

Decolonizing Historical Consciousness Through Digital Inquiry: Student Experiences with Indigenous Peace

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Abstract: Understanding how students experience engagement with marginalized historical narratives remains critical for developing an equitable curriculum in postcolonial education systems. This study explores how ethnically diverse Indonesian high school students experience and make sense of inquiry-based digital learning centered on the 1894 Tumbang Anoi Peace Accord, a reconciliation event systematically excluded from Indigenous Dayak history. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis, eight purposively selected Grade 11 students (four Dayak, four non-Dayak) participated in semi-structured interviews lasting 60 to 90 minutes, conducted four to eight weeks after completing a three-week scaffolded e-module. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed through iterative coding that captured the descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual dimensions of lived experience. Four superordinate themes emerged: Emotional Resonance and Cultural Awakening, Transformation from Marginalization to Cultural Pride, Peace as Embodied Practice, and Indigeneity as National Belonging. Dayak participants described profound shifts from ethnic shame to pride, whereas non-Dayak students developed intercultural solidarity and expanded conceptions of national identity. All participants reported visceral bodily responses and recognized peace as an active practice applicable to contemporary conflicts. Findings demonstrate that centering previously excluded Indigenous histories through scaffolded digital inquiry generates profound affective and identity transformations that are invisible to traditional assessment, contributing methodologically by demonstrating the utility of interpretative phenomenological analysis for evaluating digital interventions and practically by providing evidence for equity-oriented curriculum reform.

Key Words: interpretative phenomenological analysis; decolonizing curriculum; Indigenous peace studies; digital history education; cultural identity

Introduction

The Historical consciousness, the psychological and cultural framework through which individuals relate past, present, and future, develops not through rote memorization but through affective engagement with narratives that resonate with lived experience and collective identity (Seixas, 2017). Across diverse global contexts, students' sense of belonging, cultural pride, and civic commitment are profoundly shaped by whether formal education validates or marginalizes their communities' histories (Barton & Levstik, 2004). When curricula systematically exclude certain groups' narratives while centering others, they communicate powerful messages about whose knowledge matters, whose ancestors deserve recognition, and who belongs as full epistemic citizens. This pattern of curricular exclusion constitutes a form of epistemic injustice, namely the structural denial of certain knowledge systems and lived experiences, which undermines both individual identity development and democratic pluralism (Fricker, 2007).

In the Indonesian context, this epistemic violence manifests as persistent Java-centric curricula that marginalize Indigenous histories from outer-island regions, despite national education frameworks that explicitly mandate appreciation of diversity and pluralism and a

sense of national pride (Djono, Joebagio, & Abidin, 2023; Patria, Sudarsono, Sutapa Yuliana, & Ikhhsanudin, 2023). The omission is neither incidental nor neutral; it reflects colonial-era hierarchies that continue to shape postcolonial knowledge production. Indigenous communities in Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku, and Papua are routinely rendered invisible or depicted as “primitive” in national textbooks, reinforcing stereotypes that deny their agency, diplomacy, and contributions to national identity (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

A paradigmatic case of this erasure is the 1894 *Tumbang Anoi* Peace Accord, in which thousands of Dayak leaders from diverse sub-ethnic groups across Central Kalimantan negotiated 96 customary laws to end centuries of headhunting and intertribal warfare (Sumiati, Arianti, & Susanto, 2022; Susanto & Andayani, 2023). The accord exemplifies Indigenous legal pluralism, restorative justice, and diplomatic sophistication, predating modern conflict resolution frameworks, yet it remains absent from Indonesia’s national history curriculum. This omission perpetuates colonial narratives that depict Dayak societies as inherently violent rather than as architects of peace. Table 1 illustrates the gap between national curriculum mandates and actual textbook representations of Indigenous histories, underscoring the systemic nature of epistemic exclusion.

