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IMPLEMENTATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE EDUCATION PROGRAM: INSIGHTS AND ASPIRATIONS OF TEACHERS IN MALABOG DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT
This study explored the challenges, coping mechanisms, and aspirations of elementary teachers in implementing the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program in Malabog District, Division of Davao City. Ten (10) teachers with significant experience in teaching Indigenous learners were selected using purposive sampling and participated in in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Guided by a phenomenological research design and analyzed through Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, the study revealed three major themes regarding the challenges: language barriers and cultural disconnect, lack of culturally relevant resources and materials, and institutional and environmental limitations. For coping mechanisms, themes included culturally-responsive instructional practices, community engagement and collaborative learning, and professional development and adaptive learning. Aspirations and visions were grouped into culturally rooted and community-shaped curriculum, empowered Indigenous learners as future leaders, and active and sustained community collaboration. The findings highlighted the teachers' role as cultural agents who integrate Indigenous knowledge systems into their pedagogy while navigating systemic limitations. These insights may guide DepEd policymakers, school administrators, and future researchers in enhancing culturally relevant, inclusive
KEYWORDS: *Implementation, Indigenous People Education Program*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Constitution of the Philippines provides a range of rights of its citizens, ensuring that they can exercise these rights. However, despite the government's implementation of the Indigenous Peoples Education Program (IPEd) as a significant policy intervention to address the unique educational needs of indigenous communities, challenges still need to be addressed. This program is instrumental in promoting culturally relevant and responsive approaches to persistent issues such as limited resources and insufficient teacher training.

Under the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act or the IPRA law, education should be qualitatively and equally given to the Indigenous Peoples. As mandated in the Implementing Rules and Regulations of Republic Act No. 10533 or the Enhanced Basic Education of 2013, Rule 1, Section 8 on Inclusiveness of Enhanced Basic Education, DepEd Order No. 32 s. 2015, otherwise known as Adopting the Indigenous Peoples Education Curriculum Framework, recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples to basic education that is culturally rooted and responsive (Gulam & Hordista, 2024).

In Australia, stakeholders of indigenous people's education have faced significant challenges over the years, stemming from a complex history of colonization, cultural dispossession, and systemic discrimination. Compared to other populations, Indigenous Peoples typically have less access to and a lower level of education. According to the World Bank (2019), the education of the indigenous people in New Zealand is frequently lacking curricula and teaching techniques that acknowledge the histories, cultures, pedagogies, local languages, and traditional knowledge of their communities.

In addition, the World Bank and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics introduced the Learning Poverty Index in 2019 to spotlight the global learning issue. Ardington et al. (2021) stated that the Sustainable Development Goal 4 aim of universal access to high-quality education by 2030 still needs to be met. In many cases, it is not on track to be met, as high rates of learning poverty are an early indicator that education systems are failing to ensure that children obtain essential basic skills.

Furthermore, in Canada, the lack of specialized training for educators in culturally responsive teaching methods exacerbates the problem. Many teachers are not equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to integrate Indigenous knowledge systems and practices into their teaching. In addition, the discrimination faced by indigenous populations worldwide contributes to the challenges in implementing these educational programs. In many cases, there is a lack of a clear national vision or standards for integrating Indigenous perspectives into the mainstream education system, leading to inconsistent and fragmented approaches (Lumapenet, 2020).

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In the Philippines, Indigenous Education Programs have the potential to play a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage, promoting social justice, and improving educational outcomes for Indigenous learners. However, the implementation of these programs has faced numerous challenges, including limited resources, lack of teacher training, and cultural insensitivity. According to Mateo and Gica (2021), teachers from indigenous communities in Mindoro reported difficulty in aligning the national curriculum with cultural practices due to a lack of materials and capacity-building. Similarly, Cabiles and Recio (2020) identified teacher burnout and limited policy implementation support in the Cordillera Region. Additionally, Baylen and Torrevillas (2022) emphasized the need for community-driven curriculum development in indigenous schools in Palawan to ensure relevance and student engagement.

In addition, the implementation of Indigenous Peoples' Education in the Province of Sarangani has frequently addressed issues and concerns regarding the location of the school. The issues and concerns are a lack of materials, textbooks, and references in the Indigenous Peoples' context. Moreover, contextualization, localization, and indigenization cause additional burden to the teachers; lack of expertise of teachers in indigenous content; parents and Indigenous Peoples' leaders were passive in the education of their learners; peace and order situation; calamities or disaster; tribal conflict, lack of advocacy on the part of the community, and sensitivity (Gulam & Hordista, 2024).

In Davao del Norte, Delos Reyes (2023) found that ALS teachers working with IP learners struggled with adapting instructional content to tribal knowledge systems, and expressed the need for more culturally rooted teaching aids, more training, and closer engagement with tribal councils to ensure curriculum relevance and learner motivation.

This study addresses this gap by providing an in-depth examination of the experiences and insights of teachers in the Malabog District, highlighting the specific barriers they face and the strategies they employ to overcome these challenges. The urgency of this study lies in the need to address persistent issues such as limited resources, insufficient teacher training, and cultural insensitivity that hinder the effective implementation of indigenous education programs. By examining the insights and aspirations of educators implementing the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPE) program, this study contributes to improving education practices by providing evidence-based recommendations. The findings will inform policymakers, educational leaders, and practitioners on best practices and innovative approaches to integrating Indigenous perspectives within the mainstream education system.

