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Hataw Higaonon: Validation of Higaonon Creative Movements

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Abstract. This study developed and culturally validated *Hataw Higaonon*, an Indigenous fitness routine derived from the basic and permissible creative movements of the *Higaonon* community in Iligan City. Anchored on four culturally approved performances, *Anahaw, Binanog, Kapangamuti,* and *Saut*, the routine aimed to integrate traditional movement elements into a structured fitness context while maintaining cultural integrity. Guided by the Successive Approximation Model (SAM), the study employed a qualitative research design involving iterative development, expert review, and community validation. Data were gathered through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and movement demonstrations, with active participation of cultural elders, including the Datu and Baylan, in accordance with NCIP guidance and Indigenous ethical protocols. Findings revealed that the adapted movements preserved their symbolic meaning, respected cultural boundaries, and were acceptable for non-ritual fitness use. Community validation indicated strong acceptability, highlighting the routine's cultural appropriateness, ease of execution, and potential to promote both wellness and cultural awareness. The study concludes that *Hataw Higaonon* demonstrates the viability of culturally grounded fitness development when guided by community participation and ethical practice, and may serve as a model for Indigenous-based physical education and wellness initiatives.

Keywords: Indigenous fitness, cultural validation, dance ethnography, physical education

1. Introduction

In Barangay Rogongon, Iligan City, Mindanao, Philippines, the *Higaonon* community continues to preserve traditional performances that embody their history, values, and relationship with nature. Movements found in dances such as *Binanog, Anahaw, Kapangamuti,* and *Saut* are not merely artistic expressions but living practices through which cultural knowledge is transmitted across generations. These creative movements

form part of everyday life, ritual practice, and social organization, reflecting how Indigenous cultural performances carry collective memory, identity, and embodied knowledge.

Studies in dance ethnography and embodied symbolism explain that meaning in Indigenous movement is sustained through practice, context, and collective participation rather than through fixed choreography (Ness, 2016; Sklar, 1991). Traditional dances therefore function not only as artistic displays but also as systems through which values, social roles, and relationships with the environment are communicated. Such embodied practices are integral cultural resources deeply rooted in community life. Contemporary studies further affirm that cultural dance strengthens social cohesion, cultural identity, and intergenerational knowledge transmission (Liu & Kalimyllin, 2024; Dais-Mohadali, 2025).

In recent years, there has been growing interest in integrating Indigenous knowledge systems into contemporary education and wellness initiatives. While this integration opens opportunities for culturally responsive and inclusive practice, scholars caution that adaptations made without community participation may lead to misrepresentation and loss of symbolic meaning. Research on Indigenous physical activity highlights the importance of community-led design to ensure that cultural integrity is maintained when traditional practices are adapted into modern contexts (Ahmed et al., 2021).

Despite the rich cultural significance of *Higaonon* performances, these movements remain largely confined to ceremonial and community settings. Limited research has explored how such Indigenous movements can be responsibly adapted into non-ritual fitness contexts while maintaining cultural integrity and respecting Indigenous authority. This gap highlights the need for culturally grounded fitness initiatives that are ethically developed and validated by the communities from which they originate.

Responding to this need, the present study focused on the development and cultural validation of *Hataw Higaonon*, an Indigenous fitness routine derived from the basic and permissible creative movements of the *Higaonon* people. Anchored on four culturally approved performances, *Anahaw, Binanog, Kapangamuti,* and *Saut,* the routine was developed through an iterative process guided by the Successive Approximation Model. Central to the study was the direct involvement of cultural elders, including the *Datu* and *Baylan,* in accordance with guidance from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples and the principles of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent. By situating Indigenous authority and ethical practice at the core of the development process, this study contributes to culturally responsive Physical Education, Indigenous wellness initiatives, and the responsible integration of Indigenous knowledge into contemporary health and educational contexts.