Table 1. Contrasting National Curriculum Principles with Textbook Representation of Indigenous Histories

Curriculum Principle	Actual Textbook Representation	Implication
Appreciation of cultural diversity	Dayak histories appear only as “ethnic customs” or “headhunting practices.”	Reduces complex political agency to exotic folklore
Pluralism as the foundation of national identity	Over 70 percent of pre-20th-century content focuses on Javanese kingdoms (Majapahit, Mataram, Demak)	Implies Java equals Indonesia; the outer islands equal the periphery.
Critical historical thinking	No inquiry-based tasks on Indigenous peace-making or governance	Reinforces passive reception of dominant narratives

This marginalization has tangible consequences: Indigenous students internalize shame about their heritage, non-Indigenous students replicate stereotypes born of ignorance, and all students develop a truncated historical consciousness disconnected from the archipelago’s actual plural foundations (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Recent scholarship on decolonizing pedagogy demonstrates that curricula centering previously marginalized narratives foster cultural pride, critical consciousness, and academic engagement among minoritized students, while building intercultural competence among dominant group students (Kondo, 2022; McKeown, 2025; Paris & Alim, 2017; ul haq, 2025). Digital technologies offer unique affordances for such transformation through multimodal engagement with primary sources (e.g., oral histories, interactive maps), scaffolded inquiry, and collaborative knowledge construction. When properly structured, inquiry-based learning enhances historical thinking without overwhelming novice learners, provided that it includes guidance that prevents cognitive overload (Lazonder & Harmsen, 2016). Meanwhile, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) has emerged as a valuable methodology for capturing affective and identity dimensions of learning that are invisible to quantitative instruments, with recent applications in history education revealing emotional resonance and transformed belonging among students engaging with local narratives.

Despite growing evidence that decolonizing curricula advances equity and democratic education, significant gaps remain in understanding the lived, experiential texture of student engagement. Few studies examine how ethnically diverse students phenomenologically experience scaffolded digital inquiry into Indigenous histories, particularly the meaning-making that occurs as they navigate tensions among shame and pride, compartmentalized and integrated identities, and abstract knowledge and embodied historical consciousness. Such questions demand methodological approaches that prioritize participants' own interpretive frameworks over researcher-imposed outcome categories.

This study addresses that gap through three interconnected contributions. Methodologically, it pioneers the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to evaluate digital history interventions, thereby capturing transformative dimensions that are invisible to conventional assessment. Theoretically, it bridges decolonizing pedagogy and phenomenology, offering new tools to understand how epistemic justice operates through affective and existential channels, not only cognitive ones. Empirically, it provides the first systematic account of how both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students experience the same decolonizing curriculum, revealing cross ethnic patterns and divergences that refine our understanding of culturally responsive teaching. These insights carry both theoretical value, advancing decolonizing pedagogy from programmatic ideals toward psychological mechanisms, and practical relevance for educators seeking to design learning experiences that authentically honor Indigenous knowledge while fostering transformative engagement (Banks, 2004; Freire, 2020; Yonit & Iris, 2017).

This interpretative phenomenological analysis, therefore, aims to explore the lived experiences of ethnically diverse Indonesian high school students regarding scaffolded inquiry-based digital learning centered on the marginalized Indigenous history of the *Tumbang Anoi* Peace Accord.

Method

This study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a qualitative approach grounded in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (J. A. Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2021). IPA prioritizes in-depth exploration of how individuals make sense of significant life experiences, making it well-suited to investigating students' phenomenological engagement with marginalized historical narratives. The method aligns with decolonizing research ethics by treating participants as co-creators of meaning rather than passive data sources (L. T. Smith, 2021).

The research was conducted between May and September 2025 in two public senior high schools (SMA Negeri 1 and SMA Negeri 2) in Palangka Raya, Central Kalimantan. Eight Grade 11 students (aged 16–17) who had completed a three-week scaffolded e-module on the *Tumbang Anoi* Peace Accord were purposively selected to ensure ethnic diversity (four Dayak: Ngaju, Bakumpai, Maanyan; four non-Dayak: Javanese, Banjar), gender balance (four male, four female), demonstrated engagement (based on teacher observation and forum activity), and voluntary informed consent with parental approval.

The e-module was co-designed using the ADDIE model by a team of history education researchers, secondary school teachers, and Dayak cultural practitioners. It integrated three core principles:

1. Decolonizing content, centering Dayak voices through oral histories, customary Law (*adat*), archival materials, and explicit critique of colonial stereotypes;

2. Scaffolded inquiry, structured across five phases (Orientation, Conceptualization, Investigation, Conclusion, Discussion) with guided questions and source analysis protocols (Pedaste et al., 2015);
3. Digital affordances, multimedia resources (historical photos, oral history audio, interactive maps), annotation tools, discussion forums, and reflective journal prompts.

