

Unheard Voices Of The Far: Indigenous Teachers' Journey In Teaching English

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Abstract

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples teachers in teaching English at Lumigo Integrated School, Glan 1 District, Division of Sarangani. Anchored on Sociocultural Theory, Constructivism, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and Krashen's Language Acquisition Theory, the study examined how indigenous teachers experienced, strategized, and coped with the demands of English instruction in a culturally and linguistically diverse learning environment. Five indigenous teachers were purposively selected as participants. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological approach. Findings revealed that indigenous teachers faced challenges related to irregular learner attendance, limited instructional resources, budget constraints, insufficient training, and learners' limited exposure to English. Despite these barriers, they employed bilingual instruction, code-switching, culturally relevant pedagogy, integration of indigenous traditions, experiential learning, and community-based support mechanisms. The study concluded that indigenous teachers serve not only as language instructors but also as cultural stewards, mediators, and advocates who balance English proficiency with cultural preservation. The findings call for culturally responsive teacher training, adequate resource provision, strengthened IPed implementation, and institutional support for indigenous educators.

Keywords: *Indigenous teachers, English instruction, Indigenous Peoples education, bilingual instruction, culturally responsive pedagogy, phenomenology.*

Introduction

English instruction in indigenous communities is a complex educational concern because teachers are expected to develop learners' English proficiency while also protecting their cultural and linguistic identity. In the manuscript, language is presented not only as a tool for communication but also as a carrier of cultural heritage, values, and worldview. This makes the teaching of English in indigenous communities more sensitive because English may function both as a language of opportunity and as a possible source of cultural and linguistic tension.

Teachers who teach English in indigenous communities' face challenges that require deep understanding of both language and culture. Wodon and Cosentino (2019) emphasized that English teachers in indigenous contexts encounter unique challenges and opportunities because they work within learners' linguistic and cultural realities. Similarly, Leaño et al. (2019) found that indigenous learners in the Philippines often experience difficulty in mastering English because of limited exposure to the language outside school.

This difficulty is also evident in Lumigo Integrated School, where most learners are indigenous. The manuscript states that previous Phil-IRI and Mean Percentage Score records from School Year 2022 to 2024 showed that learners struggled with English proficiency because of limited exposure, lack of culturally responsive materials, and systemic barriers in curriculum implementation.

The integration of English in indigenous education also raises concerns about the possible erosion of native languages and cultural identities. Macdonald et al. (2022) emphasized that indigenous teachers support learners' English competence while also preserving and promoting native languages and cultural practices. Dacudao (2022) further stressed the need for pedagogical strategies that respect and integrate Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

Despite the growing attention given to indigenous education, there remains a gap in studies focusing specifically on indigenous teachers teaching English. Napil and San (2020) noted the limited literature on the experiences of indigenous teachers in English instruction, while Dedel et al. (2023) observed that most studies focused on indigenous learners' language acquisition rather than on teachers' strategies and challenges. Thus, this study explored the lived experiences, strategies, roles, and coping mechanisms of indigenous teachers in teaching English.

The study answered the following questions:

1. How do indigenous teachers describe their experiences and journey in teaching English?
2. What strategies do indigenous teachers employ in English teaching?
3. How do indigenous teachers characterize their roles in teaching English?
4. What coping mechanisms do indigenous teachers employ to overcome challenges in teaching English?

Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design using a transcendental phenomenological approach. This design was appropriate because the study aimed to explore and describe the lived experiences of indigenous teachers in teaching English. The manuscript explains that transcendental phenomenology allowed the researcher to uncover the essence of participants' experiences through epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings.

The study was conducted at Lumigo Integrated School in Glan 1 District, Division of Sarangani. The school was purposely selected because it is an Indigenous Peoples Education-implementing school and has indigenous teachers teaching English. The locale was also relevant because Barangay E. Alegado has a dominant indigenous population composed of Blaan, Obo-Manuvo, and Taga-kaulo groups.

The participants were five indigenous teachers from Lumigo Integrated School. They were selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: they were permanent DepEd teachers, members of the Blaan, Obo-Manuvo, or Taga-kaulo group, had at least three years of teaching experience, taught English, and were willing to participate in the study.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. Before the interviews were conducted, the researcher secured permission from concerned authorities and obtained informed consent from the participants. The interviews were audio-recorded with permission, transcribed, reviewed repeatedly, and analyzed thematically.

