ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 5| May 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

EXPERIENCES OF GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS OF LAST MILE SCHOOLS IN HANDLING INDIGENOUS PEOPLE LEARNERS WITH DIFFICULTY IN REMEMBERING, CONCENTRATING, PAYING ATTENTION AND UNDERSTANDING

Genevie C. Avellana
Master of Arts in Education Major in Special Education Area 2: Teaching Learners with Intellectual Disabilities

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra21819
DOI No: 10.36713/epra21819

ABSTRACT

Poor skills in handling Indigenous Peoples (IP) learners with special needs remain a significant challenge. In response, this study explores the lived experiences of general education teachers who have worked with IP learners exhibiting cognitive challenges. A phenomenological approach was employed, and data were gathered through in-depth interviews with eight purposively selected participants. Thematic analysis revealed key themes and associated sub-themes. Under personal factors, the sub-themes identified were: lack of confidence, limited knowledge, and challenged teaching philosophies. Behavioral factors included trial-and-error lesson delivery, improvised attention-management techniques, and adaptations to classroom routines. Environmental factors comprised limited training and resources, irregular policy enforcement, and cultural mismatches. It is recommended that education leaders provide stronger institutional support for teachers in Last Mile Schools to effectively assist Indigenous learners facing memory, attention, and comprehension challenges. This includes fostering meaningful collaboration among stakeholders and developing inclusive, culturally responsive teaching strategies. Prioritizing targeted teacher training and sustained support systems is essential to promote equitable and quality education for all learners.

KEYWORDS: *Experiences of General Education Teachers of Last Mile Schools in Handling Indigenous People Learners with Difficulty in Remembering, Concentrating, Paying Attention and Understanding.*

INTRODUCTION

Poor skills in handling Indigenous People (IP) learners with special needs posed a significant challenge among general education teachers, particularly in underserved and remote communities (Bacani & Panganiban, 2019). These difficulties became more evident when teachers encountered Indigenous learners who struggled with remembering, concentrating, paying attention, and understanding—cognitive challenges that hindered academic engagement, reduced learning outcomes, and created persistent barriers to meaningful educational participation (Battiste, 2013).

International studies documented these struggles across various contexts. In Canada, Battiste (2013) emphasized that Indigenous students encountered cognitive barriers within Westernized classroom settings, which demanded the use of adaptive and culturally sensitive teaching strategies. In New Zealand, Bishop and Berryman (2006) reported that Māori students consistently experienced challenges with attention and comprehension, highlighting the necessity of culturally responsive pedagogy. Similarly, Osborne (2001) observed that Aboriginal learners in Australia were marginalized by mainstream curricula, resulting in disengagement and difficulty in understanding lessons.

In the Philippine context, the Department of Education's Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) Program acknowledged the cognitive challenges faced by Indigenous learners—particularly among Lumad communities—highlighting issues such as memory retention and sustained concentration (Dizon, 2017). Research further indicated that the lack of culturally appropriate instructional materials worsened comprehension difficulties (Bacani & Panganiban, 2019). De Vera (2007) found that Indigenous learners in Mindanao's last-mile schools exhibited significant delays in attention and memory, while Panganiban (2018) observed that integrating local culture into classroom instruction improved comprehension for some learners, though many continued to struggle with focus and understanding.

These cognitive challenges—including difficulties in remembering, concentrating, and processing lesson content—have hindered effective instruction (Dizon, 2017; Bacani & Panganiban, 2019). When unaddressed, such challenges threaten

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 5| May 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

the goals of inclusive education and may adversely affect teacher well-being. As Battiste (2013) and Bishop and Berryman (2006) emphasized, recognizing and responding to cultural and cognitive diversity in classrooms is vital to effective teaching and equitable policy development.

Despite the significance of this issue, few studies have documented the lived experiences of general education teachers working with Indigenous learners facing cognitive challenges (Bacani & Panganiban, 2019). To address this gap, the present research was undertaken.

Statement of the Problem

In this research, I examined the lived experiences of general education teachers in remote schools who worked with Indigenous students facing challenges in memory, concentration, attention, and comprehension. I aimed to understand their daily struggles and the strategies they used in managing these difficulties. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What personal experiences did general education teachers have when working with Indigenous students struggling with memory, concentration, attention, and comprehension?
2. What behavioral challenges did general education teachers experience in managing Indigenous students with these difficulties?
3. What external factors influence the teachers' experiences in supporting Indigenous students dealing with memory, concentration, attention, and comprehension challenges?

METHOD

I considered the phenomenological research approach to be the most suitable method for this qualitative study, as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of teachers in last-mile schools who work with Indigenous learners facing challenges in memory, comprehension, and concentration. This approach provided a deeper understanding of how these educators navigated the unique difficulties of their demanding teaching environments. As noted by Denzin and Lincoln (2018), qualitative research adopts an interpretive and naturalistic perspective, enabling researchers to examine human experiences within their authentic settings—aligning with my objective of capturing the real-world experiences of these teachers. Similarly, Moustakas (1994) highlighted that phenomenological research seeks to uncover the essence of participants lived experiences, making it an ideal approach for understanding the complex realities these teachers encounter daily. Through this method, I gained valuable insights into how they adapted, persevered, and supported Indigenous learners, offering a deeper perspective on their professional and personal journeys.

