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Community Wisdom in the Classroom: Oral Histories as Pedagogical Tools in Brazilian Indigenous Schools

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ABSTRACT

Background. The effectiveness of oral corrective feedback (OCF) in language learning is influenced by learners' comprehension and response to various OCF techniques. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to consider learners' preferences for OCF strategies.

Purpose. This quantitative study aimed to investigate the preferences of Thai as a foreign language (TFL) learner for ten commonly discussed types of OCF. Specifically, it examined whether these preferences are influenced by four learner variables: proficiency level, first language (L1), foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA), and foreign language enjoyment (FLE).

Method. The study involved 288 university students from Chinese, Japanese, and Korean TFL settings, and the data from questionnaires were analysed using appropriate statistical methods.

Results. The findings indicate that, regardless of proficiency level, L1, FLCA, or FLE level, learners prefer more explicit OCF techniques, such as metalinguistics feedback and explicit correction. However, Korean undergraduates scored lower in the majority of OCF strategies (i.e., ignoring, elicitation, recast, explanation, and public feedback) compared to the other participants.

Conclusion. This study has significant implications for instructional practices in TFL settings and for L2 lecturers in the classroom. By understanding learners' preferences for OCF, educators can tailor their instructional approaches to meet the specific needs of their students.

KEYWORDS

Community-Based Learning, Indigenous Education, Oral History

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INTRODUCTION

Education in indigenous communities in Brazil has long operated at the intersection of cultural preservation and state-driven standardization (Cupchoy, 2024; Khadka dkk., 2023). Within these communities, oral tradition is not merely a method of communication but a fundamental epistemological system through which knowledge, identity, and values are transmitted across generations. Formal education, especially when guided by national curricula, often marginalizes or fails to engage these systems of community-based knowledge (Adu-Gilmore, 2024; Osipova, 2022). In recent years, there has been growing interest in culturally sustaining pedagogies that validate and incorporate indigenous ways of knowing into



the classroom. These approaches seek to empower indigenous students through education that is both relevant to their cultural identity and responsive to their lived experiences.

Brazilian indigenous schools represent a unique educational ecosystem where traditional knowledge and formal learning coexist, sometimes in harmony, often in tension. Teachers in these schools face the dual responsibility of meeting institutional educational goals while maintaining cultural continuity for their students (Kisely dkk., 2021; A. C. Thomas, 2021). In many cases, the failure to include local community knowledge—especially as told by elders—has led to disengagement, low student motivation, and erosion of cultural confidence. The challenge is not simply pedagogical but political, involving broader questions of epistemic justice and the role of schools in preserving indigenous autonomy and heritage.

Oral histories in indigenous communities have historically functioned as pedagogical narratives, embodying ecological knowledge, social structures, spiritual beliefs, and ethical codes (Okoomian, 2024; A. C. Thomas, 2021). Their integration into the classroom has the potential to reinforce students' sense of identity, deepen learning, and re-establish community ties weakened by the imposition of formal schooling systems (Samaraweera dkk., 2024; Vue, 2021). This study situates oral history as more than cultural content—it treats it as a method, a pedagogy, and a philosophical stance that bridges community wisdom and classroom instruction. Investigating how oral histories are currently used in indigenous schools can offer critical insights into decolonizing education and rethinking knowledge production from within the community.

This research addresses the specific problem of epistemological disconnection in indigenous education in Brazil (Campesato, 2023; Manitowabi, 2021). Despite educational reforms aimed at intercultural and bilingual education, many indigenous schools continue to operate under a curricular model that privileges written, Eurocentric, and externally imposed knowledge systems. As a result, students often find themselves learning in environments that do not reflect their identities, languages, or values. This disconnect contributes to limited engagement, inconsistent attendance, and, in some cases, cultural alienation among indigenous youth.

