmmakers work with local groups or alternative media spaces to keep their creative freedom, even as they struggle with the realities of distribution and funding. The tension between independence and commercial viability becomes more complicated in the digital era, especially as the line between indie and mainstream continues to blur. This situation shows both the possibilities and the limits of the Ilokano model, raising important questions about how "independence" should be understood in regional filmmaking today.

Additionally, the Ilokano filmmaker stated that all team members during the production stage fulfil their respective roles.

When it comes to the production stage, *ditoyn nga aggaraw amin amin nga tattao and like adda amin kanya-kanya a role-da.* (When it comes to the film production process, this is where all members collaborate and where everyone must take part and do their roles.)

The Ilokano filmmaker highlights how important it is for the team to share a clear vision, even if disagreements sometimes happen. Since filmmaking is a collective process, it depends on different specialists, producers, directors, actors, and writers working together to bring words and images to life, encouraging both creativity and communication (Buechler, 2020; Cherrier & Rabiger, 2020). Beyond improving the storytelling itself, collaboration also becomes a way to pass cultural knowledge from one generation to another. By involving new talent and keeping the crew engaged, the filmmaker helps ensure that Ilokano traditions continue to be practiced and remembered.

However, this collaborative setup also brings tension. The team often must choose between preserving cultural heritage and experimenting with new forms to appeal to today's audiences. Disagreements sometimes arise about which direction should take priority, revealing the delicate balance between cultural responsibility and creative freedom. Managing this balance is crucial if Ilokano culture is to remain sustainable and meaningful through film.

4.1.2 Theme 2: Raw and authentic

The Ilokano filmmaker's focus on raw and authentic filmmaking becomes an important part of how culture is passed on from one generation to the next. By presenting Ilokano culture in its most unfiltered form, the filmmaker can build a stronger connection with the audience and communicate the film's message more honestly. In *Iyallatiw*, for instance, the absence of logos, sound effects, and background music shows a deliberate effort to preserve the film's authenticity. This stripped-down style draws viewers into the experience, allowing them to fully engage with the rhythms, environment, and emotions of Ilokano life. Through this approach, the filmmaker offers audiences not just a story, but a deeper and more immediate encounter with Ilokano culture. The filmmaker emphasized that the raw and authentic look of Ilokano filmmaking is what sets it apart from other styles, making it a unique and valuable addition to the Filipino film industry:

Nu start diay Iyallatiw, awan logo, awan sound effects, awan music-na diay start, ag-play diay Iyallatiw ket first frame-en kasdiay. So, ti kayatko lang nga ipakita pay idiay ket didiay kina-raw diay maysa nga film. (In our film Iyallatiw, it started without the logo, sound effects, and music because I wanted to portray the authenticity of that film.)

That film was actually very raw, awan inkabkabilmi nga background music, pure nga kanta dagidiay babbaket. (The film was so raw since we did not put any background music in the edit; we only used the elders' native songs.)

Well, haan nga dakes ngem napinpintas met laeng nu raw, isu nga haanmi inikkan iti audio or sound effects, kasdiay dagitay films-mi idikkua. (It is nice to add background music or sound effects in the post-production, but it is more enticing if the film is raw.)

This perspective connects well with scholarly discussions on authenticity in documentary filmmaking. P. Jenkins (2022) notes that authentic storytelling helps bridge generational gaps, while Dickerson (2012) explains that straightforward, unembellished narratives can build trust and relatability. Faulcon (2012) also points out that this kind of approach pushes storytelling beyond simply presenting evidence, turning it into a more compelling visual narrative.

Still, the concept of “authenticity” is not without debate. Some view rawness as a marker of truth, but others argue that authenticity is shaped by the filmmaker’s stylistic decisions. In this light, Ilokano authenticity is not a fixed quality. Instead, it becomes a negotiated identity shaped by the filmmaker’s intentions, the audience’s expectations, and the pressures of gaining visibility within broader film circuits.