My study was conducted in a public school within a selected municipality in the Davao del Norte Division, Region XI. This institution is classified as one of the "last mile schools" in the province, situated in an Indigenous community and committed to inclusive education. In the Philippine educational system, last-mile schools refer to institutions in remote and underserved areas that struggle with limited resources, socioeconomic difficulties, and restricted access to quality education. These schools are often located in hinterlands, primarily on Indigenous territories, and encounter significant challenges in providing quality learning opportunities. This particular school was selected as the study site because it allowed access to qualified participants who could provide valuable insights aligned with the research objectives.

This study utilized purposive sampling, a method that Patton (2015) characterizes as the deliberate selection of information-rich cases for comprehensive analysis. Through this approach, eight (8) general education teachers were identified based on their direct experience with Indigenous learners, particularly those encountering difficulties in memory, comprehension, concentration, and attention. To qualify as participants, teachers needed to meet the following criteria: (1) a minimum of two years of teaching Indigenous learners, (2) current employment in hinterland schools, (3) experience handling learners recorded in the Learner Information System (LIS) as having special education needs, and (4) a willingness to fully engage in the study. Those who did not meet these requirements—such as educators with less than two years of experience, those not presently teaching in hinterland schools, or those unwilling to provide informed consent—were excluded. Additionally, any participant who withdrew consent at any stage was immediately removed from the study. This sampling strategy ensured that the selected teachers could offer meaningful insights into the complexities and challenges of educating Indigenous learners with cognitive and attentional difficulties.

This research employed a semi-structured interview guide to collect qualitative data from general education teachers working with Indigenous students who faced difficulties with memory, concentration, attention, and comprehension. Grounded in Social Cognitive Theory, the guide featured open-ended questions that delved into teachers' experiences, teaching strategies, and methods for addressing the cognitive challenges these students encountered. It allowed for flexibility in exploring new themes during the interviews, while still focusing on core areas of the study. To ensure the guide's clarity, cultural appropriateness, and relevance, it was reviewed and validated by experts. Eight participants took part in individual in-depth interviews (IDIs), with each session recorded with the participant’s consent. The data collected was securely stored and anonymized to protect confidentiality throughout the research process.

This study followed a systematic and ethical approach to data collection, organized in chronological order. The initial phase involved the conceptualization of the study and obtaining approval from the Graduate School research panel at Holy Cross of Davao College. Following the panel's approval, an endorsement letter from the Graduate School Dean was acquired and used to formally request permission from the Schools Division Superintendent of DepEd Davao del Norte Division.

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 5| May 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

Once division-level approval was secured, the school principal was sent a letter of request to gain consent for involving the selected participants. This careful process ensured compliance with institutional policies and proper authorization.

In the data collection phase, eight (8) general education teachers were purposively chosen based on their experience and willingness to participate. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before conducting Individual In-Depth Interviews (IDIs). The consent forms outlined the study's objectives, procedures for the interviews, and participants' rights, including the option to withdraw at any time. To maintain confidentiality, interviews were held in private settings and audio recorded. A semi-structured interview guide was employed to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility to explore relevant themes.

The final stage of the study involved data retrieval and management. All interview recordings and transcripts were anonymized using unique alphanumeric codes to ensure participants' privacy. Data were securely stored in password-protected digital files, and physical records were stored in a locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher. Upon completion, all audio recordings were permanently erased, and physical records were discarded according to the data retention policies of Holy Cross of Davao College. The collected data were then analyzed thematically, focusing on identifying patterns and insights aligned with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, to interpret the participants' experiences comprehensively.

This research utilized Creswell's Phenomenological Data Analysis Method, specifically the Modified Van Kaam Method, to examine the complex data gathered from general education teachers who worked with Indigenous learners facing challenges in memory, concentration, attention, and comprehension. As described by Creswell and Poth (2018), this qualitative method enabled a thorough exploration of participants' lived experiences, addressing both observable aspects and the more profound realities of teaching in demanding educational contexts. By following this structured approach, the study aimed to generate valuable insights that could enhance teaching practices, guide policy-making, and improve understanding of the specific needs of Indigenous students with cognitive and attentional struggles.