Finally, the study holds significant social value as it contributes to addressing community needs in marginalized and indigenous populations. By enhancing our understanding of how teachers navigate the complexities of culturally responsive teaching in indigenous communities, this research promotes equitable and inclusive education. It aims to empower both educators and learners through better implementation strategies, ultimately supporting the preservation of indigenous knowledge and identity while fostering educational success among IP learners in the Philippines.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the level of implementation of the Indigenous People (IP) Education Program in Malabog District, focusing specifically on the dimensions of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. Using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach, the study first seeks to determine the extent to which the IP Education Program is being implemented through quantitative data collection and analysis. It aims to assess how the curriculum is localized to indigenous knowledge, how pedagogy addresses cultural responsiveness, and how assessment practices reflect indigenous learners' realities.

Furthermore, through qualitative inquiry, the study seeks to explore the challenges and barriers that teachers encounter in implementing the IP Education Program, their coping mechanisms, and their aspirations and visions for the future of indigenous education. By integrating the insights from both quantitative and qualitative data, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the current state of IP education implementation, highlight areas for improvement, and offer recommendations that can strengthen and sustain culturally relevant and inclusive educational practices for Indigenous communities. This mixed-methods approach ensures that both measurable trends and lived experiences are captured, offering a holistic view of the realities on the ground. Ultimately, the study aims to serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders committed to
advancing equity and cultural integrity in education.

Statement of the Problem

This study explored the implementation of the Indigenous People's Education Program in Malabog District, Davao City. Specifically, this study aims to offer answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the extent of the implementation of indigenous education programs in terms of the following:
   1.1 curriculum,

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1.2 pedagogy, and
1.3 assessment?
2. What are the challenges and barriers faced by teachers in the effective implementation of indigenous education programs?
3. How do teachers cope with the implementation of indigenous education programs?
4. What are the aspirations and visions of teachers for the future of indigenous peoples' education?

The findings of this study are beneficial to the teachers**.** Teachers can use this study's pertinent data as a starting point to learn new pedagogical approaches that are culturally responsive and effective for indigenous learners. The findings of this study will also guide them in understanding the insights and aspirations of teachers to create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Also, this study benefits the learners. This study sheds light on the implementation of the indigenous education program. It offers insights into a supportive and culturally relevant educational environment, learning about their culture in a positive context, and receiving an education that acknowledges and respects their cultural heritage.

Moreover, the indigenous People's community can benefit from this study. This study sheds light on the implementation of the Indigenous Education Program. The study highlights the importance of cultural preservation and can inspire pride and empowerment within the indigenous community.

Furthermore, this study offers valuable information to the school heads in different schools, as they are pivotal in leading educational institutions. It provides valuable data that can help school heads make informed decisions about curriculum development, pedagogical strategies, and feedback mechanisms. Lastly, this study serves as a guide for future researchers to conduct their own research and gain a deeper understanding of the insights and aspirations of teachers toward the implementation of the indigenous education program.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the Indigenous People (IP) Education Program in the Malabog District. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2021), explanatory sequential design involves initially gathering and analyzing quantitative data, followed by qualitative data collection to further explain or elaborate on the quantitative findings. This design is appropriate for the study, as it allows the researcher to first measure implementation levels across curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, and then deepen understanding of the results by exploring teachers' experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and aspirations.

In the quantitative phase, survey questionnaires were administered to measure the extent of IP Education Program implementation across the identified dimensions. The results of this phase served as the foundation for selecting participants for the qualitative phase. In the qualitative phase, in-depth interviews were conducted to gather rich, descriptive data on the challenges teachers faced, their strategies for overcoming them, and their visions for the future of indigenous education. By integrating the quantitative and qualitative results, the study aims to provide a more holistic view of the realities and aspirations surrounding the IP Education Program's implementation.

Research Participants

The participants of this study were fifty-four (54) public elementary teachers in the selected schools in Malabog District, Division of Davao City, Region XI, during the Academic Year 2024–2025. In determining the participants, this study employed total enumeration sampling, also known as total sampling, which involves including all members of the population who met the specified criteria. Given that the total number of eligible teachers was only fifty-four (54), it is both practical and methodologically sound to include all of them as participants to obtain more accurate and representative insights into the implementation of the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program. Of the 54 identified participants, 44 teachers participated and completed the data collection process for the quantitative phase of the study. The participation of 44 respondents was sufficient to yield reliable and meaningful quantitative results, allowing the researcher to identify patterns and general trends relevant to the implementation of the IPEd Program in the district.

The following were the inclusion criteria utilized in the study: 1) teaching the Indigenous Education Program in the school community, 2) five years as teachers in the IPEd school, and 3) willing and able to participate in the study.

In the qualitative phase, nine (9) teachers undergo in-depth, semi-structured interviews using a validated set of open-ended research questions specifically designed to elicit rich, reflective, and experience-based responses. These questions aimed to explore teachers' insights, lived experiences, and aspirations regarding the implementation of the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program in their respective schools.