While this raw approach can help preserve Ilokano culture and present it with integrity, its impact ultimately depends on how viewers interpret it. Younger audiences, who are used to highly polished media, may see this style as amateurish rather than authentic. This creates a layer of ambiguity that complicates a purely celebratory view of authenticity.

4.1.3 Theme 3: Medium for storytelling

The Ilokano filmmaker harnesses storytelling to preserve and share the rich culture and traditions of Ilocos. Inspired by the stories of his upbringing, he uses filmmaking as a platform to document and showcase the unique heritage and customs of his community. Beyond cultural preservation, his work highlights important local issues, positioning him as both an artist and an advocate:

There are a lot of stories to tell around us, but it is up to us how we will use stories to tell other people or the audience by using film as a medium or platform. Nagpintas, nakaadado 't stories tay' ditoy Ilocos, we just have to appreciate those stories and tell them to those people because we have this story in our locality. (There are a lot of stories to tell around us, and it is up to us how we will use these stories to tell other people through using film as a medium or platform. It is nice that we have a lot of stories to tell here in our province; we just have to appreciate those stories and tell other people that we have this story in our locality.)

Critically, storytelling through film has the power to amplify underrepresented voices and create deeper, more nuanced connections. Martinez (2022) notes how film can bring marginalised issues to the forefront, while Murphy et al. (2022) highlight its emotional impact in strengthening audience engagement. Likewise, Sherak (as cited in Shah, 2011) and Lu (2023) shared that films provide a snapshot of the prevailing attitudes, norms, and concerns of a particular time and place. Koki (1998) further reminds us that narratives carry collective memory and values, shaping how people understand who they are.

For Ilokano filmmakers, storytelling is more than a creative pursuit; it becomes an intentional effort to preserve culture and engage different generations. By weaving local narratives into their work, they create pathways for younger audiences to reconnect with their roots while also encouraging them to think critically about their identities. Yet this process comes with difficult decisions: which stories should take centre stage? Should filmmakers emphasize romanticised images of heritage, or confront

uncomfortable realities like poverty and marginalisation? These choices reveal an ongoing negotiation between cultural pride and critical realism, reflecting the complex responsibilities that come with representing a community on screen.

4.1.4 Theme 4: Awareness and learning

Ilokano filmmaking transcends entertainment, serving as a medium for educating audiences about Ilokano culture, customs, and traditions. Through raw and authentic portrayals, the Ilokano filmmaker fosters a deeper understanding of Ilokano identity, dispelling the misconception that these films are purely for entertainment. The Ilokano filmmaker stated:

*It serves as an avenue or a platform for them nga okay we have this particular culture gayam, adda gayam kastoy tayo ditoy, itattak lang mangngeg daytoy a kanta kasla kasdiay ket if you go back to Iyallatiw, didiay main a kanta didiay Iyallatiw nga nai-record nga undocumented idi tattan documented-en, Puso a Rumayrayray, so daytoy a kanta, naamuan dagitay dadduma nga ububbing tattan kasi nai-post ti social media didiay Iyallatiw, so okay adda gayam kastoy kunada. Before haanda ammo and then nabuyada't social media didiay, so didiay awareness nga we have this culture in our province or in our locality. (It serves as an avenue or platform to learn culture. The song "Puso a Rumayrayray" was known by other kids simply because the film *Iyallatiw* was posted on social media. Through posting the films on social media, people become aware that a particular culture exists in our province.)*

Gomez also added that through his film, people became aware of the state of the locals' cultural heritage.

*Agbalinda nga aware kadidiay, ket for example kuma, didiay Naisangsangayan a Daga, okay duaduada lang gayam nga Agdamdamili'n. Diay Iyallatiw, ah okay, haanpay gayam naipasa, or naipasa gayamen didiay nga oral tradition. (People became aware, for instance, in the *Naisangsangayan a Daga* film, spectators learned that there were only three pot makers left, while in the film *Iyallatiw*, the audience learned whether or not the oral traditions were already passed.)*

In this sense, filmmaking becomes a meaningful tool for cultural transmission, helping younger generations rediscover aspects of their heritage that may be fading from everyday life. Through their films, Ilokano filmmakers bring attention to cultural practices that might otherwise go unnoticed—especially at a time when social media broadens the reach and impact of their work.