The analysis process followed six distinct stages. Initially, in the Horizontalization Phase, all relevant statements from participant responses were listed, giving equal weight to each one to encompass a wide array of experiences. In the Elimination and Reduction phase, redundant or overlapping statements were discarded, focusing on the unique aspects that were crucial for understanding the teachers' experiences. During the Thematizing and Clustering stage, similar units of meaning were grouped to identify emerging themes. The Textural Description step then provided detailed accounts of "what" participants experienced, using direct quotations to highlight key themes. In the Structural Description phase, "how" these experiences unfolded was examined, considering the social, psychological, and contextual factors that shaped the teachers' interactions with Indigenous learners. Finally, the Composite Description brought together both the structural and textural elements to create a comprehensive narrative, summarizing the common experiences of the participants and offering a deeper insight into their perspectives on teaching Indigenous learners with cognitive and attentional difficulties.

In this study, the four main components of trustworthiness, confirmability, credibility, transferability, and dependability, were essential in ensuring that the results accurately represented the experiences of the teachers and Indigenous learners. The study aimed to demonstrate that its methodology and conclusions were transferable to other contexts, that the research process was dependable and consistent, and that the findings were shaped by participant preferences rather than researcher bias.

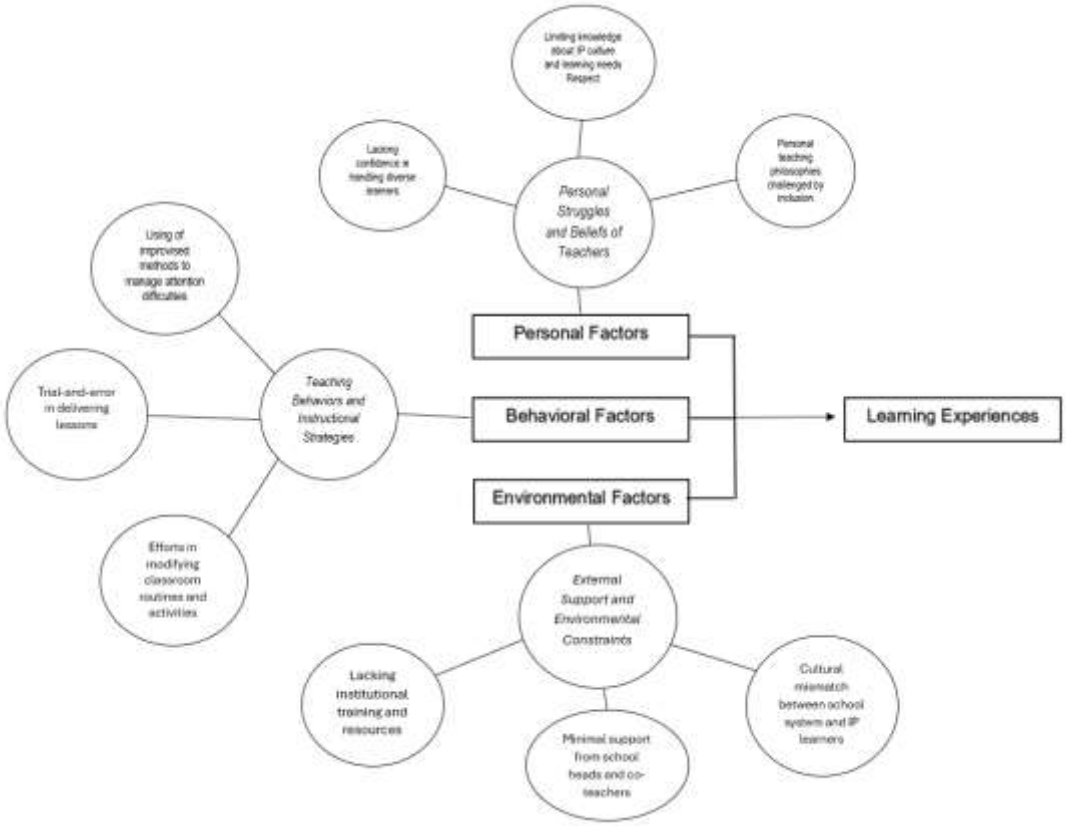
To achieve this, techniques such as long-term participant engagement, member checking (where participants reviewed and validated the findings), detailed descriptions of participants and context, peer debriefing, and maintaining an audit trail of study findings were employed. These approaches helped minimize potential harm by closely examining trustworthiness. As a result, the study ensured that the voices and experiences of teachers and Indigenous learners were fairly represented, that cultural sensitivities were respected, and that the findings had a positive impact on educational practices and policies for Indigenous learners experiencing memory challenges.

RESULTS

The modified paradigm presented a clearer, more systematic framework, illustrating how Personal, Behavioral, and Environmental Factors jointly shaped teachers' experiences with Indigenous learners with special needs. Each domain was expanded with corresponding themes and specific subthemes. Under Personal Factors, it highlighted how teachers' inner struggles, such as lack of confidence, limited knowledge, and challenged teaching philosophies, influenced their learning and teaching behaviors. The Behavioral Factors domain, labeled "Teaching Behaviors and Instructional Strategies," detailed practices such as trial-and-error lesson delivery, improvised attention-management techniques, and adaptations to classroom routines. Finally, the Environmental Factors domain, termed "External Support and Environmental Constraints," was refined to include issues like limited training and resources, irregular policy enforcement, and cultural mismatches, all of which impacted the effectiveness of inclusive education in remote schools.