Main Objective

The primary objective of this study was to develop and culturally validate an Indigenous fitness routine grounded in the basic and permissible movements of traditional *Higaonon* performances, ensuring that the adaptation remained culturally appropriate and beneficial to physical wellness. Specifically, the study examined how *Higaonon* Creative Movements could be translated into a structured fitness routine that respects Indigenous values and practices, how the community perceives the cultural appropriateness and acceptability of such adaptation, and what insights may inform improvements in the routine's design, inclusivity, and sustainability. The study was conducted within the

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Higaonon community of *Barangay Rogongon*, Iligan City, through consultations with cultural elders and community members, and was limited to the adaptation of non-sacred movements suitable for fitness use.

Framework of the Study

The research was anchored on Cultural Performance Theory, which views movement as a living expression of cultural identity, and Motor Learning and Control Theory, which guided the structured learning and safe execution of the fitness routine within a contemporary context.

The framework of the study followed an Input–Process–Output structure, with the process phase guided by the Successive Approximation Model (SAM). The input consisted of seven documented *Higaonon* performances, from which culturally permissible movements appropriate for non-*Higaonon* participation were identified to ensure inclusivity while maintaining cultural respect. The process involved an iterative SAM-driven approach, beginning with the preparation phase that identified basic *Higaonon* dance steps as foundational movement inputs, followed by the iterative design phase where these steps were organized into a culturally appropriate and fitness-oriented routine, and culminating in the development phase that involved prototype creation through a structured video guide and successive refinement based on cultural validation, safety, and usability. The output of this process was *Higaonon Creative Movements*, a culturally grounded fitness routine that integrates Indigenous heritage into contemporary exercise practice and supports both cultural appreciation and physical wellness across diverse participant groups.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in advancing efforts toward cultural preservation, culturally responsive physical education, and community-based wellness initiatives. It serves as a documented account of selected *Higaonon* customary performances, contributing to the safeguarding of Indigenous intangible cultural heritage and supporting cultural continuity within a contemporary context. For the *Higaonon* community, the study reinforces cultural identity and promotes appreciation of traditional practices beyond ritual settings. For Bachelor of Physical Education (BPEd) students, Physical Education teachers, and administrators, the findings provide a reference for culturally sensitive movement analysis, choreography, and curriculum development, helping to address issues of cultural misrepresentation and appropriation in instructional practice. The study also offers dance enthusiasts, fitness practitioners, and choreographers a culturally grounded framework for engaging with Indigenous movements in a respectful and informed manner. Finally, this work contributes to the growing body of literature on indigenized movement practices and may serve as a foundation for future research on Indigenous-based fitness programs, cultural education, and community-centered physical activity initiatives.

Definition of Terms

For clarity and consistency, key terms are defined as used in this study. *Culture* refers to the shared way of life, values, beliefs, and practices of a community, operationalized as the cultural knowledge provided by the *Higaonon* participants. *Dance* is understood as rhythmically patterned movement accompanied by music and, in this study, refers to the interpretation of *Higaonon* movement patterns within a fitness context. *Indigenous group* denotes a distinct cultural community with ancestral ties to specific territories and traditions, specifically referring to the *Higaonon* community of Iligan City. *Music* refers to the locally composed accompaniment used for the *Hataw Higaonon* routine. *Higaonon* pertains to the Indigenous group in Mindanao that served as the cultural source of this study.

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Several *Higaonon* terms are also used. *Anahaw* refers to a leaf traditionally associated with healing practices. *Banog* (hawk) symbolizes territoriality and environmental protection. *Kalasag* (shield) and *bangkaw* (spear) are traditional implements associated with protection and warfare and are referenced in relation to symbolic meaning within *Higaonon* performances.

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to culturally validate *Higaonon* Creative Movements as an Indigenous fitness routine. Qualitative methods were used to document cultural meaning, contextual use, and community acceptance of selected movements through field observation, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews with cultural elders and performers. This approach aligns with ethnographic perspectives that emphasize embodied practice and meaning-making in cultural movement traditions (Ness, 2016; Sklar, 1991). The development process followed an iterative refinement approach guided by the Successive Approximation Model, allowing continuous validation and feedback from the community.