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Research Instrument

The researcher utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods in this study. The instruments were based on the mixed-method design used in this study: a survey and an interview. As guided by the method used in this study, the researchers followed the two (2) phases or steps in gathering the data needed for the study.

The first part used to measure the extent of the implementation of indigenous education programs in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. The respondents were asked to rate each item along a five-point scale ranging from 5 to 1. According to Jamieson (2022), the researcher employed a five-point scale. A Likert scale is presented to guide respondents in the evaluation of the statements. The following scale was used in the interpretation of the respondents' answers about the implementation of indigenous education programs in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment.

To ensure the accuracy and consistency of the results, the instruments used in this study underwent a reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha. The survey questionnaire designed to measure the extent of the implementation of indigenous education programs obtained a Cronbach's Alpha value of (0.919), indicating excellent internal consistency. This means that the items in the instrument reliably measure the same underlying constructs, making the tool dependable for collecting valid and consistent data from the respondents.

In gathering the data, the researcher conducted a survey adapted from Gulam and Hordista (2024). The survey questionnaire was slightly modified in consideration of the context of the study. Furthermore, it included instructions to guide respondents in completing the following questions.

The second phase was under the qualitative design which the researcher conducted an in-depth interview. In conducting the in-depth interview, the researcher used a semi-structured guide questionnaire, in which accordingly a semi-structured interview is a type of data collection wherein questions are asked within a defined theme framework. In this guide questionnaire, the researcher may add follow-up questions in order to fully extract the needed information from the participants.

Data Collection

The researcher asked for endorsement from the dean of the Graduate School to conduct the study. Along with the dean's approval, the researcher recommended to the Schools Division Superintendent of Davao City Division to survey public elementary school teachers in the Malabog District during the school year 2024-2025. When the request was approved, the researcher personally arranged with the school principals and teachers.

Upon the approval of the said survey and interview protocol, the researcher finalized the schedule of data collection with the school heads of Malabog District. After the respondents completed the questionnaire, the data were tallied, tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted. After the conduct of the interview, the researchers analyzed the gathered data using appropriate analytical tools and methods.

Data Analysis

This study's responses were analyzed and interpreted using the statistical methods listed below:

Mean

The mean was used as the primary statistical tool to describe the extent of the implementation of the Indigenous People Education Program in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. The mean is a measure of central tendency that summarizes the average responses of participants for each indicator. The results from this analysis provided a numerical overview of the current status of IPEd implementation in the Malabog District.

Thematic Content Analysis

For the qualitative phase, thematic content analysis was employed to systematically analyze the data gathered through interviews. Following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-step process, the researcher first familiarized himself with the data by repeatedly reading the transcripts. Then, initial codes were generated to identify meaningful units related to challenges, coping mechanisms, and aspirations in the implementation of Indigenous education programs. After coding, patterns were organized into themes and subthemes and were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately capture the experiences and insights of the participants. This approach allows for a rich, detailed, and complex interpretation of the teachers' lived experiences, which was crucial in providing depth to the numerical findings of the study. The themes identified were directly linked back to the research objectives and used to explain, deepen, and complement the quantitative results.

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Moreover, to further enhance the credibility of the qualitative analysis, member checking was conducted by returning the summarized themes and interpretations to selected participants for validation. This process ensured that their perspectives were accurately represented and that no significant insights were misinterpreted or overlooked.

Lastly, to strengthen the rigor of the analysis, peer debriefing was also conducted by consulting with a qualitative research expert who reviewed the coding process and thematic development. This provided an external check on the researcher's interpretations, contributing to analytical depth and credibility. Through this collaborative process, the researcher was able to refine the themes and ensure that the emerging findings were grounded in the actual data and aligned with the study's objectives.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Extent of Implementation of Indigenous Education

The findings reveal a very high level of implementation of the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program in Malabog District across curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment (overall mean = 4.35), indicating strong adherence to culturally responsive and inclusive education.

Table 1. Extent of the Implementation of Indigenous Education

Indicator	Mean	SD	Descriptive Equivalent
1. Curriculum	4.26	0.64	Very High
2. Pedagogy	4.40	0.64	Very High
3. Assessment	4.39	0.64	Very High
Overall	**4.35**	**0.64**	**Very High**

Curriculum. The curriculum domain obtained a very high rating (4.26), suggesting strong alignment with Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP). The highest items were: curriculum content and planning reflect the interrelation of subjects (4.52) and curriculum content and planning promote positive attitudes to indigenous languages (4.52). This supports the claims of Smith et al. (2020) that flexible and context-driven curricula enhance learning outcomes. Moreover, the integration of indigenous knowledge counters the dominance of mainstream epistemologies, as highlighted by Shohel et al. (2023). The findings further affirm Pagaddut and Tamana (2024), who emphasized that culturally grounded content increases learner engagement and motivation. Similarly, Tapias et al. (2021) and Batnag et al. (2023) underscored that embedding IKSP across disciplines strengthens both cultural identity and academic achievement.