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 5| May 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

The revised paradigm that illustrated these findings was presented below.



Personal Factors of Teachers in Handling IP Learners with Special Needs

The personal factors of teachers significantly shaped their experiences in handling Indigenous learners with special needs in mainstream classrooms. Under the theme Personal Struggles and Beliefs of Teachers, several sub-themes emerged. These included: (1) Lack of confidence in handling diverse learners; (2) Limited knowledge about IP culture and learning needs; and (3) Personal teaching philosophies challenged by inclusion.

On Lacking Confidence in Handling Diverse Learners. Teachers expressed self-doubt in managing learners with different needs. Based on my interview, it became evident that teaching IP learners with learning difficulties had not been easy for the general education teachers, especially when they lacked the proper knowledge and strategies to effectively address the learners' needs within the framework of inclusive education. As by teacher Shirlyn shared,

> *"Lisod gyud siya Ma'am. Wala man mi training ana, unya basin sayop among mahatag sa bata, labi na kung lain-lain ilang style sa pagkat-on." (T2-Q5-L23)* ("It is truly challenging, Ma'am. We have not undergone any training related to that, and we are concerned that we might provide the wrong support to the child, especially since they have varying learning styles.")

I clearly sensed honesty in her response, and I understood that the uncertainty she had felt in managing the diverse learning needs of IP students was rooted in a lack of confidence. This had stemmed from her feeling of insufficient knowledge about the cultural backgrounds and specific learning needs of IP learners, which had made her feel unprepared for the task at hand. However, this lack of confidence was not only due to inadequate training, but also to a deeper issue — their unfamiliarity with the cultural identities and learning norms of the Indigenous learners they handled.

On Limited Knowledge about IP Culture and Learning Needs. This often led to misunderstandings or unmet needs in the classroom, as teachers struggled to respond appropriately to the unique backgrounds of their IP learners. Teacher Gretch said,

"Wala koy klaro nga background sa ilang kultura, mao nga usahay dili ko makasabot sa ilang kinaiya ug response." (T3-Q7-L35) ("I don't have a clear background of their culture, so sometimes I can't understand their behavior and responses.")

I strongly believed that she had initially applied the same teaching strategies she used for non-IP learners, not realizing

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 5| May 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

that some practices or content were misaligned with the cultural values or learning styles of her IP students. As a result, she had noticed disengagement and confusion among her learners, which made her question her effectiveness as a teacher. This reflection underscored how the lack of cultural knowledge had not only hindered meaningful instruction but had also affected the emotional connection between teacher and learners It became clear that a deeper understanding of Indigenous Peoples' culture was not optional, but essential in creating an inclusive and responsive learning environment.

Despite these difficulties, respect stood out as a guiding value, with teacher Change stated,

> *"Maski lisod, ginarespeto gyud nako sila ug akong ginapaningkamotan nga masabtan sila."* (T4-Q2-L19) ("Despite the challenges, I truly respect them and make every effort to understand.)

I truly appreciated her dedication. Even in the absence of adequate training or cultural background, teacher Change's effort to understand and respect Indigenous learners reflected a deep commitment to inclusive education. Still, beyond confidence and cultural knowledge, another internal challenge emerged. Teachers were also confronted with a need to revisit and, in some cases, revise their own long-held teaching beliefs and practices.

On Personal Teaching Philosophies were Challenged by Inclusion. Their personal teaching philosophies were challenged by inclusion, as they reflected on how their usual approaches did not always work.

Teacher Bhemz said,

> *"Sa una, klaro kaayo akong pamaagi sa pagtudlo, pero karon kinahanglan gyud ko molihok gawas sa comfort zone."* (T6-Q6-L42) ("Before, my teaching approach was very clear, but now I really need to step out of my comfort zone.")

I completely agreed with teacher Bhemz's approach. In my own experience, I found that adjusting teaching strategies according to the learners' individual needs helped make the lessons more accessible. It wasn't always easy, but I saw the positive impact of making those adjustments, as it allowed my Indigenous students to engage better with the lessons and understand the material more effectively. This sentiment was echoed by teacher Gretch:

> *"Sa sugod, naglisod ko og balanse sa akong tradisyonal nga mga pamaagi sa pagtudlo ug sa inclusive nga praktis nga gikinahanglan para sa mga IP learners. Apan, sa paglabay sa panahon, nasabtan nako nga ang pag-adapt sa akong teaching philosophy dili pasabot nga biyaan ang akong mga prinsipyo—kundili, nagpasabot kini nga palapdan ang akong pamaagi aron mahimong mas accessible ang pagtulun-an para sa tanan nga estudyante. Ang hagit niini nakatabang sa akong pag-uswag sa propesyonal ug personal nga aspeto, samtang nagdawat ko sa mga bag-ong estratehiya nga mas nakasuporta sa lain-laing panginahanglan sa akong mga estudyante."* (T3-Q8-L43) ("Initially, I struggled with balancing my traditional teaching methods with the inclusive practices required for IP learners. However, over time, I realized that adapting my teaching philosophy didn't mean abandoning my core values—it meant broadening my approach to make learning more accessible for all students. This challenge allowed me to grow both professionally and personally, as I embraced new strategies that better supported the diverse needs of my students.")

