UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

POLICY BRIEF 2026-33
ISSN 2619-7278 (Print)
ISSN 2619-7286 (Online)

LOCAL REGIONAL STUDIES NETWORK

Institutionalization and Certification of Northwest Panay's *Pagrara* Weaving Tradition

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Introduction

The *pagrara*, a traditional handicraft weaving practice utilizing natural fibers, represents both a cultural heritage and a livelihood avenue for local communities in Northwest Panay, covering municipalities under the Antique and Aklan provinces.[1] This policy brief explores the potential of instituting *pagrara* as an offering in Senior High Schools (SHS) as well as its inclusion in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) of the Department of Education (DepEd), as pathways for the institutionalization and certification of *pagrara* weaving competencies. This proposed initiative is advanced by the *Pagrara* Project aiming to promote and sustain *pagrara* as a culturally significant and economically viable heritage in the area.[2] Stakeholders' collaboration is emphasized as a central mechanism for the initiative's success.

Locating *Pagrara* in Schools

Republic Act No. 10533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, as amended by RA 12322, provides the policy framework for curriculum development and the adaptation of teaching approaches to learners' needs and contexts.[3][4] DepEd Orders No. 35 and 42, s. 2016 emphasized contextualized instruction, localized learning materials, and making classes relevant to learners'

1 Elmer Nochesada, *Arts and Tradition of Mat Weaving in the Philippines* (HABI – The Philippine Textile Council, 2016), defines *rara* as "the art and tradition of weaving mats that involves the process of creative and artistic manipulation that makes use of long strips of fiber, grass, leaf, petiole, reed, stem, twig, vine, and even branch and cane that are harvested, gathered, boiled, pounded, split, dried and dyed to make durable, easy to use, long-lasting supple mats." In Northwest Panay, *rara* or *pagrara* is regarded as a shared cultural heritage that extends beyond mat weaving to include the production of bags, carpets, placemats, hats, and decorative crafts.

2 "Pagrara: Exploring Northwest Panay Weaving Heritage," a project implemented by the UP Visayas Center for West Visayan Studies (UP-CWVS) and the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP-CIDS) in partnership with the local government units of Pandan and Libertad (Antique) and Nabas and Ibajay (Aklan).

3 Republic of the Philippines, Republic Act No. 10533: An Act Enhancing the Philippine Basic Education System by Strengthening Its Curriculum and Increasing the Number of Years for Basic Education, Appropriating Funds Therefor and for Other Purposes (May 15, 2013), sec. 5 (h), https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2013/05/15/republic-act-no-10533/

4 Republic of the Philippines, Republic Act No. 12322: An Act Allowing the Department of Education the Flexibility to Determine the Pedagogical Approaches to Be Implemented in the Basic Education Curriculum, Amending for the Purpose Section 5 of Republic Act No. 10533, or the "Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013" (August 2, 2026), sec. 1, https://elibrary.judiciary.gov.ph/thebookshelf/showdocs/2/101848?

contexts and experiences.[56] Thus, schools are encouraged to incorporate local cultural elements, knowledge, and traditions in learning activities and in crafting contextualized learning materials. In the case of schools in Northwest Panay, this includes the *pagrara* heritage.

Pagrara has been incorporated into various aspects of education, ranging from classroom lessons and learning materials to school activities. One notable example is Libertad National Vocational School (LNVS) in Libertad, Antique, whose official school community newspaper is named *Ang Pagrara*.[7] The school has also previously explored integrating *pagrara* into its curriculum, with significant support from Libertad local government unit. Similarly, weaving has been integrated into learning activities, such in the case of Naile ALS - Community Learning Center (CLC) in Ibajay, Aklan. An innovation called *Eubid it Kabuhi* (Rope of Life) had trained ALS learners to weave natural fibers into baskets, placemats, and leis with members of a cooperative from Barangay Aparicio as trainers and facilitators.[89] The innovation had provided opportunities for the learners to generate income, as they were able to sold woven leis and accepted orders from customers.

Several LGU initiatives did their share in raising awareness on *pagrara* and linking it to income opportunities to entice youth appreciation.[10] In Nabas, for example, the LGU celebrates their *Bariw Festival* highlighting the skills of weavers through the various products made from *bariw* plant. These products were also incorporated into official events and activities. Also, had initiated the *Banig Fusion Challenge* where local artists are challenged to create artworks that blend traditional weaving with contemporary art and design.[1112] In Ibajay, a collaboration with a leading department store enabled trained weavers to produce products that met quality-control standards, an example of industry partnership.[13] Meanwhile, Libertad, for its part, has the annual *Banigan Festival* celebrating its *pagrara it banig* (mat weaving) tradition and industry where regular activities include demonstration on mat weaving to students, showcase of woven products and handicraft, a beauty pageant with contestants wearing creative *banig* gowns made, and street dancing, among others.[14]