The data were analyzed using Moustakas' thematic analysis framework. The process involved epoche, horizontalization, identification of significant statements, clustering of themes, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings and essences. This process helped reveal the central experiences, strategies, roles, and coping mechanisms of indigenous teachers in teaching English.

Results

The findings revealed four major areas: the experiences and journey of indigenous teachers, their strategies in teaching English, their perceived roles, and their coping mechanisms.

First, indigenous teachers described their journey in teaching English as challenging because of irregular learner attendance, financial hardship among learners, remote living conditions, poor weather, limited instructional resources, budget constraints, and lack of training. These conditions disrupted lesson continuity and affected English language development. The manuscript identified learner absenteeism, limited resources, and lack of professional development as major concerns that shaped the teachers' experiences.

Second, the teachers employed bilingual instruction, code-switching, contextualized examples, indigenous stories, cultural practices, and experiential learning. These strategies helped make English more understandable and meaningful to learners. Anderson (2022) supported the use of culturally relevant examples in English lessons, while Kanu (2005) emphasized the value of bilingual or multilingual education in helping learners acquire English

while maintaining their native language. Sharmin (2019) also noted that indigenous language may be used to explain complex English concepts and bridge the gap between the native language and English.

Third, indigenous teachers viewed their role as broader than classroom instruction. They saw themselves as English teachers, cultural mediators, cultural stewards, and advocates of indigenous identity. Bourke and Mulcahy (2021) supported this view by noting that indigenous teachers often carry a dual role: teaching English while preserving the cultural identity of their communities.

Fourth, the teachers coped with instructional challenges through creativity, improvisation, peer collaboration, localized materials, and community support. They used available resources, adjusted lessons based on learner needs, and integrated indigenous knowledge into classroom activities. Their coping mechanisms showed resilience and commitment to both English learning and cultural preservation.

Analysis

The findings show that English instruction in indigenous communities is not only a language-teaching task but also a cultural and institutional responsibility. Indigenous teachers must teach English while ensuring that learners remain connected to their indigenous language, traditions, and identity. This supports Dacudao's (2022) view that English instruction in indigenous contexts requires strategies that respect and integrate Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

The use of bilingual instruction and code-switching suggests that indigenous language is not a barrier to English learning. Instead, it functions as a bridge that helps learners understand English concepts. This finding agrees with Kanu (2005), who emphasized that bilingual or multilingual education supports English acquisition while reinforcing learners' native language. It also supports Sharmin's (2019) claim that indigenous language may be used to explain difficult English concepts before transitioning to English.

The findings also affirm the value of culturally responsive pedagogy. Anderson (2022) emphasized that connecting English vocabulary and grammar to familiar cultural concepts helps learners understand new language structures. Inocian et al. (2019) also stressed that local customs, ecological knowledge, and traditional practices may be used to frame English lessons in ways that relate to learners' daily lives.

Moreover, the findings reveal that many of the challenges experienced by indigenous teachers are structural rather than merely instructional. Learner absenteeism, poverty, remoteness, lack of materials, and limited training affect the quality of English instruction. These conditions show the need for stronger institutional support, localized learning materials, and professional development programs designed for indigenous education contexts.

The study further implies that indigenous teachers should be recognized not only as implementers of the English curriculum but also as cultural workers who protect and transmit indigenous knowledge. Their work requires pedagogical skill, cultural sensitivity, and community collaboration.

Discussion

The study concluded that indigenous teachers play an important role in balancing English language instruction and cultural preservation. Their experiences showed that English teaching in indigenous schools is affected by irregular learner attendance, limited resources, inadequate training, and learners' limited exposure to English. However, indigenous teachers responded to these challenges through bilingual instruction, code-switching, contextualized teaching, culturally responsive pedagogy, indigenous knowledge integration, experiential learning, and community collaboration.

The study further concluded that indigenous teachers are not only English language teachers. They are also cultural mediators, cultural stewards, and advocates of indigenous identity. Therefore, effective English instruction in indigenous communities requires culturally responsive materials, teacher training, school-community partnerships, and stronger institutional support for Indigenous Peoples Education.

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