The study was conducted in Barangay Rogongon, Iligan City, a recognized *Higaonon* cultural settlement under the jurisdiction of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples. Participants consisted of ten community members selected for their cultural knowledge and involvement in traditional performances, including the Datu, a Baylan, cultural elders, and community representatives. Purposive and snowball sampling ensured participation of individuals with direct cultural authority and experiential knowledge, a practice commonly used in community-based cultural research (Sklar, 1991).

Data collection proceeded in three stages. The initial stage involved reviewing documented Indigenous performances and identifying movements permissible for fitness adaptation. The second stage focused on structuring these movements into a low-impact routine emphasizing clarity, accessibility, and continuity. The final stage involved cultural validation sessions in which the routine was presented for community review, and feedback on cultural appropriateness, acceptability, and usability was documented and integrated.

Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to cultural meaning and acceptability. Ethical clearance was granted by the Research Integrity and Compliance Office of Mindanao State University–Iligan Institute of Technology, and the study followed NCIP guidelines and the principles of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent.

3. Results and Discussions

Table 1. Classification and Specification of Higaonon Performances

Higaonon Performances	Classification	Specification
Anahaw	Ceremonial Performance	Healing
Binaong	Courtship / Ceremonial Performance	Wedding or gathering
Kapangamuti	Occupational Performance	Stealing of Root Crops
Lagudas	Ceremonial Performance	Sacred Ritual
Saut	War Performance	War or gathering
Sinayaw	Ceremonial Performance	Combination of *Lagudas and Binanog*
Talupak	Occupational Performance	Planting root crops

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Table 2. Permissible Traditional Performances and their Relevance to the Development of Exercise Routine

Permissible Traditional Performances	Extracted Core Movement	Fitnessized Step Name	Movement Description	Rationale of Inclusion
Binaog	Hawk Wing Sweeping Gesture	Hawk Swoop Arm	Alternating sweeping arm motions imitating the movement of a hawk in flight	Enhances shoulder mobility, improves upper-body coordination
	Arm Flicking	Forward-backward handkerchief flicking	Alternate flicking the handkerchief in a forward and backward motion	Enhances shoulder mobility, improves upper-body coordination
	Feet tapping	Rhythmic Foot Tapping	Primary step in doing the exercise routine, stationary alternate feet tapping	Enhances cardiovascular activation, balance, and lower-limb endurance
	Arm Raising	Praising Arm Movement	Raising of hand in all motions, forward, sides, and receding backwards	Enhances shoulder mobility, improves upper-body coordination
Anahaw	Flicking leaf-motion gesture	Wrist-Arm Flicking	Smooth flicking of the wrist up-down-down-up motion	Supports flexibility, encourages rhythmic fluidity
Kapangamuti	Ground plowing and harvesting	Plow and get	Plowing	Promotes grounding, breathing control, and balance
Saut	Striking	Striking and defense	Simulated *Bangkaw* striking and *Kalasag* defense Advancing and retreating	Builds lower-body strength and stability

Table 2 presents the permissible *Higaonon* traditional performances and their corresponding core movements that were adapted into *fitnessized* steps for the *Hataw Higaonon* routine. The selection of movements was guided by cultural permissibility, symbolic clarity, and suitability for non-ritual physical activity. Consistent with dance ethnographic studies, traditional gestures were not replicated in their complete ceremonial

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form but were translated into simplified, functional movements appropriate for contemporary contexts while retaining cultural meaning (Ness, 2016; Sklar, 1991).

Binanog contributed wide, sweeping arm patterns inspired by the hawk's flight, which were adapted into alternating arm motions and rhythmic foot tapping. These movements supported upper-body coordination and cardiovascular engagement while preserving symbolic imagery associated with alertness and environmental awareness, a characteristic noted in Indigenous dance symbolism (Ness, 2016). ***Anahaw*** introduced wrist and arm flicking gestures reflecting leaf movement, promoting fluidity and rhythmic control consistent with ceremonial movement qualities described in Indigenous performance studies (Sklar, 1991). ***Kapangamuti*** provided grounded gestures associated with planting and harvesting, emphasizing balance and controlled motion rooted in occupational practices embedded in everyday life. ***Saut*** incorporated strong advancing and retreating stances symbolizing readiness and defense, reflecting the embodied physicality commonly observed in warrior-oriented performances (Sklar, 1991).