This statement revealed how Teacher Gretch's traditional teaching philosophy had been challenged by the demands of inclusive education. It made me realize how deeply teachers' personal beliefs about teaching had shaped their methods. They often entered the profession with certain ideals about how learning should unfold, but these beliefs were tested when they faced the realities of working with learners who had different needs and backgrounds. Teachers had to adapt and expand their approaches to include a wider range of teaching methods, even if it meant stepping outside of their comfort zones or revising their established practices. This theme highlighted the internal conflict teachers faced as they reconciled their prior philosophies with the evolving needs of their students.

Behavioral Factors of Teachers in Handling IP Learners with Special Needs

Teachers' behavioral responses significantly shaped how they navigated the challenges of inclusive education. Despite lacking formal training, many of them demonstrated notable efforts to adjust their teaching approaches to accommodate IP learners with difficulties in remembering, concentrating, paying attention, and understanding. Three sub-themes emerged under this main theme: (1) Use of improvised methods to manage attention difficulties, (2) Trial-and-error in delivering lessons, and (3) Efforts in modifying classroom routines and activities. In response to the learners' struggles with sustaining attention and focus, many teachers shared how they resorted to self-devised strategies. Their accounts revealed that in the absence of formal training and resources, they improvised methods to maintain engagement and ensure participation.

On Using Improvised Methods to Manage Attention Difficulties. Teachers commonly shared that in the absence of specialized tools or training, they relied on improvised strategies to keep learners engaged. These methods were usually rooted in creativity and instinct rather than formal techniques. Teacher Sheng shared,

> *"Usahay, maghimo-himo lang ko og duwa-duwa nga activity para lang mututok sila. Kung seryoso ra kaayo, dali ra kaayo sila malipat." (T5-Q3-L28)* ("Sometimes, I just created games or activities so they would stay focused. If the lesson was too serious, they got distracted easily.")

Teacher Gretch added,

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 5| May 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

"Wala man koy ready nga materials usahay, mao nga akong ipagamyan ang topic unya ihinay-hinay nakong ihatag para mas maka-focus sila." (T3-Q5-L26) ("Sometimes I didn't have ready-made materials, so I broke down the topic and gave it slowly so they could focus better.")

Based on my experience, especially when I was teaching in remote areas, we often lacked resources. There were times when I expected to have materials ready, but because of the distance and limited support, I had to make adjustments. I also found it effective to introduce the topic gradually, because when I gave everything all at once, the learners became overwhelmed. Breaking down the lesson into smaller parts helped them understand and follow along more effectively. These improvisations, born from necessity, often became the most impactful strategies. While improvisation helped in managing attention, teachers also described how finding the right teaching approach often became a process of trial and error. This sub-theme explores how educators experimented with different strategies—adjusting their lessons depending on how learners responded in real time.

On Trial-and-Error in Delivering Lessons. Teachers acknowledged that they did not always know which strategies would work, so they used trial-and-error to identify effective approaches. This process involved frequent adjustments based on their students' reactions. Teacher Shirlyn stated,

"Dili tanan akong giplano mu-work sa klase. Usahay mag-expect ko nga sayon ra nila masabtan, pero lahi diay. Mao nga magsige lang ko testing-testing." (T2-Q6-L31) ("Not everything I planned worked in class. Sometimes I expected them to understand easily, but it turned out differently. So, I just kept trying different ways.")

Teacher Change expressed a similar experience.

"Kung dili musalir ang akong unang pamaagi, usahay magbag-o ko sa kalit. Murag experiment ba, unya akong tan-awon kung asa sila mas responsive." (T4-Q4-L30) ("If my first approach didn't work, I sometimes changed it on the spot. It was like an experiment, and I observed which ones they responded to better.")

These insights revealed how flexible teachers had to be, often learning through direct experience rather than formal instruction. I experienced the same thing. There were times I thought the lesson was simple and that my learners would understand it right away, but it didn't go as expected. I also had to try different strategies—sometimes even during the lesson itself—just to see what would work. It taught me not to rely on just one approach, especially when teaching learners with attention or comprehension difficulties. Beyond individual strategies and lesson delivery, teachers also recognized the need to revise their daily classroom routines and learning environments. Their willingness to adjust classroom structures highlighted their dedication to creating a more inclusive, responsive, and learner-friendly space.