Pedagogy. Pedagogy registered the highest mean (4.40), reflecting outstanding implementation of IPEd. Teachers connect learning to learners' lived experiences and local environments (4.55). This aligns with Adams et al. (2019), who posited that effective pedagogy integrates content knowledge with cultural relevance. The use of formal, non-formal, and indigenous teaching strategies supports Phelan et al. (2020), emphasizing the importance of integrating indigenous pedagogies. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with Uychoco (2019) on the localization mandate of the K to 12 curriculum. However, slightly lower ratings in community consultation suggest a gap, supporting Hanson and Danyluk (2022), who warned against superficial implementation without authentic community engagement. This also reflects Gebhard (2018), who noted that structural barriers may limit full pedagogical inclusivity.

Assessment. Assessment practices were also rated very high (4.39), indicating strong integration of culturally responsive and community-based evaluation. The highest-rated indicator involved community participation (4.50), supporting Warantz (2019), who emphasized the importance of indigenous voices in assessment processes. The findings align with Tapias et al. (2021), highlighting the value of contextualized and participatory assessment. However, lower ratings in elder involvement and material validation suggest persistent challenges, consistent with Manuel and Queroda (2018), who identified misalignment between national assessment tools and local contexts. Similarly, Cucio (2019) argued that conventional assessment frameworks often fail to capture IKSP, while Pepin et al. (2020) emphasized the need for stronger validation mechanisms. Nevertheless, the results support Imperial (2024), who reported strong implementation of culturally relevant assessment practices.

In totality, the results confirm that the IPEd program in Malabog District is effectively implemented, reflecting the principles of culturally responsive education and community participation, as emphasized by Gulam and Hordista (2024).

Challenges and Barriers Encountered by Teachers

Despite the strong implementation of the Indigenous Peoples' Education in Malabog District, several barriers still persist.

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Language Barriers and Cultural Disconnect. Language differences between teachers and learners hinder comprehension and participation. This supports Benson (2020), who found that non-native instruction reduces learning effectiveness. Similarly, Heugh (2020) emphasized the importance of mother tongue integration, while McCarty and Lee (2019) noted its impact on learner engagement. Malone (2020) further warned that such disconnects may contribute to cultural erosion.

Lack of Culturally Relevant Materials. Teachers reported insufficient localized resources, requiring them to develop their own materials. This aligns with Ball and McIvor (2020), who highlighted the scarcity of indigenous-centered resources. Villegas and Lucas (2021) also emphasized that mainstream curricula often fail to reflect indigenous realities, leading to disengagement (Trudell, 2021; Nalla, 2022).

Institutional and Environmental Limitations. Challenges such as inadequate facilities, unclear policies, and limited support were also identified. These findings are consistent with Hallinger (2020), who linked poor infrastructure to educational inequities. Additionally, Almazan and Arellano (2020) pointed to weak policy implementation, while Gerodias (2023) highlighted risks of cultural and linguistic loss due to systemic limitations.