Delivered in six weekly 90-minute sessions, the module covered pre-colonial Dayak societies, the cultural meanings of headhunting, motivations for peace, the Tumbang Anoi diplomatic process, the 96 customary laws, and their contemporary relevance. Ethical approval was obtained from the university research ethics committee and local education authorities. All participants and parents provided written informed consent, with assurances of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw. Dayak elders and cultural practitioners were consulted throughout to ensure respectful representation of spiritual and customary dimensions of *Tumbang Anoi*.

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews (60–90 minutes), conducted in Indonesian between July and September 2025, four to eight weeks after module completion, to balance memory accuracy with reflective distance. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and accuracy checked, yielding approximately 120,000 words of transcript data. The interview protocol, adapted from Oltar et al. (2025), explored seven experiential domains: initial emotional responses, most impactful module elements, shifts in cultural identity, new understandings of peace, prior hesitations about discussing Dayak history, intentions to share the narrative, and overall personal transformation. Questions were open-ended and participant-led, with flexible probes to support narrative depth while honoring emotional boundaries (Oltar, Marta, & Kurniawati, 2025).

Data analysis followed the six-step IPA procedure (Smith et al., 2013): 1) Immersion through repeated transcript reading; 2) Exploratory noting of descriptive content, linguistic features, and conceptual interpretations; 3) Emergent theme development grounded in participants' language; 4) Hierarchical clustering into superordinate and subordinate themes; 5) Idiographic analysis for each participant, with bracketing of prior interpretations; and 6) Cross-case synthesis to identify patterns while preserving divergences.

Analysis was conducted manually using Microsoft Word (transcripts) and Excel (theme mapping) to maintain close textual engagement. All team members maintained reflexive journals to document how their positionalities shaped analysis, an ethical necessity in hermeneutic inquiry.

Results and Discussion

Analysis revealed four superordinate themes that capture how ethnically diverse students experienced scaffolded digital inquiry into the 1894 *Tumbang Anoi* Peace Accord. Participant demographics are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Participant Demographics

Code	Gender	Ethnicity	School	Age
S1	Male	Dayak Ngaju	SMA Negeri 1	17
S2	Female	Dayak Ngaju	SMA Negeri 2	17
S3	Male	Dayak Bakumpai	SMA Negeri 1	17
S4	Female	Dayak Maanyan	SMA Negeri 2	16
S5	Male	Javanese	SMA Negeri 1	17
S6	Female	Javanese	SMA Negeri 2	17
S7	Male	Banjar	SMA Negeri 1	16
S8	Female	Banjar	SMA Negeri 2	16

Table 3 presents the four superordinate themes, their constituent dimensions, and the number of participants who expressed each theme.

Table 3. Thematic Structure and Prevalence

Superordinate Theme	Subordinate Themes	Participants (n/8)
1. Emotional Resonance and Cultural Awakening	Visceral bodily responses; Surprise at Indigenous diplomatic sophistication; Temporal collapse	8/8
2. Transformation from Marginalization to Cultural Pride	Prior shame and silence; Institutional validation; Identity celebration; Anger at exclusion; Cross-ethnic pride	7/8 (all Dayak + 3 non-Dayak)
3. Peace as Embodied Practice	Applicability to contemporary conflicts; Peace as active construction; Intergenerational responsibility	8/8
4. Indigeneity as National Belonging	Expanded conception of Indonesian-ness; Pride in plural foundations; Critique of Java-centrism	6/8 (all Dayak + 2 non-Dayak)

1. Emotional Resonance and Cultural Awakening

All participants described visceral reactions, goosebumps (*merinding*), tears, or awe when encountering visual depictions of thousands of unarmed Dayak leaders gathering for peace. S2 (Dayak Ngaju) recalled “When I saw the animation of canoes arriving without weapons, I got goosebumps all over... I actually cried. Our ancestors were extraordinary, and I never knew this before”. These embodied responses indicate what Damasio (1994) terms somatic significance: affect as a marker of existential meaning. Notably, non-Dayak students reported similar reactions. S5 (Javanese) stated, “I got goosebumps too. Great peace initiatives can come from Kalimantan, not only from Java, like we always learn”. This cross-ethnic resonance disrupted internalized assumptions about Indigenous “primitivism.”

Participants expressed surprise at the scale and sophistication of Dayak diplomacy, revealing how deeply colonial stereotypes had been absorbed, even by Dayak youth. S3 (Dayak Bakumpai) reflected “I never imagined that in 1894, Dayak people could organize thousands from different tribes without violence. That requires extraordinary planning and mutual respect”. Several described a temporal collapse and felt directly addressed by ancestors. S4 (Dayak Maanyan) said, “It felt like they were saying: We chose peace for you, so honor it”. This reflects Seixas’ (2004) model of mature historical consciousness: not just knowing the past, but feeling existentially connected to it as heir and custodian.

