

Du Ha Baytan: The Courageous Journey of Elementary Indigenous People Education Teachers

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Abstract: This study used descriptive phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of IPED elementary teachers in remote, mountainous areas of Zone 2, Division of Zambales. Purposive sampling was used to select participants, and data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The data was analyzed using McMillan & Schumacher's (2010) five-phase approach for qualitative research, and Bingham's (2023) five-phase process for thematic analysis, providing a structured framework for data interpretation and ensuring trustworthiness. The findings were identified key challenges, including language barriers, limited resources, inadequate teacher preparation, and infrastructure limitations. Conversely, teachers reported positive outcomes such as improved student academic performance, strengthened cultural identity, and enhanced teacher competency. To overcome these challenges, teachers employed strategies centered on language preservation, community engagement, and resourcefulness. The study advocates for community-led IPED programs, culturally sustaining education, and targeted interventions. Recommendations include developing culturally relevant resources, providing ongoing professional development, and strengthening policy frameworks to support Indigenous communities in leading their educational initiatives, ultimately aiming for educational equity and cultural revitalization.

Keywords: IPED Education, Challenges in IPed Curriculum Implementation, Success in IPed Curriculum Implementation, Teaching Strategies, Elementary Teachers, Phenomenology.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Ensuring quality and equity in education was a persistent global challenge. Despite significant strides in many regions, disparities in access, resources, and outcomes continued to hinder progress. Through the lens of Indigenous Peoples, there stood a more complex picture. In response, the Convention Against Discrimination in Education, adopted by UNESCO in 1960, was a crucial international instrument that directly related to the challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples in accessing quality and equitable education, (UNESCO, 2024).

DepEd teachers in the Philippines faced numerous challenges in their profession. These included difficulties in implementing new curricula, (Solomo, 2021), and addressing students' poor reading comprehension (Estrella, 2022). The primary concern was the inadequate teacher salaries, with the addition of insufficient and misaligned training, a congested and poorly structured curriculum, and ineffective teaching methods, all contributing to poor student performance, (Yu, 2023). These

issues, coupled with financial instability and inadequate health provisions, led some educators to seek overseas opportunities (Cahilog, Sarong, & Arcila, 2023).

According to a report from UNICEF, (2024), the Philippines had made progress in expanding access to education, particularly in rural areas. However, challenges in ensuring quality and equity persisted, like climate change, the need for digitalization, and achieving sustainable development. The Philippines faces a severe learning crisis that threatens the nation's future development. Despite educational reforms including infrastructure improvements and curriculum enhancements, the country's dismal performance in international assessments like PISA 2018 and TIMSS 2019 reveals persistent challenges (Bautista & Aranas, 2023; Generelao, Ducanes, Yee, & David, 2022). Millions of students remain functionally illiterate, able to read but unable to comprehend meaningfully (Tonalet, 2025). To fully strengthen these moves, House Bill 9037 was passed which sought to

institutionalize the deployment of teachers to barrios, or rural communities, to address the educational needs of children in these areas, Llego (2019). Additionally, the implementation of the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) curriculum was a significant step towards culturally relevant and academically rigorous education for Indigenous Peoples, (Verdida, Malon, & Macalisang, 2024). The framework's focus on curriculum design, teaching methodologies, and learning resources demonstrated a commitment to creating an educational environment that was deeply rooted in IP culture. The implementation of the framework proved to be challenging in terms of cultural understanding, resource constraint, capacity of teachers in teaching IPED, and community engagement. Despite the challenges of serving a deprived community, the teachers found their work rewarding and fulfilling. Felongco, Protacio, Abdulwahab, Blanca, Gagil, Rodriguez, San Juan, & Vegafria, (2022), revealed that teachers' experiences in the rural community highlighted the complex interplay of challenges and rewards associated with their profession. Despite facing life-threatening situations, limited resources, and arduous commutes, the teachers expressed a deep sense of connection with the community and satisfaction in their work, Lariosa, Diendo, & Espinosa, (2022). Their adaptability and resilience were crucial in providing quality education to their students.

While previous studies acknowledged the significant strides made in improving access to education, particularly for Indigenous Peoples (IPs) in the Philippines, it identified a crucial research gap: the effectiveness of the IPED curriculum in improving educational outcomes for IP learners. The researcher was inspired by the tales that other teachers told during conferences and intended to provide valuable insights into the practical challenges and successes experienced by teachers in implementing the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) curriculum, which would be the basis for an intervention program to address the problems encountered in the implementation of the said curriculum.

The primary goal of the study was to explore the experiences of teachers in facilitating the IPED curriculum in elementary schools in Zone 2, Division of Zambales, in order to inform the development of targeted interventions to support teachers and improve educational outcomes in these underserved communities.

Exploring the unique experiences of teachers in IPED schools helped gain a deeper understanding of the challenges they faced, identified areas for improvement, and ultimately contributed to the enhancement of education quality in these often-underserved areas. The study served as a critical resource for making IPED curriculum more relevant, effective, and supportive of the needs of indigenous communities and their learners.