Ilokano filmmaking also catalyses social change and cultural awareness, reflecting Perry's (2016) argument that film can spark empathy, promote values, and encourage social transformation. Durian (2013) and Delhi (2017) similarly highlight how film engages audiences and raises awareness of social issues, even beyond the communities directly represented. Still, this potential comes with limitations. Filmmakers noted that although films can raise awareness, not every viewer absorbs or acts on the messages. For some, the films remain simply a form of entertainment, not a prompt for reflection. This gap between intention and impact shows that cultural learning through cinema can be uneven and, at times, superficial.

Viewed this way, Ilokano filmmaking plays an essential role not only in preserving cultural practices but also in helping younger audiences value these traditions. By raising awareness and creating meaningful engagement, Ilokano filmmakers foster a sense of pride, understanding, and continuity—ensuring that Ilokano traditions are not just remembered, but carried forward into the future.

4.1.5 Theme 5: Cultural preservation

Ilokano filmmaking plays a critical role in preserving local culture and traditions at risk of being lost. By documenting these practices, the Ilokano filmmaker ensures that even as customs fade, their essence endures through film. These works become enduring legacies for future generations, fostering cultural appreciation and learning.

Our goal is to really document or record these practices before I am not telling nga maawandan. Before man lang nga mapukaw, before nga agkasdiay ti mapasamak, atleast by

means of film, audio and visual makita and mabuya dagidiay sumarsaruno nga generation. And then when it comes to Iyallatiw, available isunan idiay the "AngDocu.Ph," kaslang archive didiay iti Filipino documentary films. (Our main goal is to document or record these practices, and utilizing film, youth from the next generation would be able to watch. When it comes to Iyallatiw, it is already available at AngDocu.Ph, an archival website of Filipino documentary films.)

This important role of filmmaking in cultural preservation reflects the growing urgency to document traditions amid rapid social change. While the filmmaker aims to capture practices before they fade, the real challenge is making sure these films actually reach audiences and resonate with them—especially today, when attention is fragmented across many media platforms.

Dairo (2021) notes that indigenous films can effectively pass on cultural values, while Heuring (2004) points out their function as archival records. Antoniazzi (2017) likewise stresses the significance of film in safeguarding cultural heritage. Within this context, Ilokano filmmaking does more than protect traditions; it also strengthens cultural identity through creative expression. However, the work of preservation comes with contradictions. Film can immortalise practices that are slowly disappearing, but it can also freeze culture into fixed images that overlook how traditions naturally evolve. This tension between preserving heritage and allowing it to change complicates the idea of film as simply an archival medium.

For the Ilokano filmmaker, each film serves as documentation of previously unrecorded practices, ensuring their cultural significance is preserved. As he noted:

"Adda gayam kastoy tay' ditoy, a 'tattak lang mangngeg daytoy a kanta, kasla kasdiay, ket if you go back to Iyallatiw didiay main a kanta didiay Iyallatiw nga nai-record, undocumented idi, tattan documented'en." (People realise they have this certain practice as they witness it in a film. If we go back to the film Iyallatiw, the undocumented became documented after recording it.)

By documenting community customs, Ilokano filmmakers help keep traditions visible and accessible for both present and future generations. These films give young people a chance to reconnect with their heritage, supporting cultural continuity at a time when global influences often overshadow local practices. Still, the impact of this work depends on how well filmmakers adapt to a changing cultural environment, where attention is easily diverted, and traditional practices may seem distant or unfamiliar to the youth.

In the context of intergenerational cultural transmission, this kind of preservation becomes a bridge between the past and the present. Even as practices and practitioners slowly disappear, film offers a tangible record that keeps cultural heritage alive. The challenge, however, is making sure these films truly resonate with younger audiences, helping them form meaningful connections with their roots and sustaining Ilokano identity. Without active engagement, preservation risks becoming purely symbolic—a memory archived on screen rather than a living, practiced tradition.