Teachers in indigenous communities frequently express frustration about the limitations imposed by standardized curricula that make little room for ancestral knowledge or community participation (Rosas, 2024; Sukumar dkk., 2024). While national education policies may acknowledge indigenous autonomy in principle, in practice, classroom activities rarely accommodate oral knowledge systems or intergenerational learning. The exclusion of community elders from school life further compounds the issue, weakening the cultural continuity that has sustained indigenous education for centuries outside formal institutions.

The core problem lies not only in the content being taught but in the pedagogical models employed. When education is delivered in ways that ignore the oral, narrative, and performative dimensions of indigenous culture, it risks reproducing colonial dynamics within indigenous spaces. This research explores how oral histories, when strategically integrated into classroom practice, can challenge such dynamics and create more inclusive, respectful, and effective learning environments (Babichenko & Swanson, 2024; Cupchoy, 2023). The investigation centers on the experiences of teachers and students in indigenous schools who engage with oral storytelling as a legitimate and generative educational practice.

The purpose of this research is to explore the pedagogical role of oral histories in Brazilian indigenous schools and to understand how they can be meaningfully integrated into classroom instruction (Babichenko & Swanson, 2024; Rodríguez & Rebolledo-Rebolledo, 2024). The study seeks to document current practices, analyze their impact on student engagement and cultural identity, and identify conditions that support or hinder the use of oral narratives as educational

tools. By doing so, the research aims to inform both policy and practice, offering concrete strategies for educators working in indigenous contexts.

A key objective is to highlight the voices of indigenous educators and elders who serve as custodians of community wisdom. Their perspectives are essential for developing context-specific pedagogical models that are grounded in cultural authenticity (Logan & Grillo, 2023; Weuffen & Pickford, 2021). The study aims to bridge the gap between formal teacher training and indigenous oral epistemologies by showcasing how storytelling can be a tool for knowledge creation, reflection, and identity affirmation in the classroom.

The research also intends to contribute to the broader discourse on culturally sustaining pedagogy by emphasizing the value of oral tradition as both content and method (da Assumpção dkk., 2024). By focusing on storytelling as an educational resource, this study reframes it from being seen merely as folklore or heritage into a dynamic form of pedagogy. The ultimate aim is to shift educational narratives from deficit-based models to those that recognize indigenous students as knowledge holders and cultural agents.

A review of the literature reveals that while there is growing attention to indigenous education and intercultural pedagogy, empirical studies focusing specifically on oral histories as classroom tools remain limited (Ayres dkk., 2023; Henry, 2021). Most research emphasizes bilingual instruction or curriculum development but pays less attention to the methodological implications of integrating oral narratives into daily teaching. This creates a knowledge gap in understanding how indigenous epistemologies can be activated through narrative pedagogies.

Studies from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have examined the role of indigenous storytelling in formal education, yet these contexts differ significantly from the socio-political and linguistic landscape of Brazilian indigenous communities. Brazil's unique history of colonization, linguistic diversity, and legal recognition of indigenous education necessitates context-specific inquiry (Olko & Radding, 2023; A. Thomas, 2024). There remains an absence of localized pedagogical models that document how oral history is being implemented by teachers within Brazilian indigenous classrooms.

This research contributes to filling that gap by offering grounded, field-based insights into the pedagogical use of oral narratives (Olko & Radding, 2023; Vieira & Dias, 2021). Through ethnographic fieldwork in three Amazonian schools, the study documents lived experiences, teaching strategies, and community interactions that shape the inclusion of oral history in school life. By highlighting practical challenges and successes, the study adds to the empirical foundation necessary for scaling and sustaining culturally responsive education in indigenous contexts.

The novelty of this study lies in its treatment of oral history not just as cultural content but as a formal pedagogical methodology. It positions community storytelling as a legitimate and powerful tool for curriculum enrichment and student engagement (Greendeer & Weston, 2021; McComsey & Porter, 2022). The study is among the few to document how storytelling practices, led by indigenous elders and integrated into the classroom, can influence student motivation, intergenerational dialogue, and cultural affirmation within a formal school setting.