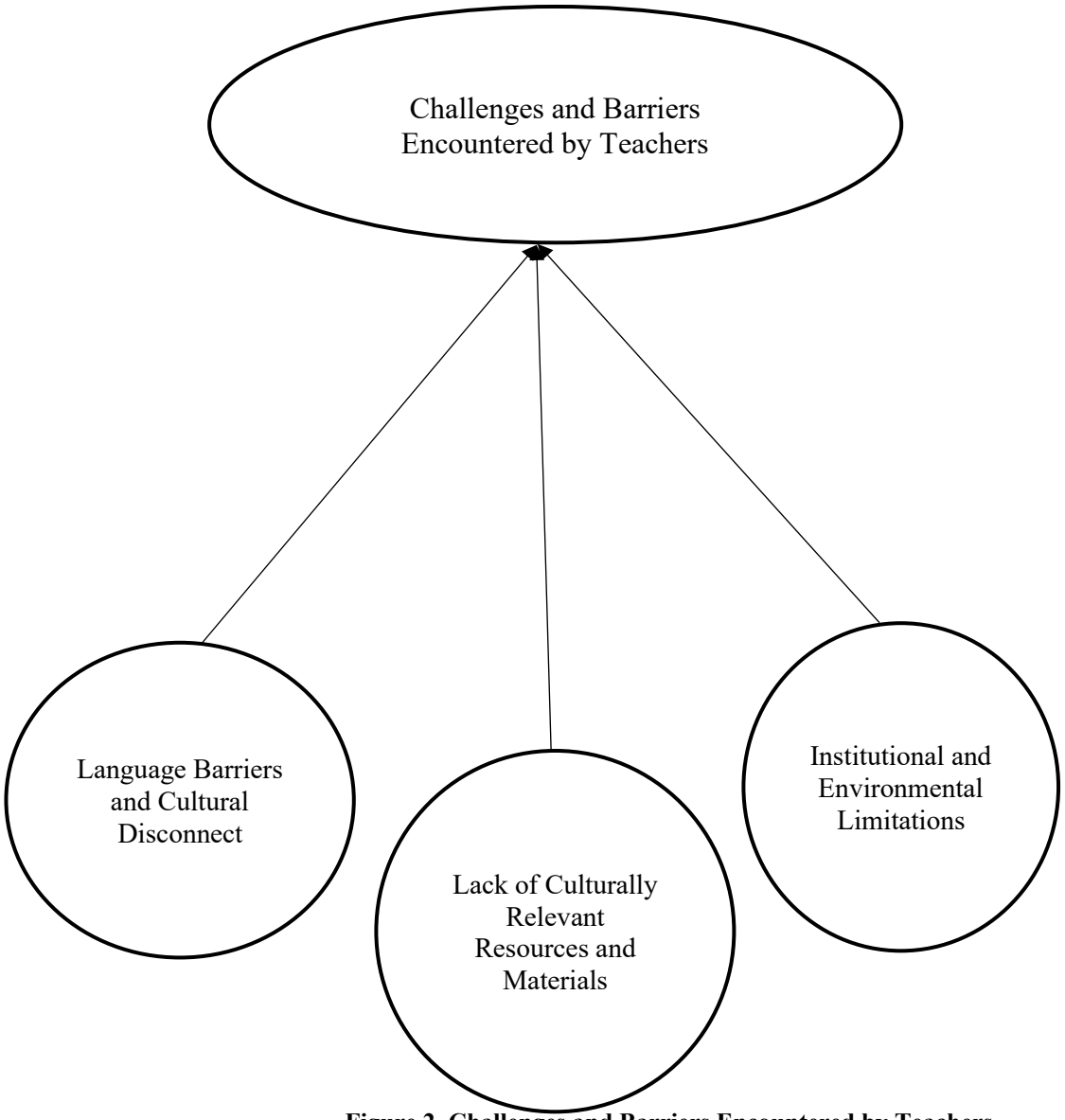


Figure 2. Challenges and Barriers Encountered by Teachers

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Teachers' Coping Mechanisms

Teachers demonstrated resilience through adaptive strategies. These were done in order to improve the program implementation and address specific concerns about the implementation of the IPEd.

Culturally Responsive Instruction. Localization of content and use of indigenous knowledge reflect Gay (2020) and Baylen and Ramos (2021), who emphasized culturally relevant teaching for improved learning outcomes. Underscores the critical role of targeted interventions in sustaining the implementation of the IPEd program and enhancing teacher resilience. By focusing on teacher training, language proficiency, and culturally responsive assessment methods, educational institutions can better support teachers in indigenous communities, ultimately leading to improved educational outcomes. The study highlights that empowering teachers through academic resilience and culturally rooted training is vital for the long-term success and sustainability of indigenous people education programs. Tingson and Quines (2025).

Community Engagement. Collaboration with elders and parents aligns with Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020) and Daniels (2021), highlighting the importance of community-based education. This also supports Alvarez and Ramos (2022) on the role of elders in knowledge transmission.

Professional Development. Participation in training enhances teacher capacity, consistent with Buendia and Garcia (2021) and Tomlinson (2019). However, gaps in sustained support remain, as noted by Casilao and Tenedero (2020).