4.1.6 Theme 6: Intracultural Communication

Ilokano filmmaking serves as a crucial medium for fostering unity among Ilokanos across provinces by emphasizing shared cultural practices and values. Through films, audiences can identify with familiar cultural elements, engaging in meaningful comparisons of similarities and differences. The inclusion of English subtitles expands the films' accessibility, bridging language barriers and facilitating broader connections. As the Ilokano filmmaker observed:

"Ngem adda met dagidiay practices-tayo nga kaslang adda agpada when it comes to other regions, other provinces... nu mabuyada didiay certain practice or film ta's adda certain practice idiay community-da... ah okay meron din kaming gan'to pero gan'to lang siya." (We have certain practices that are like other regions. When people watch Ilokano films, they compare their traditions with what they see, finding it intriguing. Ah, okay, we have something like that, but it is only like this.)

Research by Abi-Hashem and Peterson (2013) and Matsumoto and Hwang (2013) highlights how intracultural exchanges strengthen bonds within communities. These studies emphasize that shared cultural experiences can deepen solidarity, but they also call for a critical lens. Intracultural communication is never uniform, and filmmakers must be attentive to the cultural nuances within their audiences—recognizing both shared elements and the distinct characteristics of each Ilokano community. When approached with this sensitivity, films can foster genuine connections while celebrating the broad spectrum of Ilokano identity. At the same time, there is a risk that emphasizing unity may unintentionally reduce internal differences, creating a simplified or homogenised image of what it means to be Ilokano.

Within this context, Ilokano films offer a meaningful platform for acknowledging both commonalities and differences. They enrich cultural understanding and promote solidarity, but the danger lies in condensing diverse experiences into a single narrative that glosses over regional variations and individual perspectives. For filmmakers, the challenge is to uphold shared cultural values while also representing the multiplicity of Ilokano experiences.

Intracultural communication remains essential in sustaining a shared sense of identity. Through these films, younger viewers gain a deeper awareness of their roots and the layered complexity of Ilokano culture. The films contribute significantly to preserving heritage and values, but only if they intentionally engage with the many voices within the community. Ultimately, the successful transmission of cultural knowledge depends on a careful balance: fostering unity while honoring diversity so that future generations inherit not just a shared identity, but a fuller appreciation of the nuances that make it unique.

4.1.7 Theme 7: Appreciation of Ilokano Culture

Ilokano filmmaking showcases the vibrant heritage of the Ilocos region, fostering admiration for its customs, practices, and traditions. Through the creative vision of the Ilokano filmmaker, these films capture the essence of Ilokano culture, engaging audiences within and beyond the local community. They highlight the richness of Ilokano heritage, earning recognition not just as entertainment but as art that celebrates cultural uniqueness.

The Ilokano filmmaker noted:

"Yung Iyallatiw na 'yon hindi siya nanalo ng Tan-ok but that is the first ever film to go outside the province, to go outside the country... ang ganda ng pagkaka-appreciate nila outside ng mga Ilokano traditions or Ilokano films." (The Iyallatiw film did not win in the Tan-ok contest but became the first to be featured internationally. It is remarkable how Ilokano traditions are appreciated beyond our locality.)

Research highlights the cultural impact of film. H. Jenkins (2006) points out how relatable stories create strong emotional connections, while Khatchadourian (1975) notes the satisfaction audiences gain from well-crafted art. For Ilokano viewers, these films reinforce a sense of cultural identity, while for outsiders, they offer insight into Ilokano heritage.

Ilokano films also nurture a deeper appreciation for local traditions, helping to ensure that customs are valued and passed down to future generations. Recognition from international audiences can have mixed effects: while it may boost local pride, it can also create pressure for filmmakers to cater to external expectations rather than the needs of their own communities. At the same time, these films promote intercultural understanding, bridging cultural gaps and fostering a stronger sense of pride in younger generations for their roots.