2. Transformation from Marginalization to Cultural Pride

Seven participants (all Dayak and three non-Dayak) shifted from ethnic shame to pride. Dayak students disclosed long-standing identity concealment. S1 (Dayak Ngaju) admitted, “I used to say I am just ‘Indonesian.’ I was ashamed to say I am Dayak, I feared people would think I am primitive”. This aligns with Goffman’s (1963) stigma management and Freire’s (1970) internalized oppression. The module’s institutional validation reversed this. S2 emphasized, “For eleven years, Dayak history was invisible in school. Now I feel like we exist in the curriculum.”

This triggered behavioral change: S1 began wearing *sapei* cloth to school, a public act of reclamation. Alongside pride emerged critical anger. S4 asked, “Why was I never taught this? It feels like theft; someone stole our rightful place in Indonesian history.” Her language echoes Fricker’s (2007) epistemic injustice. Notably, three non-Dayak students developed cross-ethnic pride, reframing *Tumbang Anoi* as shared heritage. S8 (Banjar) stated, “It is not

just Dayak history, it is part of who we all are as Indonesians.” This aligns with Paris and Alim’s (2017) culturally sustaining pedagogy, which fosters plural belonging without erasing difference.

3. Peace as Embodied Practice

All participants reconceptualized peace from the absence of conflict to an active, justice-oriented practice. S3 linked *Tumbang Anoi* to contemporary social media disputes. “Peace means negotiating rules everyone accepts, compensating harms, it takes work”. This reflects Galtung’s (1969) distinction between negative peace (the absence of violence) and positive peace (just structures). S6 (Javanese) clarified, “Real peace is not calm, it is hard work: talking when it is hard, making agreements, repairing harm”.

Participants also expressed intergenerational responsibility. S7 (Banjar) vowed, “When I become a father, my children must know this story... so they will not feel ashamed of any part of their heritage”. This embodies Smith’s (2012) Indigenous futurity: education as cultural continuity across time. Peace became a practical orientation rather than a static ideal.

4. Indigeneity as National Belonging

Six participants (all Dayak and two non-Dayak) reimagined Indonesian identity as plural by design. S1 (Dayak Ngaju) articulated, “Now I feel more Indonesian, not less Dayak. Indonesia is strong because of its diversity”. This challenges assimilationist nationalism that equates “Indonesian-ness” with Javanese culture. Instead, participants saw the nation as constituted by pre-existing Indigenous political traditions. S5 (Javanese) reflected “Indonesia is not great because of Java alone... It is great because Dayak people built peace before the nation-state existed”.

Participants also critiqued Java-centrism. S4 asked, “Why do we learn Majapahit every year but never *Tumbang Anoi*?, both show sophisticated governance, yet only one is glorified.” This reveals critical curriculum literacy (Grimmett, 2017): recognizing that knowledge selection reflects power, not merit.

Synthesis

These themes demonstrate that centering Indigenous historical agency through scaffolded digital inquiry catalyzes affective awakening, identity transformation, ethical reorientation, and plural national belonging. Outcomes arose not from didactic messaging but from experiential engagement with evidence of Indigenous sophistication, facilitated by digital affordances and inquiry scaffolding. This validates Ladson-Billings’ (2021) argument that equity requires epistemic validation, not just content inclusion.

The study extends IPA’s utility in educational research by capturing transformations that are invisible to standardized assessments yet vital to democratic citizenship. It also affirms that decolonizing pedagogy is not identity politics but, in practice, an epistemic justice project: restoring historical agency to reshape present and future identities.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that centering the silenced history of the 1894 *Tumbang Anoi* Peace Accord through a scaffolded digital inquiry module catalyzes profound affective, identity, and civic transformations among ethnically diverse Indonesian high school students. Four interrelated themes emerged: Emotional Resonance and Cultural Awakening, Transformation from Marginalization to Cultural Pride, Peace as Embodied Practice, and Indigeneity as National Belonging. Together, they reveal how epistemic justice, when enacted

through culturally grounded and digitally mediated pedagogy, can heal internalized shame, foster intercultural solidarity, and reframe national identity as plural by design.

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