Incorporating *pagrara* in schools in the area, however, has become increasingly challenging as revealed by findings from stakeholder consultations, focus group discussions, and interviews facilitated by the *Pagrara* Project. Notable is the significant decline in learners' interest in *pagrara* as it is perceived as a labor-intensive work associated with poverty and limited social mobility, such that parents, including artisans, encourage their children to pursue formal education or alternative careers.[15] A local survey was conducted among students for their preferred choice in Technical-

5 Department of Education, DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2016: Policy Guidelines on Daily Lesson Preparation for the K to 12 Basic Education Program (June 17, 2016), https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/DO_s2016_042.pdf

6 Department of Education, DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016: The Learning Action Cell as a K to 12 Basic Education Program School-Based Continuing Professional Development Strategy for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning (June 7, 2016), https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/DO_s2016_035.pdf

7 Ang Pagrara LNVS, Facebook account, accessed August 12, 2026, https://www.facebook.com/lnvswriters/

8 Joyce Cara Olid (ALS Teacher, Naisud Central School, Ibajay, Aklan) remarks during stakeholders' dialogue conducted on August 7, 2026 at the University of the Philippines Visayas Antique Extension Facility, Nauring, Pandan, Antique.

9 Olid had initiated the innovation.

10 Lyn Ilinon, (Municipal Tourism Officer-Designate of Ibajay, Aklan) remarks during the stakeholders' dialogue conducted on October 8, 2025 at the University of the Philippines Visayas Antique Extension Facility, Nauring, Pandan, Antique

11 Bryan Briones (Municipal Tourism Officer-Designate of Nabas, Aklan) during the stakeholders' dialogue conducted on 8 October 2025 at the University of the Philippines Visayas Antique Extension Facility, Nauring, Pandan, Antique

12 Bryan Briones, remarks during stakeholders' dialogue, October 8, 2025.

13 Lyn Ilinon, remarks during the stakeholders' dialogue conducted on October 8, 2025

14 Dezhel Jane S. Maubol et al., "Banigan Festival," Cultural Mapping of Panay, Guimaras & Negros Occidental (2024), https://cmpg.upv.edu.ph/heritage/banigan-festival/

15 Frances Anthea R. Redison, Issues and Concerns: Crafting the Weaves of Northwestern Panay, Discussion Paper Series 2025-18 (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies, 2025). https://cids.up.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Issues-and-Concerns_-Crafting-the-Weaves-of-Northwestern-Panay.pdf

Professional (TechPro) Track or cluster specialization, and it was found out that none chose basketry or weaving.[16][17] Also, while teachers endeavor to make *pagrara* relevant to learners especially in classes, it is not consistent as there are only limited topics where it is discussed. Curricular gaps have also emerged, as schools that previously offered handicraft programs had discontinued them, leaving students with minimal exposure to weaving skills.[18] In the case of ALS, while *pagrara* could be a viable inclusion, teachers, however, lack the skills to teach it.[19] Another issue that was raised is the marketability of the products as learners tend to lose interest if they could not gain from the project, such is the case in Naile CLC where they have limited market options for their products.[20] Lastly, adding to the concerns mentioned, is the lack of a recognized skills certification that constrains opportunities for learners for their skills to be aligned to the industry.

Policy Recommendations

As DepEd strengthens its Senior High School curriculum to better align with the demands of higher education and workforce needs, there is a need to integrate locally rooted skills and creative industries into formal learning. However, while current policies strengthen contextualization and localization, they do not readily establish *pagrara* as a formally certified industry qualification. Thus, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Offering *Pagrara* in Senior High School**. *Pagrara* can be offered under the TechPro Track as a Unique Elective under Artisanry and Creative Enterprise Cluster in the Strengthened Senior High School Curriculum (SSHSC).[21][22] Unique electives are school or community-developed courses based on local culture, context, and community needs, and may be offered in place of official DepEd electives.[23] Also, *pagrara* can be integrated in the ALS curriculum as the system provides a flexible platform through which *pagrara* may be integrated as contextualized livelihood and cultural heritage learning activities.[24][25] Since ALS learners are mostly from the marginalized sectors, *pagrara* is a livelihood opportunity of them.[26]

2. **Strengthening DepEd-TESDA partnership**. Both agencies have been collaborating with each other, thus, offering *pagrara* as a unique elective in Tech-Pro Track in Senior High Schools as well as integrating it in the ALS curriculum are easy pathways to contextualize approved relevant weaving qualifications such as that of Basket Weaving NC II and Mat Weaving and Diversified

16 Donald Antoy (Principal, Libertad Central School, Libertad, Antique) remarks during stakeholders' dialogue conducted on August 7, 2026 at the University of the Philippines Visayas Antique Extension Facility, Nauring, Pandan, Antique.

17 The Department of Education describes the Technical-Professional (Tech-Pro) Track as "an educational pathway designed for learners primarily seeking employment, entrepreneurship, or middle-level skills development. Learners can choose from 10 different clusters of Tech-Pro Electives, each aligned with industry standards and national certifications." DepEd Order No. 017, s. 2026: Strengthened Senior High School Curriculum (2026), sec. III(k).