On Efforts in Modifying Classroom Routines and Activities. Teachers reported that they needed to adjust their routines and activities to accommodate learners who struggled to maintain attention or follow traditional classroom structures. Teacher Bhemz shared,

"Ako gyud gi-usab ang flow sa klase. Dili ko magpugos og straight discussion. Magbutang ko og break or light activity in between para dili sila ma-burn out." (T6-Q4-L37) ("I really changed the flow of the class. I didn't insist on straight discussion. I inserted breaks or light activities in between so they didn't get burned out.")

Teacher Lito added,

"Gibag-o nako ang seating arrangement kada semana para dili sila ma-bored, unya akong ginabutang ang bata nga dali madistract sa dapit nga gamay ra og samok." (T7-Q5-L38) ("I changed the seating arrangement every week, so they didn't get bored, and I placed students who got distracted easily in quieter spots.")

These adjustments reflected a proactive and learner-centered approach. I did the same thing in my own class. I didn't stick to long, straight discussions because I noticed my learners—especially those with short attention spans—would get mentally exhausted. I inserted breaks, fun activities, or even short energizers just to help them reset and refocus. It really made a difference in how they participated. These efforts reinforced the idea that inclusive education required continuous sensitivity to learners' evolving needs.

Environmental Factors in Handling IP Learners with Special Needs

Teachers' ability to respond to the learning needs of IP learners was not solely shaped by their personal or behavioral factors. External conditions also played a significant role. These environmental influences, often beyond the teachers' control, impacted on their confidence, strategies, and willingness to adapt. Under the theme External Support and Environmental Constraints, three sub-themes emerged: (1) Lack of institutional training and resources, (2) Minimal support from school heads and co-teachers, and (3) Cultural mismatch between the school system and IP learners.

On the Lack of Institutional Training and Resources. Many teachers emphasized the absence of formal training and accessible instructional resources tailored to the needs of Indigenous learners with learning difficulties. Without institutional backing, teachers struggled to implement inclusive practices effectively. Teacher Gretch shared,

"Wala man mi seminar bahin sa inclusive education. Kung naa man gani, general ra kaayo ug wala naghisgot og specific sa IP learners nga nay special needs." (T7-Q3-L29) ("We didn't have seminars about inclusive education. If there were, they were too general and didn't specifically talk about IP learners with spcial needs.")

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 5| May 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

Teacher Bhemz echoed this concern,

> *"Lisod kung walay materials nga angay para nila. Maghimo nalang ko sa akong kaugalingon bisan kulang ko og idea." (T6-Q5-L36)* ("It's difficult when there are no materials suitable for them. I had to make my own even if I lacked ideas.")

These insights reflected how the lack of systemic support diminished teachers' confidence and limited their capacity to effectively meet the needs of IP learners. I, too, experienced the challenge of creating learning materials from scratch. Without structured guidance or culturally relevant resources, I often felt that my efforts were insufficient, even though I was genuinely motivated to help.

Beyond the lack of institutional resources, many teachers also felt alone in their efforts, pointing to the minimal support they received from their immediate colleagues and school leaders.

On Minimal Support from School Heads and Co-Teachers. Support systems within the school environment were often weak or inconsistent. Teachers described instances where their concerns about struggling IP learners with special needs were not prioritized. Teacher Haze revealed:

> *"Ninghangyo ko nga tagaan mig mentor or SPED teacher nga matabangan mi, pero hangtod karon wala pa." (T8-Q6-L33)* ("I asked for a mentor or SPED teacher to help us, but until now, we still haven't received any.")

Teacher Meme also noted,

> *"Bisan ako ra ang nag-adjust, wala ko nagduha-duha. Nituo ko nga kung naay usa magsugod, sunod ra ang uban." (T1-Q6-L34)* ("Even if I felt alone in making adjustments, I believed that someone had to start. If my actions help even one learner feel understood, then the effort is already worth it.".")

Although the lack of a collaborative culture often left teachers feeling isolated, I chose to see it as an opportunity to grow. I had moments when I hoped for professional conversations and shared planning, but when these didn't happen, I learned to take initiative. The absence of a strong peer network made the journey more challenging, but it also strengthened my resolve to be a catalyst for change. Looking back, I realized that even small efforts toward inclusivity could inspire others and gradually build a more supportive teaching environment.

In addition to structural and interpersonal gaps, teachers also encountered deeper tensions between the cultural expectations of the school system and the lived experiences of their IP learners with special needs.

On Cultural Mismatch Between School System and IP Learners with Special Needs. Teachers reported that existing school rules, content, and schedules were not always aligned with the cultural beliefs and practices of their Indigenous learners. This disconnect made it harder for IP students to relate to what was taught. Teacher Shirlyn stated,

> *"Naay mga adlaw nga dili musulod ang bata kay naa silay ritwal sa ilang komunidad, pero sa eskwelahan, i-consider siya nga absent." (T2-Q7-L40)* ("There were days when the child didn't come to school because of a ritual in their community, but in school, that was still marked as an absence.")