II. METHODS

➤ *Research Design*

Descriptive phenomenology was the research method used in this study as it aimed to understand the lived experiences of IPED teachers in remote, mountainous areas. This qualitative approach allowed for a deep exploration of teachers' perceptions, emotions, and interpretations of their experiences, providing valuable insights into the challenges and successes they encountered. As rooted in Husserl's philosophy, aiming to uncover the essential meanings of human experiences through first-person accounts (Sinfield, Goldspink, S., & Wilson, 2023). By focusing on the lived experiences of participants, phenomenology allowed researchers to delve into the universal essences that underlie shared experiences (Shorey & Ng, 2022). This phenomenological approach was particularly effective as it allowed the study to capture the common ground and variations in teachers' experiences, providing a rich, detailed understanding of their professional lives.

➤ *Respondents and Location*

IPED elementary teachers in Zone 2, Division of Zambales were the primary focus of this study. This specific population provided a valuable opportunity to explore the unique challenges and experiences of teachers implementing the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) curriculum in remote, mountainous areas. A total of 15 teachers from the three districts of Botolan, Iba, and Palauig, participated in the study. They were purposively selected according to the following criteria: (1) The participants had to be full-time IPED teachers in Zone 2, Division of Zambales; (2) Teachers should have had at least one year of experience teaching the IPED curriculum; and (3) the Teachers had to be willing to share their experiences and perspectives openly and honestly.

➤ *The Instrument*

The primary instrument for data collection in this study was semi-structured interviews. The researcher developed an interview guide containing a set of open-ended questions based on the research questions and the conceptual framework to ensure that the interview questions aligned with the study's objectives. To enhance the quality and effectiveness of the interview process, the researcher conducted a few pilot interviews with IPED teachers who were not part of the main study. The pilot participants' feedback was needed for the clarity, relevance, and effectiveness of the questions, ensuring that the data that would be collected was reliable, valid, and relevant to the research objectives.

➤ *Data Collection*

The qualitative data collection for this study followed a structured, five-phase process adapted from McMillan & Schumacher, ensuring a comprehensive and ethical approach. The process began with a Planning phase that involved scouting locations in Zambales and securing the necessary permissions from school administrators and the NCIP. This was followed by the Beginning Data Collection phase, which focused on

building rapport and trust with the IPED teachers and observing their work context to create a comfortable and open interview environment. The researcher then moved to Basic Data Collection, a phase of deep immersion where they not only gathered data but also engaged in continuous analysis and developed tentative interpretations. This dynamic process allowed for adjustments to data collection strategies and informant selection based on emerging insights.

The Closing Data Collection phase marked the end of interviews, with the decision to stop based on the quality and sufficiency of the information gathered to address the research question. The study then moved into the Completion phase, which involved a deep dive into data analysis and interpretation. The researcher organized, analyzed, and synthesized the collected data to pinpoint key themes and patterns, using visual aids like charts and diagrams to illustrate relationships and present the results clearly. Throughout the entire process, the researcher maintained a strong commitment to ethical standards by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring they fully understood the purpose and procedures of the study.

➤ Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis for this study was systematically implemented using Bingham's five-phase process, a structured framework that combined deductive and inductive coding with guided memoing to ensure trustworthiness. The process began with Organizing the Data, where the researcher immersed themselves in transcripts, took initial notes, assigned attribute codes, and recorded memos of their initial analytic procedures. This was followed by Sorting Data into Relevant Topical Categories, which used deductive coding based on study objectives to filter and structure the data. Next, the researcher performed Open/Initial Coding, using the constant comparison method to generate and refine a comprehensive set of new, emergent codes that captured all key themes. The fourth phase, Identifying Patterns, Themes, and Findings, involved pattern coding to group similar codes into broader, more meaningful themes and synthesize them into clear findings, with continuous memoing to document evidence for the final report. The analysis concluded with Applying Theory and Explaining Findings, where the researcher connected the findings to existing literature and theoretical frameworks, using inductive strategies and analytic memoing to construct a nuanced argument and highlight the study's unique contribution and significance.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

➤ Primary Challenges Faced by Teachers in Implementing the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) Curriculum

The findings revealed four primary challenges teachers faced in implementing the IPED curriculum, these were: (1) language barriers, (2) limited relevant resources, (3) teacher preparedness and support, and (4) accessibility and infrastructure. Teachers implementing the IPED curriculum faced primary challenges centered around language barriers,

hindering communication and comprehension for both educators and students due to a lack of fluency in local dialects. They also struggle with limited access to relevant and updated instructional materials and resources, often exacerbated by remote locations and poor internet connectivity. Furthermore, a lack of adequate teacher preparedness, including linguistic and cultural competency, coupled with a shortage of indigenous teachers and limited community support, impedes effective delivery. Finally, accessibility issues due to poor infrastructure, hazardous travel conditions, and long distances further complicate the implementation process for both teachers and students.