18 Meriam Lababit (Schools District Supervisor, Libertad, Antique) remarks during stakeholders' dialogue conducted on 8 October 2025 at the University of the Philippines Visayas Antique Extension Facility, Nauring, Pandan, Antique.

19 Allan Alpas (ALS District Coordinator, Pandan, Antique) remarks during stakeholders' dialogue conducted on August7, 2026 at the University of the Philippines Visayas Antique Extension Facility, Nauring, Pandan, Antique.

20 Joyce Cara Olid, remarks during stakeholders' dialogue, August 7, 2026.

21 *Department of Education (DepEd), DepEd Order No. 017, s. 2026: Strengthened Senior High School Curriculum (2026), https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/DO_s2026_017r.pdf.*

22 Under the SSHSC, one cluster is Artisanry and Creative Enterprise, which offers "Handicrafts: Weaving" with its TESDA equivalent as "Handicraft (Handloom)" at the NC II Level. However, pagrara loosely falls under basketry and macrame.

23 DepEd, DepEd Order No. 017, s. 2026, sec. V(14)(c).

24 Interview with Remy Baculina, ALS teacher in District of Patnongon 1, Patnongon, Antique, by the author, telephone interview, July 2, 2026

25 Sunny Morillo (ALS Education Program Specialist II, Schools Division of Antique) remarks during stakeholders' dialogue conducted on August 7, 2026 at the University of the Philippines Visayas Antique Extension Facility, Nauring, Pandan, Antique.

26 Alpas, remarks during stakeholders' dialogue conducted on August 7, 2026.

Mat Products Making NC II to incorporate *pagrara*.[27] An assessment can then be made on whether existing competency standards covers knowledge, techniques, and practices in *pagrara*. Then, a complementary or separate qualification can be proposed based on identified gaps.

3. **Towards Multi-Stakeholders' Engagement**. Once institutionalized, the initiative may expand through multi-stakeholders' engagement towards sustained implementation. While DepEd integrates *pagrara* into the curriculum, and TESDA oversees training and certification, cooperatives and enterprises dedicated to *pagrara*, as well as skilled *manugrara* (weavers) in the area, can serve as resource partners to conduct trainings to equip teachers with the necessary skills.[28][29] The LGUs can be tapped to provide training centers and explore the hiring of ALS Teachers that would focus on *pagrara* under the Local School Board through the Special Education Fund (SEF), complementing DepEd's ALS teachers.[30] Other government agencies such as Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and Department of Science and Technology (DOST) can assist in innovation, enterprise development, and market linkages.[31] Also, higher educational institutions such as Aklan State University (ASU), University of Antique (UA), and University of the Philippines Visayas (UPV) are strategic partners that can provide relevant capacity building and research undertakings.[32][33] Ultimately, the realization of the proposed inter-LGU collaboration on *pagrara* that Ibajay, Libertad, Nabas, and Pandan are currently undertaking, would provide a strong foundation for a coordinated approach aimed at promoting and further developing *pagrara*, including its institutionalization in schools.[34]

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28 Rick Abraham (Provincial Director, TESDA Antique), remarks during stakeholders' dialogue conducted on August 7, 2026 at the University of the Philippines Visayas Antique Extension Facility, Nauring, Pandan, Antique.

29 In Northern Antique, organizations and enterprises dedicated to handicraft products are Sto. Rosario Multi-Purpose Cooperative (STORMPC) and Santa Ana-San Joaquin Agrarian Reform Cooperative (SASJ AR COOP) in Pandan, and Libertad Bariw Weavers Federation (LIBAWFED) in Libertad. In Aklan, there is Monlaque Agrarian Reform Cooperative and Aparicio Agrarian Reform Cooperative in Ibajay, and the established private enterprises in Nabas.

30 Plaridel Sanchez VI (Municipal Vice Mayor, Pandan, Antique) remarks during stakeholders' dialogue conducted on August 7, 2026 at the University of the Philippines Visayas Antique Extension Facility, Nauring, Pandan, Antique.

31 Mary Grace Samulde (PESO Manager, Pandan, Antique) remarks during stakeholders' dialogue conducted on August 7, 2026 at the University of the Philippines Visayas Antique Extension Facility, Nauring, Pandan, Antique

32 ASU has its College of Hospitality and Rural Resource Management in Colong-Colong,Ibajay, Aklan, UA has a campus in Union, Libertad, Antique, while UPV has its Antique Extension Facility in Nauring, Pandan, Antique.

33 Raymund Nonato Gumboc (Sangguniang Bayan Member, Pandan, Antique) remarks during stakeholders' dialogue conducted on August 7, 2026 at the University of the Philippines Visayas Antique Extension Facility, Nauring, Pandan, Antique

34 The inter-LGU alliance is the product of consultation meetings among stakeholders and other engagements facilitated by the Pagrara Project. Resolutions by respective Sangguniang Bayan of the four LGUs to authorize their Local Chief Executives to enter into MOU on the matter are currently being undertaken, and the proposed schedule for the MOU signing is December 2026.

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