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PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

Year: 2026 · Volume: 57 · Issue: 1 · Pages: 66–60

Document ID: 2026PEMJ5912

DOI: 10.70838/pemj.570105

Manuscript Accepted: May 26, 2026

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Abstract

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Keywords: Professional Development, Phenomenology, Teachers, Philippines, EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT

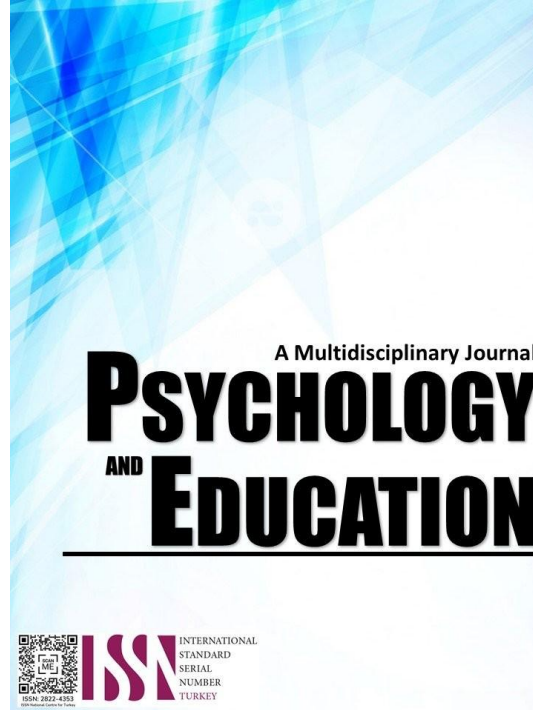
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NAVIGATING TRANSCULTURAL EDUCATION: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF NON-LOCAL TEACHERS IN THE TBOLI IPED PROGRAM



PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

Volume: 57

Issue 1

Pages: 49-60

Document ID: 2026PEMJ5541

DOI: 10.70838/pemj.570105

Manuscript Accepted: 05-18-2026

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Abstract

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Keywords: *educational management, professional development, teachers, phenomenology, Philippines*

Introduction

Teaching in Indigenous education contexts involves navigating complex cultural, linguistic, and pedagogical differences that influence instructional effectiveness and teacher adaptation. In such settings, uncertainty emerges as a persistent condition due to variations in cultural knowledge systems, communication patterns, and educational expectations. For non-local teachers, this situation requires continuous adjustment, cultural sensitivity, and reflective practice to ensure meaningful engagement with Indigenous learners.

International literature indicates that teachers assigned to Indigenous communities often experience significant challenges related to cultural unfamiliarity, language barriers, and limited contextual understanding of Indigenous lifeways. Studies in countries such as Australia and Canada report that these factors contribute to instructional difficulties, weak teacher-student relationships, and, in some cases, teacher attrition in Indigenous schools (Brown, 2021; Johnson, 2021; Smith, 2021). These findings underscore the importance of culturally responsive teacher preparation, sustained professional support, and mentorship systems to enhance teacher effectiveness and retention in Indigenous education contexts.

In the Philippines, the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) Program of the Department of Education was established to promote culturally responsive and inclusive education for Indigenous learners. However, implementation challenges persist, particularly among non-local teachers who often struggle to integrate Indigenous knowledge systems, language, and cultural practices into classroom instruction. This gap between policy intentions and classroom realities affects instructional relevance and learner engagement (Clark, 2020; Gonzales, 2022; Ramirez & Dela Peña, 2023; Reyes, 2023; Santos, 2022; Villanueva, 2020). In the Tboli West District of the Schools Division of South Cotabato, these challenges are more pronounced, as many teachers are not native to the community and have limited exposure to Tboli culture and language.

Despite the growing body of literature on Indigenous education, existing studies largely focus on general teacher challenges in multicultural settings and provide limited empirical evidence on the specific lived experiences of non-local teachers implementing IPED within the Tboli context. There is a lack of in-depth qualitative inquiry that captures how these teachers emotionally, culturally, and professionally negotiate their roles while adapting to Indigenous educational environments. This constitutes a significant research gap, particularly in understanding the subjective and contextual realities of teachers working in geographically and culturally distinct Indigenous communities.

Addressing this gap is essential for improving the implementation of culturally responsive education. In the absence of context-specific

evidence, teacher support programs may remain generic and insufficiently responsive to actual classroom conditions. In the Tboli West District, ongoing instructional and cultural adaptation challenges suggest the need for a deeper understanding of how non-local teachers experience and respond to IPED implementation at the ground level.

Thus, this study aimed to explore the lived experiences of non-local teachers implementing the IPED Program in the Tboli West District, focusing on their challenges, coping strategies, emotional responses, and professional growth within transcultural teaching contexts. By providing rich, context-specific insights, the study seeks to inform improvements in teacher preparation, professional development, and culturally responsive instructional support systems.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to educational psychology and multicultural education by deepening understanding of teacher adaptation in Indigenous settings. Furthermore, they may guide policymakers, school leaders, and teacher education institutions in strengthening IPED implementation through targeted training, structured mentoring, and enhanced community engagement. Ultimately, this study supports the broader goal of promoting culturally sustaining and inclusive education for Indigenous learners in the Philippine basic education system.