The inclusion of these movements aligns with Cultural Performance Theory, which conceptualizes performance as an embodied social practice through which cultural identity and everyday roles are expressed rather than as purely aesthetic display (Nikitina, 2018). Cultural elders confirmed that the adapted movements did not distort their original meanings, supporting their appropriateness for public and fitness-oriented use. The routine was deliberately structured to exclude sacred or restricted gestures, particularly those reserved for ritual specialists, ensuring ethical compliance and cultural respect.

Table 3. Appropriateness and Acceptability

Theme	Description	Participant Statement	Interpretation
1. Cultural Meaning is Preserved	Movements remain true to symbolic origins	*"Klaro gihapon ang Binanog bisag exercise na siya."*	Movements retain authenticity despite *fitnessization*
2. Fitness Attire is Acceptable	Community does not require traditional garments for non-ritual activities	*"Okay ra nga exercise outfit kay dili man ni ritual."*	Cultural appropriateness depends on context and intention
3. Cultural Pride and Visibility	Community feels honored and represented	*"Maayo nga makaila ang uban sa among kultura."*	Routine strengthens cultural identity and pride
4. Safety and Accessibility	Steps are easy to follow and safe	*"Dali ra sundon, dili bug-at sa lawas."*	Movements meet wellness goals without strain
5. Respect for Cultural Boundaries	No prohibited or sacred gestures included	*"Walay bawal nga lihok nga giapil."*	Researcher followed cultural protocols and boundaries

From a movement perspective, the *fitnessized* steps also demonstrate relevance to physical engagement. Dance-based movements involving sweeping arm actions, rhythmic stepping, and grounded stances have been shown to support coordination, balance, and

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functional strength when adapted with attention to safety and control (van der Krogt et al., 2020). These findings support the dual function of the routine as both culturally meaningful and physically engaging.

Designing an Exercise Routine from Higaonon Creative Movements

The findings demonstrate that a structured exercise routine can be systematically developed from the permissible basic steps of *Higaonon* creative movements. Through the identification of culturally approved performances, *Binanog, Anahaw, Kapangamuti*, and *Saut*, their fundamental gestures were translated into organized warm-up, fitness, and cool-down sequences. The iterative design process ensured that the movements retained their symbolic meaning while becoming suitable for non-ritual physical activity.

Ensuring Cultural Appropriateness of the Adapted Routine

Community consultations confirmed that the adaptation respected *Higaonon* cultural values and protocols. Cultural elders emphasized that the movements did not distort original meanings, that no sacred or restricted gestures were included, and that the use of fitness attire was acceptable in exercise contexts. These validations highlight the importance of community participation in adapting Indigenous practices into contemporary settings without compromising cultural integrity.

Identifying Body Parts and Muscle Groups Engaged in the Movements

Anatomical observation revealed that each movement engaged distinct body regions contributing to flexibility, balance, coordination, and functional strength. *Anahaw* promoted upper-limb mobility and coordination, *Binanog* engaged the shoulders and upper back for endurance, *Kapangamuti* activated the core and hip stabilizers for balance, and *Saut* strengthened the lower extremities for functional stability. Research indicates that dance participation broadly supports components of physical fitness, including strength, coordination, flexibility, and cardiovascular engagement, demonstrating its relevance as a viable form of physical activity (Tao et al., 2022). Similarly, movement programs that incorporate rhythmic and coordinated patterns have been shown to improve balance control and motor competence, further supporting the physical relevance of the adapted routine (Akinci, 2025).

Community Perception of Cultural Acceptability

Participants expressed strong acceptance of the routine as both culturally meaningful and physically accessible. Elders noted that the identity of the movements remained recognizable even when performed as exercise. Community members also emphasized that the steps were easy to follow across age groups and contributed to positive movement engagement. Studies show that structured dance programs enhance psychological and social well-being through coordinated movement and shared participation, which aligns with the community's positive reception of the routine (Zhang & MA, 2025).