4.2 Grand Theme: Ilokano Filmmaking as a Means for Intergenerational Cultural Transmission

The research problem, understanding what filmmaking means to an Ilokano filmmaker, was addressed through thematic analysis of the participants' narratives. Initial coding identified recurring themes such as collaboration, storytelling, cultural awareness, preservation, and communication. Through iterative

analysis, these themes coalesced into the central concept of **Intergenerational Cultural Transmission**, highlighting the role of Ilokano filmmaking in passing cultural heritage from one generation to the next.

The participants' lived experiences revealed that filmmaking is more than a creative act; it is a communicative process deeply intertwined with cultural identity. This involves collaborative efforts to produce authentic narratives that foster cultural awareness and appreciation. Storytelling emerged as a key tool for preserving and transmitting values, beliefs, and traditions. Intracultural learning further emphasizes film's function as a bridge between generations, allowing younger audiences to engage with and understand their heritage. These findings align with Luo (2021) and Adams (2017), who describe films as important audiovisual cultural artifacts that facilitate cultural transmission. Similarly, Kamei (2019) highlights that film constructs the meanings and symbols of its time, forming narratives that reflect ways of life, societal practices, and prevalent ideologies within a given historical context.

The grand theme, Ilokano filmmaking as a medium for Intergenerational Cultural Transmission, captures the essence of the participants' experiences. However, it is important to note that these findings are based largely on the perspective of a single successful filmmaker. While this provides rich, in-depth insights, it limits generalisability, as not all Ilokano filmmakers have the same resources, recognition, or approaches to cultural storytelling. This limitation underscores the need for future studies to include more diverse voices, particularly emerging and less visible filmmakers, to better capture the full spectrum of Ilokano filmmaking practices.

This perspective situates filmmaking as a dynamic process that combines cultural preservation with active participation, ensuring the continuity of Ilokano identity and traditions through cinematic storytelling. In the regional context, it demonstrates film's significant role in amplifying narratives that are often unheard (Grant, 2020; Mallari, 2021; Telles, 2020). At the same time, Del Mundo (2024) emphasizes that film can also serve as a tool for social justice, highlighting its potential not only to preserve culture but to provoke change in society.

Figure 1

Conceptual connections among the Themes

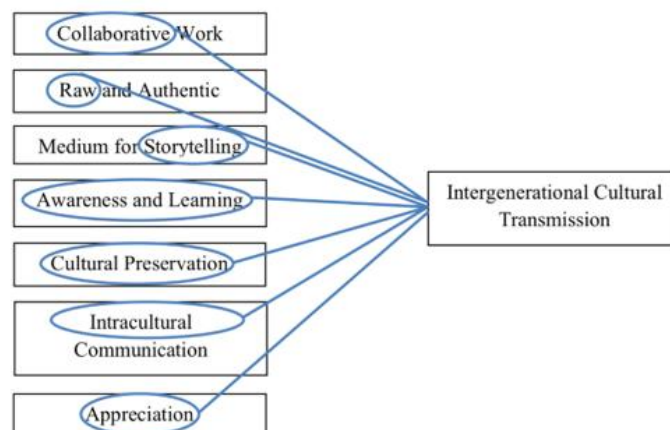


Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual connections leading to the identification of the grand theme, highlighting key aspects of Ilokano filmmaking as described by the Ilokano filmmaker. This visual summary addresses the main research question of the study.

For the Ilokano filmmaker, filmmaking extends beyond entertainment; it is a process for Intergenerational Cultural Transmission, fostering dialogue and continuity across generations. This aligns with Corsaro's (1997), as cited by Trommsdorff (2008), where he views cultural transmission as vital for a culture's survival and evolution. The filmmaker's focus on preserving cultural legacies also echoes Johansen's (2021) idea of film as a "time capsule," capturing the past in ways that keep it emotionally relevant and historically alive. The Ilokano filmmaker uses film to bridge generational

divides, preserving cultural heritage through storytelling that fosters understanding and appreciation. Hence, there is a need for archiving this heritage (Del Mundo, 2024; Lim, 2018; Patino, 2018).