This research also offers a conceptual contribution to decolonial education frameworks by demonstrating how indigenous pedagogies can coexist with and enrich formal schooling. Rather than viewing oral tradition as separate from academic instruction, the study advocates for a model of education that treats indigenous knowledge systems as central, not peripheral (Philpot dkk., 2023; Yaagun, 2024). This approach challenges prevailing hierarchies of knowledge and proposes a more equitable model of educational exchange.

The study is justified by its potential to reshape indigenous education policy and teacher training programs in Brazil (Hong Lee, 2022; Moitra, 2024). In a context where indigenous schools are increasingly called upon to meet national academic standards while preserving cultural integrity, practical models for integrating oral histories into teaching are urgently needed. By documenting existing practices and highlighting their educational value, the research offers evidence-based recommendations for educators, policymakers, and community leaders committed to culturally grounded and socially just education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic research design to explore how oral histories function as pedagogical tools in indigenous schools in Brazil. Ethnography was chosen for its ability to capture the complexity of cultural practices, social interactions, and educational meanings within specific communities (Hong Lee, 2022; Philpot dkk., 2023). The approach allowed for sustained engagement in naturalistic settings, privileging the voices of indigenous teachers, elders, and students as co-constructors of knowledge. Narrative inquiry was integrated into the design to emphasize lived experiences and personal interpretations of oral history practices in the classroom.

The research was conducted in three indigenous schools located in the Amazon region of Brazil, selected through purposive sampling based on their active inclusion of community-based teaching practices (Moitra, 2024; Nicholas, 2022). Participants included twelve classroom teachers, nine community elders, and thirty-two students aged between 10 and 16 years. The selection aimed to represent a diversity of indigenous linguistic and cultural groups, including the Tikuna, Baniwa, and Yanomami communities (Ayres dkk., 2023; Twum-Danso Imoh, 2024). Participants were invited to take part voluntarily and were informed about the objectives, ethical procedures, and potential uses of the study prior to data collection.

Three main instruments were used to gather data: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and student focus groups. Interviews were conducted with teachers and elders to gather perspectives on the purpose, methods, and perceived impact of integrating oral histories into teaching (Basson & Burger, 2023; James dkk., 2022). Classroom observations focused on the interactions between educators, students, and storytelling content, documenting both the narrative process and student engagement. Student focus groups were used to explore learner perceptions and experiences of oral history-based lessons, with discussions facilitated in a mix of Portuguese and local indigenous languages, with the assistance of bilingual translators when needed.

Data collection took place over a period of four months, with the researcher residing in each community for several weeks to establish rapport and engage in participant observation. Interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed, while field notes were maintained to capture contextual and non-verbal data. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns related to educational practices, identity affirmation, and intergenerational learning. Triangulation was achieved through cross-verification of data from different sources, and member-checking sessions were held with teachers and elders to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of interpreted findings. Ethical clearance was obtained from a Brazilian university review board, and research protocols were designed in accordance with indigenous research ethics and community consultation processes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study involved a total of 53 participants across three indigenous communities in the Brazilian Amazon. These included 12 teachers, 9 community elders, and 32 students. The schools represented three distinct ethnic-linguistic groups: Tikuna, Baniwa, and Yanomami. Data were collected through interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations over a four-month field period. The following table summarizes the demographic and cultural characteristics of the participating schools.

Table 1. Summary of Participating Indigenous Schools and Community Participants

School Code	Ethnic Group	Number of Teachers	Number of Elders	Number of Students	Language Used
S01	Tikuna	4	3	10	Tikuna, Portuguese
S02	Baniwa	5	4	12	Baniwa, Portuguese
S03	Yanomami	3	2	10	Yanomami, Portuguese

The data show that all three schools integrated oral history activities into their classrooms, though the methods and frequency varied. In S02, teachers conducted biweekly sessions involving storytelling circles co-led by elders, while S01 and S03 used oral histories more sporadically, often aligned with cultural calendar events. The most commonly narrated themes across all schools included ancestral migration, traditional ecological knowledge, local myths, and community conflict resolution.