Community Insights and Recommendations for Improvement

The community recommended clarifying gender-specific stylistic nuances traditionally present in Higaonon performances, strengthening cultural cues within the choreography,

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and ensuring continued elder involvement in future implementations. These insights underscore the need for sustained community engagement to maintain cultural authenticity and integrity in Indigenous-based wellness initiatives.

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Appendix 1

FGD Interview Guide Questionnaires

Purpose: Elicit participants' perceptions of cultural relevance, engagement/enjoyment, and perceived fitness benefits; gather suggestions for improvement.

Participants: 6–10 students per FGD; 45–60 minutes.

Materials: Audio recorder, consent forms, notetaker's template.

Opening

- Thank you for joining. We'll discuss your experiences with Hataw Higaonon. There are no right/wrong answers; please speak freely. Your responses are confidential.

Core Questions

1. **Cultural relevance**
   - 1.1 What aspects of the routine felt authentically Higaonon to you?
   - 1.2 How did the music, movements, and formations shape your understanding of Higaonon culture?
2. **Learning & skill acquisition**
   - 2.1 Which steps were easiest/hardest to learn? Why?
   - 2.2 What helped you improve (e.g., demonstrations, cues, peer practice)?
3. **Engagement & enjoyment**

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3.1 How enjoyable were the sessions? What made them engaging (or not)?
3.2 What would keep you coming back?

4. **Perceived fitness benefits**
   4.1 How did the routine challenge your stamina, coordination, or flexibility?
   4.2 Did you notice any changes (energy, mood, sleep, soreness)?
5. **Safety & accessibility**
   5.1 Were there steps that felt risky or too difficult? How should we modify them?
6. **Improvement suggestions**
   6.1 What should we add, remove, or change (steps, pacing, music, instruction)?

Closing

- Anything we didn't ask that you'd like to share?

Recording/Analysis: Audio + notes → verbatim transcription → thematic analysis.

Appendix 2

FGD Interview Guide Questionnaires (Bisaya Version)

Katuyoan: Aron makuha ang mga panan-aw sa mga partisipante bahin sa kultural nga kaangayan, kalipay/kahimakas, ug ilang nabati nga mga benepisyo sa kahimsog; ug aron makatigom og mga suhestiyon para sa pagpaayo.
Mga Partisipante: 6–10 ka estudyante matag FGD; 45–60 minutos.
Mga Materyales: Audio recorder, consent forms, template para sa notetaker.
Pag-abli

- Salamat sa inyong pag-apil. Maghisgot ta karon bahin sa inyong mga kasinatian sa Hataw Higaonon. Wala'y husto o sayop nga tubag; pwede mo mosulti nga gawasnon. Ang inyong mga tubag kay kumpidensyal.

Mga Pangunang Pangutana

1. Kultural nga Kaangayan
   1.1 Unsa nga mga bahin sa routine ang inyong nabati nga tinuod nga Higaonon?
   1.2 Unsaon sa musika, mga lihok, ug mga pormasyon ang pagpahimo ninyo nga masabtan pa ang kultura sa Higaonon?
2. Pagkat-on ug Pag-angkon sa Kahanas
   2.1 Unsa nga mga lakang ang pinakasayon ug pinakalisod ninyong tun-an? Nganong mao man?
   2.2 Unsay nakatabang sa inyong pagpaayo (pananglitan, demonstrasyon, mga pahimangno, o praktis uban sa kauban)?
3. Pag-apil ug Kalipay
   3.1 Pila ka makalingaw ang mga sesyon? Unsa ang nakapahimo niini nga makapa-engganyo (o dili)?
   3.2 Unsa ang makapabalik kanimo sa pag-apil pag-usab?
4. Nabating mga Benepisyo sa Kahimsog
   4.1 Giunsa sa routine ang paghamon sa imong kusog, koordinasyon, o pagkamaliksi?
   4.2 Nabantayan ba nimo ang mga kausaban (pananglitan: kusog, mood, tulog, o kasakit sa kalawasan)?
5. Kaluwasan ug Kaangayan sa Tanan
   5.1 Ado na bay mga lakang nga imong nabati nga delikado o lisod buhaton? Unsaon nato kini pag-usab aron mahimong mas angay?

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