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Gomez Works Promoting the Intergenerational Cultural Transmission

Understanding the Ilokano filmmaker's lived experiences is essential in this study, as it offers a deeper look into how filmmaking can serve as a tool for cultural preservation. His films are more than artistic expressions; they are historical records that document the endangered customs of the Ilokano community, offering invaluable insights into the role of regional filmmakers in shaping cultural identity. By having a gist of his approach, this study provides a more candid understanding of how film can contribute to the safeguarding and transmission of cultural practices to future generations, fostering a sense of pride and continuity in the face of modernization.

The list of films discussed corroborates the finding that, from the experiences of Gomez, Ilokano filmmaking is a process of Intergenerational Cultural Transmission.

Film synopsis: IYALLATIW (Refer to Figure 2 and 3) is a compelling narrative that follows a prayer leader living in a barangay in Paoay, Ilocos Norte. This dynamic story documents the sacred and ancient tradition of passing on the oral tradition for the dead to the younger generations. The prayer leader demonstrates the importance of preserving the unwritten customs and transmitting them through the generations while performing Ilokano burial chants and prayers to honor the dead. The film illustrates the powerful beliefs and rituals surrounding death and the afterlife, and how they shape and enhance the culture of Paoayños. With poignant scenes of the prayer leader singing mournful songs such as "Puso a Rumayrayray" and "Responsorio," the documentary film captures the deep sense of respect for their ancestors.

Figure 2

Still cut from the film 'Iyallatiw', which shows a 'Manglualo' (worship leader) passing on an oral tradition to the younger kids in their community.



Figure 3

Still cut from the film 'Iyallatiw', where one of the 'Manghualos' speaks about the importance of transferring those practices to younger generations.



In addition, Ilokano culture was also captured in his other films, such as *Naisangsangayan a Daga* (Extraordinary Soil), which features an important cultural heritage in San Nicolas, the *panagdamili*, or pot making. In the Ilokano filmmaker's film, he artistically showed the process of making *banga* (pottery), including the struggles of the *Agdamdamilis* (pot makers) and the likelihood of it being discontinued soon, since none of their grandchildren have inherited it yet.

Film synopsis: NAISANGSANGAYAN A DAGA (Refer to Figure 4 and 5). The documentary film, *Naisangsangayan a daga*, is a representation not only of the pottery of San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte, but also of the lives and experiences of two elderly female potters. Through their craft, these women have moulded rich stories and memories, showcasing their unique cultural heritage.

Figure 4

A still cut in the film 'Naisangsangayan a Daga', where the 'Agdamdamilis' (pot makers) contemplate the likelihood of the tradition becoming extinct in the future.



Figure 5

A still cut from the film 'Naisangsangayan a Daga', where the process of 'panagdamili' was shown.



The Ilokano filmmaker's film *Panaglaga* (Basket Weaving) also features the lifelong tradition of basket weaving of *Tingguians* in Uguis, Nueva Era, Ilocos Norte. Like his other films, the process of basket weaving was also captured, along with the struggles and challenges basket weavers experience, amidst having a weak support system. As most of the youth in their town have lost interest, it also portrays the possibility that basket weaving might go extinct in the next generations.

Film Synopsis: PANAGLAGA (Refer to Figure 6 and 7). It delves into the fascinating stories of the skilled basket weavers residing in Brgy. Uguis, Nueva Era, Ilocos Norte. By showcasing the intricate artistry and dedication of these weavers, the film highlights the crucial role of this craft in the community's heritage and cultural identity. The laborious process of creating these baskets involves weaving each strand with care and precision, resulting in a beautiful and functional work of art. With each basket they create, the weavers preserve their traditions and history, passing them down from one generation to the next. *Panaglaga* serves as a powerful tribute to these unsung heroes, who work diligently to keep their community's heritage and traditions alive.

Figure 6

A still cut from the film 'Panaglaga' (Basket Weaving), where the basket weaver leaves a message to the youth regarding the importance of learning the craft.



Figure 7

A still cut from the film 'Panaglaga' (Basket Weaving), where the process of basket weaving is shown.