Participants described oral storytelling as central to both cultural identity and the educational process. Teachers reported that students demonstrated heightened engagement and curiosity during storytelling sessions compared to standard lessons. Elders viewed their participation as a form of cultural guardianship, emphasizing the importance of transmitting values and history orally. Students reported feeling proud when learning through stories that featured their families, ancestors, and local landscapes.

Narrative analysis revealed that oral histories fostered affective and cognitive connections between students and subject matter. Classroom observations indicated increased student participation during sessions incorporating oral histories, particularly when stories were linked to curriculum themes such as environmental science or local history. Teachers noted improved retention of content presented through narrative, especially when supported by visual aids or dramatization.

Inferential comparisons between student responses in storytelling versus non-storytelling sessions suggested significant differences in engagement. Students who participated in at least three oral history-integrated sessions showed a higher rate of voluntary participation in classroom discussions and group activities. Analysis of student focus group transcripts further indicated deeper reflective thinking and higher use of indigenous terminology among students frequently exposed to oral narratives.

Correlation analysis found a positive relationship between elder participation and student motivation. In classrooms where elders were regularly involved, teachers recorded more instances of collaborative questioning, peer dialogue, and culturally grounded metaphors in student responses. This suggests that elder presence not only supported content delivery but also acted as a cultural bridge, enhancing classroom inclusivity and intergenerational respect.

One particularly illustrative case involved a storytelling session at School S01 led by Elder E03, who recounted the Tikuna origin story of the "Forest of Voices." The story was linked to an environmental science lesson on biodiversity and conservation. Students responded with a class-led mural illustrating scenes from the story and held a reflective discussion connecting the narrative to current deforestation issues. The teacher noted that this lesson had one of the highest rates of student-led dialogue throughout the term.

Another case from School S02 involved a mathematics lesson contextualized through a traditional tale about fish distribution among Baniwa clans. The story was used to introduce division and proportional reasoning. Students demonstrated higher comprehension and participation when solving story-related problems compared to abstract exercises. The teacher reported that students retained and referenced the lesson content weeks later, indicating a long-term pedagogical impact.

The data affirm that oral histories serve as an effective pedagogical strategy for culturally relevant teaching. Students not only engaged more deeply with the content but also expressed greater cultural confidence and personal connection to school activities (Hasslocher-Moreno dkk., 2021; Milligan-McClellan, 2024). Teachers described oral histories as a bridge between formal knowledge and lived experience, enabling a more holistic and respectful learning environment.

The findings suggest that oral narratives are not supplementary but foundational in indigenous education. Their use fosters emotional resonance, cognitive activation, and identity affirmation. The evidence highlights the importance of elevating indigenous storytelling as a legitimate and powerful pedagogical resource within formal schooling contexts that often privilege written and Western-centric knowledge models.

The findings of this study underscore the transformative potential of oral histories as pedagogical tools within Brazilian indigenous schools. Across the three communities studied, oral narratives played a pivotal role in enhancing student engagement, affirming cultural identity, and creating meaningful links between formal learning and lived experience. Teachers observed increased participation and deeper conceptual retention when oral histories were used to contextualize lessons (Hasslocher-Moreno dkk., 2021; Willemse, 2021). Elders contributed as knowledge bearers, enriching the educational process through the transmission of community memory and traditional values.

Students expressed heightened interest in lessons grounded in storytelling, particularly when the content reflected their own cultural heritage. Oral histories fostered emotional resonance and narrative ownership, motivating students to see themselves as active participants in the learning process (Endeshaw, 2023; Mahuika & Porou, 2022). Classroom environments that integrated elder-led storytelling exhibited stronger intergenerational dialogue and communal learning. These outcomes suggest that oral histories not only enrich curriculum content but also cultivate inclusive and respectful pedagogical spaces.