Teacher Sheng observed,

> *"Dili pud kaayo sila magbasa o motubag sa akong mga pangutana sa klase. Pero sa ilang kultura, ang ilang hilom nga postura nagpamatuod lang nga naghatag sila og dako nga respeto sa klase ug sa magtutudlo. Ang akong nakat-unan gikan niini mao nga kinahanglan nato silang tabangan aron masabtan nila nga ang pagtubag o pangutana dili lang tungod sa pagsupak, apan usa pud ka paagi sa pagkat-on ug engagement."* (T5-Q6-L39) ("They weren't very responsive or quick to answer questions in class. But in their culture, their quiet demeanor simply reflects a deep respect for the class and the teacher. What I've learned from this is that we need to help them understand that responding or asking questions isn't just about challenging the lesson, but also a way to engage and learn.")

These statements emphasized how the school's rigid systems often misunderstood or invalidated Indigenous practices. I also experienced this in my class. There were days when some Indigenous learners were absent because of community rituals or cultural responsibilities. At first, I marked them absent like usual, but eventually I realized that the school system didn't fully recognize or accommodate these cultural practices. It felt unfair, because their absence wasn't due to negligence but because of something deeply rooted in their way of life. It made me think that we need more flexible and culturally sensitive attendance policies for IP learners. Personally, I realized that inclusion is not just about strategies; it is also about honoring the learners' identities. When cultural context is ignored, learners become disengaged, and teachers—no matter how well-intentioned—face barriers in reaching them.

DISCUSSION

Personal Struggles and Beliefs of Teachers (Personal Factors)
Teachers' internal reflections revealed that their self-beliefs, confidence, and teaching philosophies were deeply affected by the inclusion of cognitively diverse Indigenous learners in their classrooms.

***Lack of Confidence in Handling Diverse Learners*.** Teachers consistently reported a lack of confidence in managing classrooms that included learners with cognitive difficulties.

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 5| May 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

Many of them admitted that they felt unprepared to modify lessons, adjust strategies, or address the unique needs of students who struggled with attention and comprehension. This finding supports Bandura's (1997) theory, which posits that individuals with low self-efficacy were more likely to avoid challenging tasks and feel overwhelmed. Similarly, the results aligned with the findings of Sharma et al. (2012), who find that teachers with lower confidence in inclusive settings were less likely to implement accommodation effectively.

Limited Knowledge About IP Culture and Learning Needs. Teachers also described their limited understanding of Indigenous Peoples' culture and learning styles. Most participants acknowledged that their pre-service education and in-service training rarely addressed Indigenous cultural values or cognitive characteristics. As a result, they often resorted to generalized assumptions that failed to engage learners. The finding of this study also supports the claims of Kanu (2007), who emphasizes that teachers in Indigenous communities lacked cultural preparedness, which contributed to student disengagement and academic underperformance.

Personal Teaching Philosophies Challenged by Inclusion. Teachers' personal philosophies of teaching were also challenged by the inclusive context. Many expressed that their beliefs in traditional, lecture-based instruction or uniform performance standards were incompatible with the realities of a cognitively and culturally diverse classroom. Some teachers reported internal conflict, while others gradually revised their pedagogical values to better align with inclusive practices. The finding of the present study supports the claims of Sachs' (2005) notion of "transformative professionalism," in which educators redefined their identities and roles in response to societal change.

Teaching Behaviors and Instructional Strategies (Behavioral Factors)

Despite their personal struggles, teachers actively adapted their instructional behaviors to address the cognitive and cultural needs of Indigenous learners, which led to three emerging sub-themes: the use of improvised methods to manage attention difficulties, trial-and-error in delivering lessons, and efforts in modifying classroom routines and activities.

Use of Improvised Methods to Manage Attention Difficulties. Teachers frequently relied on improvised strategies to sustain learners' attention, including the use of repetitive routines, visual prompts, physical movement, and storytelling. These techniques were developed through personal initiative rather than formal training. Such improvisation aligns with the findings of Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), who argue that inclusive teaching often required creative and responsive practices tailored to the learners' needs.

Trial-and-Error in Delivering Lessons. Most teachers described having used a trial-and-error approach to lesson delivery. In the absence of professional guidance, they experimented with various activities, observed student reactions, and adjusted their strategies accordingly. This behavioral flexibility demonstrated their capacity for reflection and adaptation in response to classroom challenges. This finding supports Schön's (1983) model of the "reflective practitioner" and Bandura's (1991) notion that behavior is shaped through self-regulation and response to feedback.

Efforts in Modifying Classroom Routines and Activities. This study revealed that teachers also modified routines and activities, such as slowing the pacing of lessons, grouping students differently, or giving extended time for certain tasks. These behavioral changes were rooted in their desire to accommodate learners' needs despite limited institutional direction. This statement aligns with Tomlinson's (2014) advocacy for differentiated instruction and highlighted the proactive nature of teaching behavior in the face of cognitive challenges.

External Support and Environmental Constraints (Environmental Factors)

Teachers' actions and attitudes were strongly influenced by external conditions, such as institutional structures, leadership support, and cultural congruence.