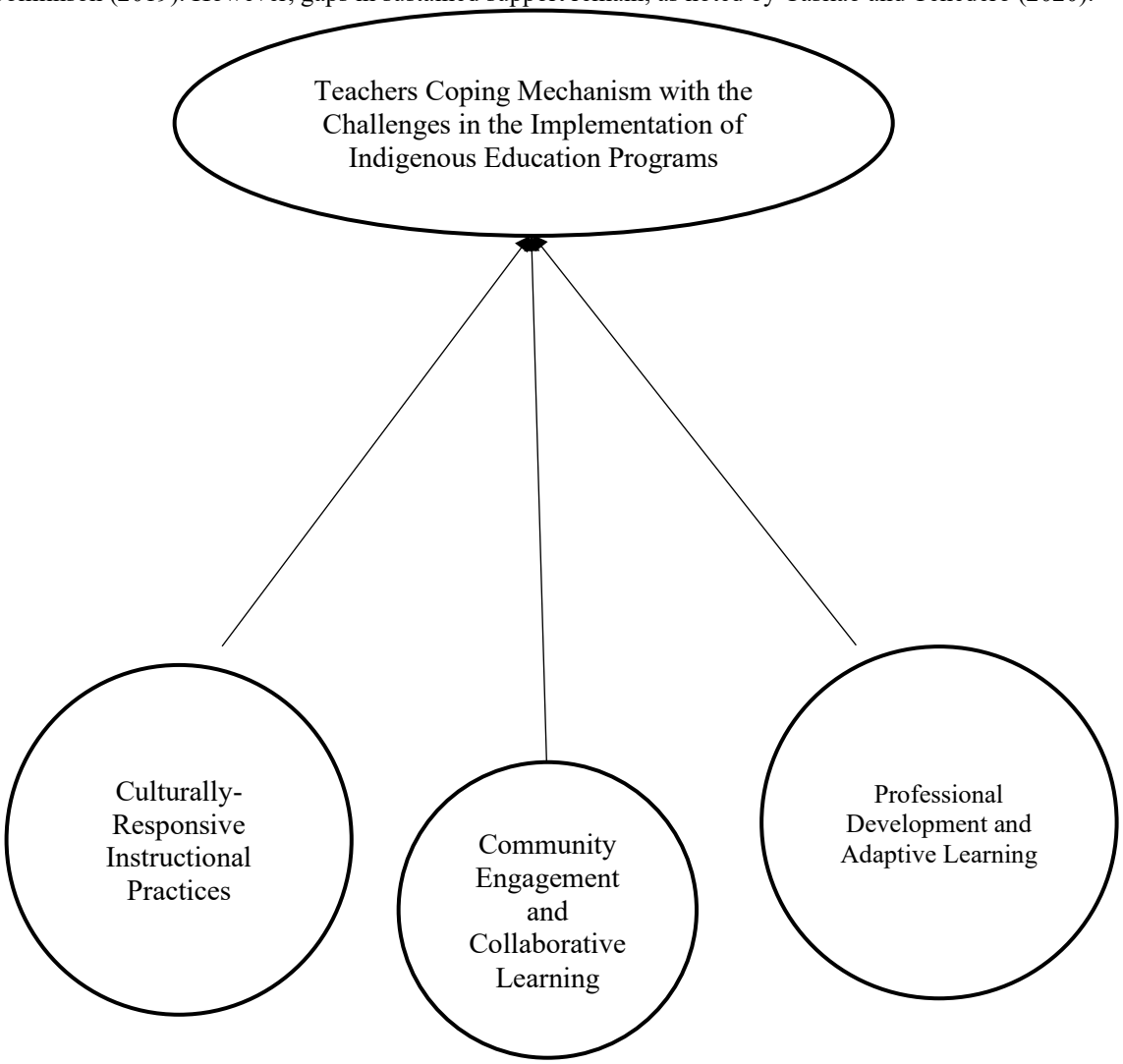


Figure 3. Teachers' Coping Mechanisms with the Challenges in the Implementation of Indigenous Education Programs

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Aspirations and Visions of Teachers for the Future of Indigenous Peoples' Education

This theme captures the forward-looking perspectives of teachers regarding the implementation of Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd). Beyond their current practices, participants articulated a collective vision anchored in cultural integrity, community partnership, and learner empowerment. These aspirations reflect not only professional commitments but also a deeper recognition of education as a vehicle for cultural preservation, social equity, and community transformation. In the context of persistent structural and pedagogical challenges, teachers' visions underscore the need for systemic reforms that are inclusive, culturally grounded, and community-driven.

Culturally Rooted and Community-Shaped Curriculum. A dominant aspiration among participants is the development of a curriculum that is deeply embedded in indigenous culture and co-constructed with the community. Teachers emphasized that indigenous knowledge, languages, and traditions should not merely supplement the curriculum but should constitute its core foundation. This perspective highlights a shift from rom simply adding culture to making it the foundation of learning, where indigenous ways of knowing define the structure and content of education. Teachers also emphasized the importance of integrating local histories, oral traditions, and participatory teaching strategies such as storytelling and experiential learning. These findings resonate with Gay (2020), who identified teachers as key agents in advancing culturally responsive curricula, and with Escorial (2023), who emphasized the importance of documenting and institutionalizing indigenous knowledge systems. The envisioned curriculum is not static but dynamic, which means continuously shaped by the lived experiences of the community.

This aspiration of teachers in Malabog District, shows a shift toward making the curriculum more inclusive of indigenous perspectives, where communities themselves play a key role in shaping knowledge instead of relying only on centralized institutions. This approach strengthens cultural authenticity in the teaching and learning process and increases learner engagement, making education a means of preserving culture rather than replacing it.

Empowered Indigenous Learners as Future Leaders. Another central theme in teachers' aspirations is the development of learners who are both academically competent and culturally grounded, proud of their community. Participants consistently expressed the desire to nurture students who are confident in their identity, fluent in their mother tongue, and proud of their heritage. This vision reflects a transformative approach to education that goes beyond academic achievement to include identity formation, self-efficacy, and leadership development. Teachers view IPEd as a platform for producing individuals who can contribute meaningfully to both their communities and the broader society. This aligns with Smith (2021), who argued that culturally responsive education enhances motivation and leadership by affirming learners' identities. Similarly, Bang et al. (2019) emphasized that education plays a critical role in sustaining indigenous identity and promoting self-determination. Importantly, the findings suggest that empowerment is understood as holistic development**,** encompassing cognitive, cultural, and social dimensions of teaching and learning. As noted by Galang (2022), such an approach is essential in addressing historical marginalization and fostering long-term community development. Thus, teachers' aspirations extend beyond individual success toward collective empowerment and improved quality of life within indigenous communities.

Active and Sustained Community Collaboration. Teachers also envisioned a future where collaboration between schools and indigenous communities is institutionalized and sustained. Rather than serving as occasional contributors, community members, particularly elders and community leaders, are seen as co-educators who actively participate in curriculum design and instructional delivery. This reflects a reconceptualization of education as a shared process, where knowledge is co-created and validated by the community. Teachers highlighted the importance of continuous dialogue, mutual trust, and collaborative planning in ensuring that educational practices remain culturally relevant and responsive. These insights support Castagno and Brayboy (2020), who emphasized the role of schools as bridges between formal education and indigenous cultural systems. Likewise, Tupas and de Guzman (2021) found that community engagement enhances learner participation, identity formation, and overall educational outcomes.