➤ Key Successes and Positive Outcomes Observed by the Teachers in the Implementation of the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) Curriculum

Three (3) valuable themes centered on the key successes and positive outcomes observed by teachers in the implementation of the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) curriculum appeared based on the interview: (1) Improved Academic Performance and Skills, (2) Strengthened Cultural Identity and Awareness, and (3) Enhanced Teacher Competency and Professional Growth. Notably, they reported enhanced student engagement and participation, with students becoming more active and motivated in learning due to the curriculum's relevance to their culture and daily lives, leading to improved attendance. Academic performance and essential life skills such as problem-solving and critical thinking also improved as the curriculum encouraged experiential learning and community involvement. Furthermore, IPED fostered positive changes in students' attitudes towards education, making it more meaningful and empowering. A significant outcome was the strengthened cultural identity and self-esteem among Indigenous students as they gained a deeper understanding and appreciation of their heritage, traditions, and languages, which also broadened their worldviews and promoted inclusivity. Finally, teachers themselves experienced enhanced cultural competency, professional growth, and gained meaningful opportunities within the IPED implementation.

➤ Strategies Employed by Teachers to Overcome these Challenges and Effectively Deliver the IPED Curriculum

Teachers employed various strategies to overcome challenges and effectively deliver the IPED curriculum, by (1) improving language and communication, (2) employing resourcefulness and innovation, (3) using contextualization and localization, (4) initiating collaboration and community engagement, and (5) incorporating cultural sensitivity and respect. They prioritized the use of students' mother tongue as the primary language of instruction while also developing their bilingual proficiency in the English and Filipino. Many teachers actively learned the local language and immersed themselves in the community's way of life to indigenize lessons, often using local examples and materials readily available in the surroundings to make learning more relatable. They also contextualized and localized the curriculum by adapting teaching materials and assessments to the community's specific

cultural context, connecting learning to students' daily lives through storytelling, cultural events, and interviews with community members. Collaboration was a key strategy, with teachers working closely with elders and community members, involving them in teaching, and collaboratively planning lessons to integrate indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Furthermore, teachers demonstrated resourcefulness and innovation by developing alternative teaching resources and employing diverse teaching strategies, including technology integration. They also advocated for resources and support from various stakeholders. Central to their approach was cultural sensitivity and respect, where they valued and incorporated indigenous knowledge, promoted cultural preservation, and created culturally inclusive classrooms where all students felt welcomed, respected, and valued.

➤ *Proposed Intervention Plan to Address the Problems Encountered in the Implementation Based on the Study's Findings*

Based on the study's findings, the proposed intervention plan to address the problems encountered in the implementation of the IPED curriculum centered on two main themes: Empowering Indigenous Communities and Culturally Sustaining Education. The intervention plan aimed to empower Indigenous communities through community ownership of IPED, supported by teacher cultural competency training and partnerships. It also focused on culturally sustaining education via supportive policies, enhanced teacher capacity in indigenous knowledge and languages, and the collaborative design of relevant curricula with elders, ultimately creating inclusive and equitable learning environments.

IV. CONCLUSION

The teachers' experiences, as presented through the emerged themes, described the challenges, successes, strategies and proposal future intervention plans for a more enhanced and sustainable IPED curriculum implementation. The teachers faced significant hurdles, primarily language barriers, resource limitations, and teacher preparedness. Despite these challenges, they have demonstrated remarkable successes in improving student academic performance and strengthening cultural identity through culturally responsive pedagogy. Teachers effectively employ resourcefulness, community engagement, and cultural sensitivity to overcome challenges, emphasizing the critical need to empower Indigenous communities and foster culturally sustaining education through ongoing teacher training and collaborative partnerships, ultimately aiming to create a transformative and equitable education system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To realize genuinely effective and equitable Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd), a unified, multi-stakeholder strategy is essential, moving beyond current systemic limitations to embrace community empowerment and cultural sustainability. Simultaneously, School Administrators and IPED Teachers

must foster a culture of knowledge-sharing and collaboration, proactively documenting and disseminating successful, context-specific strategies while actively contributing their on-the-ground expertise to the intervention plan. Crucially, Indigenous Communities must be empowered to ensure full ownership and self-determination in IPEd by actively supporting their language vitality, communicating infrastructure needs, and enriching curriculum delivery with their invaluable cultural wisdom.

In addition to the systemic and policy recommendations, a crucial, teacher-centric intervention is proposed to ensure the sustainability and quality of IPED implementation: the "Gabay - Talagháy" Program: Indigenizing Teachers for a Sustainable IPED Curriculum Implementation. The "Gabay - Talagháy" program (meaning Guidance - Resilience) is a direct investment in the IPED teachers, who are the linchpin of the curriculum's success. Recognizing the emotional and professional demands of navigating language barriers, resource limitations, and cultural bridging in Zambales, the program aims to cultivate resilience (Talagháy) and provide guidance (Gabay) in pedagogy. This dual focus ensures that teachers not only develop the inner strength to manage challenges and maintain their well-being but are also equipped with the knowledge and skills to fundamentally shift their teaching. This shift centers on integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs), thereby making the curriculum relevant, engaging, and genuinely culturally affirming for Indigenous learners.

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