Lack of Institutional Training and Resources. One of the most prominent concerns expressed by participants was the lack of training and appropriate materials for teaching learners with cognitive challenges. Teachers reported that professional development opportunities rarely addressed inclusive strategies tailored to the Indigenous context. This finding supported the results of Engelbrecht and Green (2007), who argue that inclusive education often failed when systemic support, such as relevant training and resources, was lacking. In the same way, teachers in this study identified the lack of specialized training as a major barrier in addressing the cognitive needs of Indigenous learners.

Minimal Support from School Heads and Co-Teachers. Teachers also cited minimal support from school administrators and peers. Some experienced neglect from school heads, while others worked in isolation due to a lack of shared vision among colleagues. This absence of a collaborative culture hindered the sustained implementation of inclusive practices. The finding of this study supports Borko's (2004) emphasis on the importance of community-based learning among educators, as the lack of such collaboration revealed a critical structural gap within the schools involved.

Cultural Mismatch Between School System and IP Learners. A recurring theme in this study was the cultural mismatch between school policies and Indigenous learners' worldviews. Teachers described how standardized curricula and teaching methods often contradicted the values and learning preferences of their students, which led to alienation and resistance. This finding supports Battiste's (2013) assertion that the colonial foundations of modern education systems marginalized Indigenous epistemologies.

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 5| May 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

Implications for Practice

The experiences of general education teachers in Last Mile Schools highlighted the need to improve their skills in supporting Indigenous learners with memory, attention, and comprehension challenges. Despite their dedication and use of improvised strategies, these teachers faced significant gaps in institutional support.

As a SPED coordinator and receiving teacher, I strongly encouraged schools, school heads, and education program implementers to give sincere attention to the challenges experienced by teachers in the field. I advocated for a system of collaboration and consultation to develop culturally responsive, inclusive teaching strategies. Addressing the needs of Indigenous learners with learning difficulties was crucial for ensuring equitable education opportunities for all students.

REFERENCES

1. *Bacani, E. L., & Panganiban, M. C. (2019). Challenges of teachers in handling Indigenous learners with special needs. Philippine Journal of Education and Development, 8(2), 34–45*
2. *Bandura, A. (1991). Social cognitive theory of self-regulation. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 50(2), 248–287. https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90022-L*
3. *Bandura, A. (1997). Self-efficacy: The exercise of control. W. H. Freeman.*
4. *Battiste, M. (2013). Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spirit. Purich Publishing.*
5. *Bishop, R., & Berryman, M. (2006). Culture speaks: Cultural relationships and classroom learning. Huia Publishers.*
6. *Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spirit*. Purich Publishing.*
7. *Borko, H. (2004). Professional development and teacher learning: Mapping the terrain. Educational Researcher, 33(8), 3–15. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X033008003*
8. *Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches (4th ed.). Sage Publications.*
9. *De Vera, D. E. (2007). Indigenous education and the Philippine IPRA. In C. R. Embong (Ed.), Globalization and national autonomy: The experience of Malaysia and the Philippines (pp. 211–226). Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.*
10. *Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2018). The SAGE handbook of qualitative research (5th ed.). Sage Publications.*
11. *Dizon, R. M. (2017). Inclusive education in the Philippines: The IPED framework and implementation gaps. Asian Journal of Inclusive Education, 5(1), 18–29.*
12. *Engelbrecht, P., & Green, L. (2007). Responding to the challenges of inclusive education in Southern Africa. African Minds.*
13. *Florian, L., & Black-Hawkins, K. (2011). Exploring inclusive pedagogy. British Educational Research Journal, 37(5), 813–828. https://doi.org/10.1080/01411926.2010.501096*
14. *Kanu, Y. (2007). Increasing school success among Aboriginal students: Culturally responsive curriculum or macrostructural variables impacting school achievement? Interchange, 38(3), 269–282. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10780-007-9048-0*
15. *Moustakas, C. (1994). Phenomenological research methods. Sage Publications.*
16. *Osborne, B. (2001). Teaching, diversity and democracy. In Y. Kanu (Ed.), Teachers and teaching: Theories and practices (pp. 69–91). Harcourt.*
17. *Panganiban, M. C. (2018). Localizing instruction for Indigenous learners: Practices and challenges. Journal of Philippine Pedagogy, 4(1), 22–35.*
18. *Patton, M. Q. (2015). Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice (4th ed.). Sage Publications.*
19. *Sachs, J. (2005). Teacher professionalism: Why are we still talking about it? Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 11(4), 283–293. https://doi.org/10.1080/13450600500105518*
20. *Schön, D. A. (1983). The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action. Basic Books.*
21. *Sharma, U., Loreman, T., & Forlin, C. (2012). Measuring teacher efficacy to implement inclusive practices. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 16(5),530–544. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110903289916*
22. *Tomlinson, C. A. (2014). The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners (2nd ed.). ASCD.*