From a critical perspective, sustained collaboration addresses the gap between policy and practice by grounding educational processes in local realities experienced by teachers in the implementation of IP Education. It also ensures cultural accuracy and prevents misrepresentation, particularly in the transmission of indigenous knowledge.

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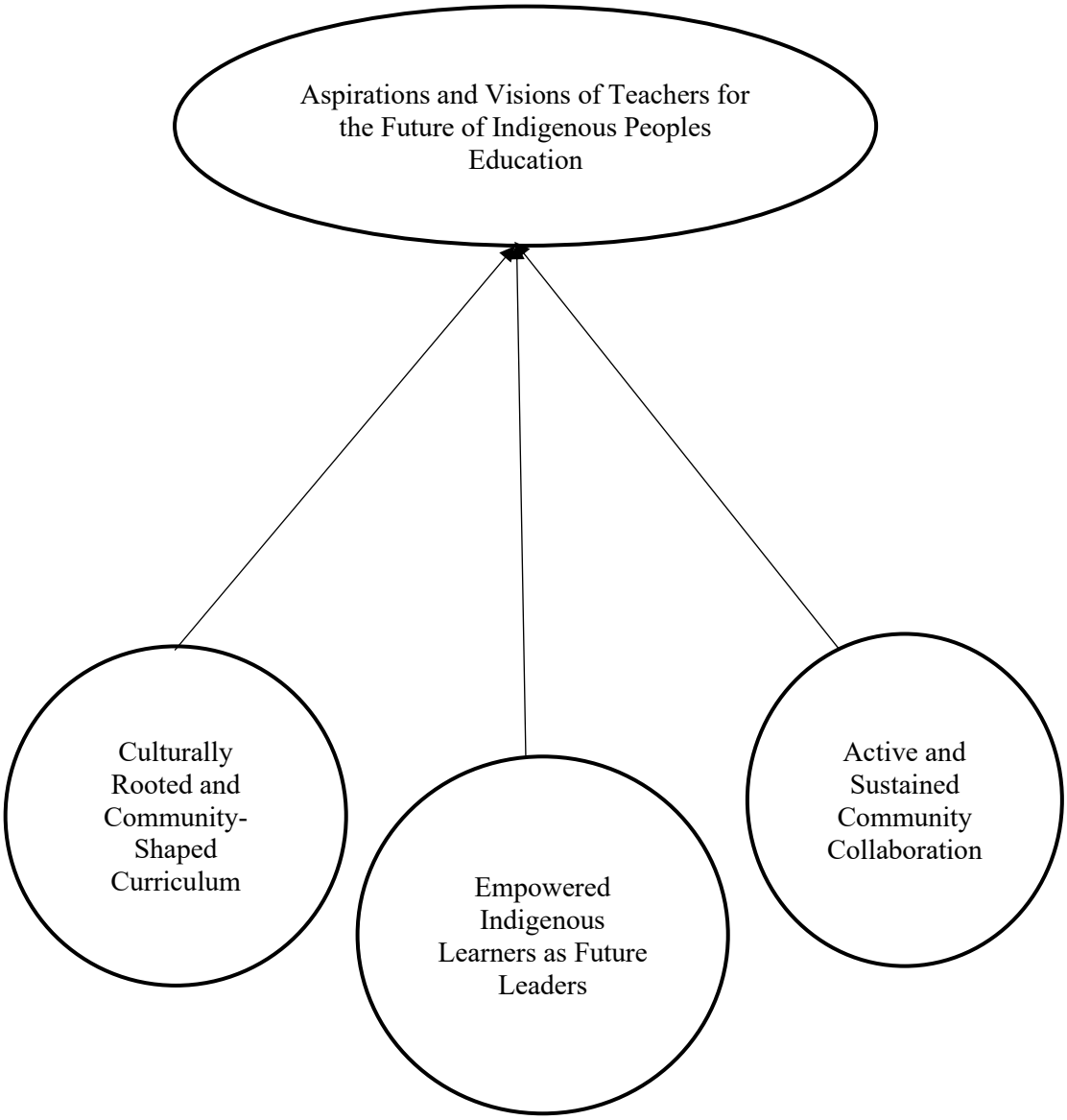


Figure 4. Aspirations and Visions of Teachers for the Future of Indigenous Peoples Education

IV. IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Implications

Based on the result of the quantitative analysis, among the three indicators, *pedagogy* received the highest mean score, closely followed by *assessment* and *curriculum*. Despite slight variations, all three indicators were descriptively rated as "very high," suggesting a strong and consistent implementation across the program. The overall mean further affirms that the general level of implementation is very high, indicating a substantial commitment to indigenous education principles in Malabog District, Davao City Division.

The overall descriptive equivalent of "very high" implies that the schools in Malabog District are performing exceptionally well in embedding indigenous education principles across curriculum design, teaching methodologies, and evaluation mechanisms. This result reveals the dedication of educational stakeholders to upholding the objectives of the IPEd Program and addressing the unique cultural and learning needs of indigenous learners.