The Ilokano filmmaker plays a crucial role in regional filmmaking, using his unique style to document and preserve the cultural practices of the Ilokano community. His short films focus on the challenges of maintaining traditional practices amidst rapid societal changes, emphasizing the need for intergenerational cultural transmission. Through his work, the filmmaker not only showcases the rich customs and traditions of his locality but also educates future generations about their cultural heritage, preventing cultural erasure.

The Ilokano filmmaker's short films have garnered recognition for documenting the traditions and practices that are at risk of being lost, serving as vital resources for future generations. Through his work, the filmmaker not only preserves the richness of Ilokano culture but also underscores the urgency of cultural preservation. His films act as a reflection of Ilokano identity and a call to action for intergenerational cultural transmission, highlighting the importance of passing on cultural knowledge to ensure its continuity across generations.

6.0 Conclusion

This study highlights the crucial role of Ilokano filmmaking in preserving and transmitting cultural identity, positioning it as an important platform for regional expression within Philippine cinema. Through the lived experiences of filmmaker Melver Ritz Gomez, the research shows how regional filmmakers act as cultural custodians, safeguarding local knowledge and values while ensuring their continuity for future generations. Yet the significance of regional filmmaking extends beyond preservation; it challenges the dominance of national cinema and offers alternative narratives that reflect the Philippines' rich regional diversity.

By engaging with broader theoretical frameworks, this study contributes to understanding the place of regional filmmaking within the national cinematic landscape. While mainstream, metropolitan-driven narratives have long shaped Philippine cinema, regional films provide a vital counterpoint by presenting localised voices that resist cultural homogenisation. Ilokano films assert a community-driven perspective, highlighting regional identity and countering the misrepresentation or underrepresentation of these cultures in mainstream media. This tension between regional and national cinema invites a re-evaluation of power dynamics in cultural representation.

Regional cinema should not be seen merely as an archive of tradition but as an active space for cultural negotiation. Filmmakers are not only preserving heritage; they are also reshaping national discourse, participating in the ongoing redefinition of identity within both local and national contexts. The interplay between regional and national identities illustrates how regional cinema can function as a participatory force within the broader cultural and political landscape.

The rise of digital platforms further complicates this dynamic. Regional filmmakers now have access to global audiences, extending the reach of local narratives and blurring the boundaries between regional and mainstream cinema. This intersection of regional filmmaking and digital technology challenges traditional power structures in global cultural flows. As local narratives gain international visibility, filmmakers can assert their identities on a global stage while simultaneously reshaping perceptions of their traditions and culture worldwide.

Ultimately, this study advocates for a rethinking of regional cinema not as a passive reflection of tradition but as an evolving, active participant in global cultural discourse. It calls for recognising regional filmmaking as both a counterforce to national cinema and a dynamic contributor to the ongoing negotiation of cultural identities at local, national, and global levels.

Future research should examine the shifting relationship between regional and national cinema, particularly in how regional films influence national identity and cinematic trends. Scholars should also explore the challenges regional filmmakers face in reaching broader audiences and the reception of regional films both nationally and internationally. Furthermore, the intersection of regional cinema with digital media and alternative distribution platforms warrants further investigation. While digital cinema offers expanded global reach, it presents challenges concerning commercialisation, accessibility, and artistic integrity. Understanding how regional films navigate these challenges will provide valuable insights into filmmaking in the digital era.

This study offers a compelling argument for the critical importance of regional cinema as a dynamic force in shaping cultural identity and highlights the potential for further exploration into the evolving role of regional filmmaking in an increasingly globalised world. However, with its limitation of involving a single-case participant, future research could involve multiple filmmakers from different regions, allowing for comparative insights into how cultural identity, resource constraints, and artistic aspirations shape regional cinema. Expanding the scope beyond a single case would deepen the understanding of similarities and divergences in filmmaking practices across the Philippines and Southeast Asia.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Author Contribution Statement

ZJD: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Methodology, Validation, Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Project Administration, Supervision, Writing – Review & Editing. BRR: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Methodology, Validation, Project Administration, Writing – Review & Editing.

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