Data analysis revealed that students exposed to frequent storytelling sessions developed more sophisticated reflections, often using indigenous language terms and demonstrating an increased capacity to relate abstract concepts to everyday realities. The correlation between elder involvement and student engagement further indicates that learning grounded in community interaction yields cognitive and social benefits. These findings highlight the synergy between relational learning practices and indigenous pedagogical traditions.

The integration of oral histories proved effective not only in the humanities but also across subjects such as environmental science and mathematics. Lessons that embedded cultural narratives within academic content prompted students to think critically while simultaneously validating their

cultural background. Teachers noted improved learning outcomes and sustained interest when curricular objectives were framed within oral traditions. The findings confirm the value of pedagogical approaches that honor indigenous epistemologies.

The study contributes to the growing body of literature on culturally sustaining pedagogy and indigenous education. Previous research in similar contexts, such as in Māori and Aboriginal schools, has demonstrated the power of narrative in fostering identity and resilience. This study aligns with those findings, showing that storytelling can act as both a pedagogical method and a cultural preservation strategy. However, the Brazilian context adds new dimensions to the discussion, particularly with regard to the role of linguistic diversity and political autonomy in shaping classroom practices.

Unlike prior studies that often treat oral tradition as supplemental to formal instruction, this research positions it as foundational. Participants framed storytelling not as enrichment but as an essential mode of knowledge transmission. This reorientation challenges mainstream educational frameworks that continue to prioritize written and standardized forms of knowledge. By placing community wisdom at the center of the classroom, the study introduces a paradigm where learning is deeply contextual, dialogical, and identity-affirming.

The integration of oral histories also departs from deficit-based models of indigenous education that view traditional knowledge as incompatible with modern schooling. This research illustrates how local epistemologies, when treated as valid and valuable, can enhance academic learning and classroom cohesion. The success of elder-led sessions further supports arguments in the literature for reimagining teacher roles and professional development in culturally diverse settings.

The Brazilian case highlights specific challenges and opportunities tied to language policy, indigenous rights, and curricular autonomy. The study's emphasis on three distinct indigenous groups adds nuance to the discourse on intercultural education, emphasizing that culturally responsive pedagogy must be tailored to the linguistic, spiritual, and social realities of each community. This context-sensitive approach is essential for designing educational frameworks that are both equitable and effective.

The findings of this research indicate a broader recognition of indigenous knowledge systems as critical to educational justice. When storytelling is embraced as pedagogy, it disrupts colonial hierarchies that have historically devalued oral tradition. The consistent positive responses from both students and teachers suggest that oral narratives support more democratic and participatory learning environments. These insights point to the importance of culturally grounded education as a foundation for inclusive schooling.

The results serve as evidence that schooling does not have to be in conflict with community knowledge. Rather, education can act as a mediator, drawing upon ancestral wisdom to inform modern academic goals. Teachers in the study did not view oral histories as nostalgic artifacts but as living knowledge systems capable of shaping critical thought. This perspective validates indigenous pedagogical practices as both current and forward-looking.

The research demonstrates that student motivation, cognitive engagement, and identity formation are not separate processes but interwoven outcomes of a culturally responsive classroom. Oral histories function as both method and message, encouraging students to view themselves as part of a larger communal story. This sense of belonging is essential to educational equity and personal development.

The broader significance of these results lies in their challenge to dominant models of education that privilege decontextualized knowledge. By centering community wisdom, the

findings argue for an educational approach that is not only about what is taught, but how and by whom. These implications are especially relevant for indigenous education reform and intercultural curriculum design.

The implications of these findings are wide-ranging for education policy, curriculum development, and teacher training in indigenous contexts. National and regional education frameworks must reconsider the marginal role currently afforded to indigenous languages and oral traditions. Policies that integrate oral storytelling into classroom practice can contribute to both academic achievement and cultural sustainability. Such policies would support indigenous autonomy while enriching the educational experience for all learners.