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Based on the results of the thematic analysis of the responses of the participants, the following findings and their corresponding themes were revealed:
The challenges of teachers with the implementation of the indigenous education program revealed three themes, namely: *language* barriers and cultural disconnect, lack of *culturally* relevant resources and materials, and institutional and *environmental* limitations. The coping mechanism of teachers was culturally-responsive instructional practices, community engagement, collaborative learning, professional development, and adaptive learning. The aspirations and visions shared by the participants revealed three themes: *culturally* rooted and community-shaped curriculum, empowered indigenous learners as future leaders, and active and sustained community collaboration.

The findings of this study hold significant implications for educational practice, teacher development, curriculum reform, and community engagement in Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) in the Philippines. First, the strong desire of teachers to implement a *culturally* rooted and community-shaped curriculum highlights the need for the Department of Education and local schools to institutionalize more localized, indigenized, and community-authenticated content. Formal efforts to preserve oral traditions and indigenous knowledge systems should be supported by policy, training, and funding mechanisms.

Second, the emphasis on empowering indigenous learners as future leaders suggests that IPEd should go beyond heritage preservation and be framed as a tool for developing civic agency and leadership capacity. This calls for a transformative model of education that merges cultural identity with competencies in advocacy, leadership, and sustainability.

Third, the importance placed on active and sustained community collaboration reflects a call for shared ownership of education among teachers, parents, elders, and local leaders. Educational leaders and policymakers must cultivate multi-stakeholder governance, where community voices are embedded in planning, delivery, and assessment processes.

Lastly, the teachers' call for professional development and adaptive learning implies that in-service training programs must be contextualized and *culturally* responsive. This means designing workshops that integrate community wisdom, recognize indigenous pedagogies, and empower teachers to innovate in complex socio-cultural settings.

The results of this study are strongly aligned with Freire's (1970) Critical Theory, particularly his assertion that education should be a practice of freedom where learners become conscious of their reality in order to transform it. Teachers in the study viewed their role not only as instructors but also as cultural agents and community advocates, echoing Freire's belief in the dialogical nature of education. Their efforts to contextualize learning, preserve indigenous traditions, and empower students to become leaders reflect the liberatory pedagogy Freire promoted. By enabling students to see their heritage as a source of strength and legitimacy, the IPEd program, as implemented by these teachers, exemplifies education that challenges oppression and supports critical consciousness.

Similarly, the study resonates with John Dewey's Community-Based Learning Theory, which emphasizes that learning is most meaningful when it is grounded in the lived experiences and communal interactions of learners. The teachers' emphasis on community collaboration, *culturally*-rooted curriculum, and experiential learning activities exemplifies Dewey's principle of learning-by-doing within social contexts. The strong role of elders, parents, and local leaders in the learning process echoes Dewey's call for schools to function as microcosms of democratic society, where knowledge emerges from shared inquiry and active participation. The findings affirm that community is not peripheral, but central to meaningful learning particularly in indigenous contexts where identity and place are inextricably linked.

Together, Freire and Dewey's theories illuminate the dual focus of IPEd as both liberatory and experiential, challenging systems of marginalization while grounding education in culturally resonant practice. The alignment of this study with their philosophies supports continued investment in teacher training, curriculum decolonization, and sustained partnerships with indigenous communities.

Future Directions
The findings of this study point to several important directions for future practice and research. For teachers, future efforts may focus on building stronger communities of practice that allow the continuous exchange of culturally grounded pedagogical strategies. Given their vital role as cultural mediators and educators, teachers would benefit from sustained training in culturally responsive teaching, contextual material development, and trauma-informed approaches tailored to Indigenous learners. Programs that amplify teacher leadership in curriculum co-design with elders and local experts can strengthen their agency and confidence in delivering relevant instruction rooted in Indigenous epistemologies.

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For school leaders and administrators, future directions may emphasize establishing institutional mechanisms that support the integration of indigenous knowledge systems into school governance and instructional planning. These include forging formal partnerships with Indigenous councils, incorporating traditional leadership structures into school decision-making processes, and creating safe, inclusive learning environments that honor cultural practices. A shift toward shared leadership that involves both formal administrators and community elders may enhance trust and co-ownership of the IPEd vision.

For DepEd policymakers, future initiatives should include reviewing and reinforcing policies to ensure adequate resource allocation for IPEd implementation. This includes developing clearer operational guidelines, localized curriculum standards, and accountability frameworks that are responsive to Indigenous communities' needs. National policies must go beyond symbolic support by ensuring tangible investments in teacher training, infrastructure, culturally aligned learning materials, and inclusive monitoring systems that involve IP stakeholders in evaluation. It is also essential to institutionalize regular consultations with indigenous leaders and educators to ensure policies reflect grassroots realities. Furthermore, funding mechanisms should be made more accessible to remote schools to reducedisparities in program execution across regions.

For future researchers, the current study opens multiple avenues of inquiry. Further research could examine the longitudinal effects of IPEd on Indigenous student identity formation, civic participation, and educational attainment. Mixed-method or participatory action research approaches involving learners, families, and elders can provide richer, community-authored insights. Comparative studies between regions with varying levels of IPEd implementation can also shed light on best practices and persistent challenges. Moreover, future research should aim to amplify indigenous voices in scholarly discourse, helping decolonize educational research frameworks and methodologies.

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