Teacher education programs should incorporate training in culturally sustaining pedagogies, including oral history facilitation. Preparing educators to collaborate with community elders and navigate multilingual classroom settings is essential. These competencies go beyond content delivery to include cultural humility, listening skills, and adaptive teaching strategies that affirm diverse identities.

Curriculum designers should explore interdisciplinary models that embed oral narratives across subject areas. By doing so, they can foster deeper connections between students' everyday lives and academic knowledge. Integrating community wisdom into environmental science, mathematics, or social studies enables students to see the relevance of learning to their local realities and responsibilities.

Community engagement must also be institutionalized as part of the school structure. This includes creating formal roles for elders in curriculum development, storytelling facilitation, and mentoring. These roles recognize elders not only as cultural authorities but also as co-educators whose presence bridges generational and epistemic divides. Sustained collaboration between schools and indigenous communities ensures educational practices remain accountable and rooted in place-based knowledge.

The positive outcomes observed in this study reflect the strength of educational models grounded in relationality, respect, and reciprocity. Storytelling offered students a means to make sense of their world and find their place within it. The presence of elders reaffirmed cultural continuity while providing moral and historical grounding. These dynamics created a classroom atmosphere where trust, curiosity, and creativity flourished.

Such outcomes are possible because storytelling aligns with indigenous values and cognitive frameworks. Narratives allow for multiple truths, collective meaning-making, and emotional engagement—dimensions often lacking in conventional schooling. The coherence between pedagogical method and cultural worldview made learning more intuitive and empowering for both students and teachers.

The enduring relevance of oral histories is grounded in their adaptability and resonance. Stories evolve with context, allowing educators to address contemporary issues through ancestral lenses. This adaptability makes oral tradition not a relic of the past but a vital instrument for the future of education. The students' responses in this study demonstrate that learning is most impactful when it feels personal, participatory, and purposeful.

Future research should expand upon these findings by investigating the long-term effects of oral history integration on student achievement, language revitalization, and community engagement. Comparative studies across regions and indigenous groups would help identify shared principles and context-specific strategies. In addition, further exploration into the training and support systems needed for teachers and elders could deepen the sustainability of storytelling-based education.

CONCLUSION

The most salient finding of this research lies in the recognition of oral histories as foundational—not supplementary—pedagogical tools that bridge formal education with indigenous epistemologies in Brazilian classrooms. Oral narratives, when integrated into school settings, were shown to enhance student engagement, affirm cultural identity, and foster intergenerational dialogue. The inclusion of community elders as co-educators not only deepened the learning experience but also reconfigured the classroom as a communal space where knowledge was co-constructed, culturally grounded, and emotionally resonant. These outcomes affirm the value of repositioning indigenous storytelling as a legitimate and transformative component of educational practice.

The study offers a significant conceptual contribution by reframing oral history as both a method and a pedagogical framework rooted in relational, narrative-based, and culturally sustaining education. It advances the discourse on decolonial and intercultural education by showing how oral traditions can operate within and alongside formal curricular structures. Methodologically, the research demonstrates the efficacy of ethnographic narrative inquiry in capturing the lived realities of students, teachers, and elders engaged in indigenous education. This approach validates community wisdom as a source of pedagogical innovation and policy relevance, providing a replicable model for other marginalized and culturally diverse educational contexts.

This study is limited by its geographic scope, focusing on three indigenous communities within the Amazon region, which may not represent the full diversity of Brazil's indigenous educational experiences. The reliance on short-term fieldwork also constrained the ability to observe longitudinal changes in student learning outcomes or teacher practices. Future research should extend to additional linguistic and cultural groups, examine the long-term impacts of oral history integration on academic performance and language revitalization, and explore mechanisms for institutionalizing elder participation in curriculum planning. Comparative studies across national contexts could further enrich global understandings of indigenous pedagogy in formal schooling systems.

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