Research Questions

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore the lived experiences of non-local teachers in the implementation of the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) Program in Tboli West District, Schools Division of South Cotabato. Specifically, it sought to answer the following grand tour and sub-questions:

1. How do non-local teachers describe their lived experiences in implementing the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) Program in Tboli West District?
2. How do non-local teachers perceive their experiences in implementing the IPED Program?
3. What emotional experiences do non-local teachers encounter in the implementation of the IPED Program?
4. How do these experiences influence the teaching practices and pedagogical approaches of non-local teachers?

Literature Review

Experiences of Non-Local Teachers in Indigenous Learning Environments

Non-local teachers assigned to Indigenous learning environments encounter multidimensional challenges that extend beyond instructional demands. These include cultural unfamiliarity, linguistic differences, and adjustment to geographically isolated and socially distinct communities. Such conditions require teachers to exercise cultural sensitivity, adaptability, and resilience as they negotiate unfamiliar norms, values, and educational expectations. In response, teachers commonly modify instructional practices through culturally responsive strategies such as storytelling, experiential learning, peer translation, visual aids, and community engagement to enhance learner participation and contextual relevance (Bautista, 2020; Carter, 2021; Garcia, 2020; Johnson, 2021; Lee, 2022; Martinez, 2020; Reyes, 2022; Rivera, 2021; Tan, 2023).

However, the literature also highlights that these experiences are not solely deficit-based. Engagement in Indigenous education settings fosters professional growth by developing teachers' intercultural competence, empathy, and reflective practice. Through sustained interaction with Indigenous communities, teachers progressively transition into roles as cultural learners and facilitators of inclusive education rather than mere content deliverers (Anderson, 2020; Brown, 2021; Evans, 2023; Fernandez, 2020; Harris, 2021; Kim, 2023; Miller, 2023; Rodriguez, 2020). Despite these gains, existing studies tend to generalize these experiences and seldom differentiate context-specific lived realities, particularly in localized Indigenous settings in the Philippines.

Challenges Faced by Non-Local Teachers in Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED)

A consistent theme in the literature is the presence of intersecting linguistic, cultural, emotional, and structural challenges faced by non-local teachers in Indigenous contexts. Language barriers remain a primary constraint, often limiting effective communication and reducing learner participation. Cultural incongruence further complicates instruction, particularly when teachers lack familiarity with Indigenous epistemologies, traditions, and community learning practices (Adams, 2021; Garcia, 2020; Johnson, 2021; Lee, 2022; Martinez, 2020; Rivera, 2021).

Beyond classroom-related concerns, structural and organizational factors intensify these difficulties. Teachers frequently report inadequate instructional resources, geographical isolation, limited professional development opportunities, and insufficient institutional support systems. These conditions contribute to emotional strain, professional isolation, and reduced job satisfaction, which may ultimately affect teacher retention and instructional quality (Fernandez, 2020; Harris, 2021; Kim, 2023; Mendoza, 2020; Reyes, 2022; Santos, 2022; Walker, 2021).

Additionally, ethical and relational tensions emerge when institutional expectations intersect with Indigenous cultural practices. Teachers must navigate cultural humility while balancing curriculum requirements and community expectations. Although studies emphasize the importance of mentoring and community-school partnerships in addressing these concerns, such interventions remain inconsistently implemented, particularly in remote Indigenous areas (Carter, 2021; Clark, 2020; Davis, 2020; Ocampo, 2022;

Villanueva, 2020).

Overall, while the literature recognizes the complexity of challenges in IPED implementation, most studies present generalized accounts and provide limited empirical focus on specific Indigenous communities in the Philippine context, particularly among non-local teachers in the Tboli West District.

Coping Mechanisms of Non-Local Teachers in Indigenous Education Settings

In response to these challenges, non-local teachers adopt various coping mechanisms that facilitate adaptation and professional functioning in Indigenous learning environments. A commonly reported strategy is cultural immersion, including learning local language expressions, traditions, and community practices, which enhances communication and strengthens relational trust with learners and stakeholders (Garcia, 2020; Johnson, 2021; Lee, 2022; Rivera, 2021).

Social and institutional support systems also play a critical role. Mentorship from experienced teachers, collaboration with local educators, and engagement with community leaders contribute to reducing professional isolation and improving classroom effectiveness. These relational supports foster a sense of belonging and shared responsibility in Indigenous education (Fernandez, 2020; Harris, 2021; Roberts, 2021; Santos, 2021).

At the psychological level, teachers utilize reflective practice, emotional regulation, self-care strategies, and work-life balance to manage stress and prevent burnout. Such adaptive strategies are often complemented by participation in professional development activities and community-based initiatives that strengthen instructional competence and cultural awareness (Anderson, 2020; Brown, 2021; Evans, 2023; Miller, 2023; Perez, 2023; Ramirez, 2023).

Collectively, these coping mechanisms demonstrate that teacher adaptation in Indigenous contexts is an active and evolving process. However, the literature largely conceptualizes coping in broad terms without deeply examining how these strategies are lived and experienced within specific Indigenous communities such as the Tboli.

Insights on Teaching and Cultural Adaptation in Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED)

Cultural adaptation is widely recognized as a central dimension of effective teaching in Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED). Teachers who successfully engage with local culture, language, and traditions are better able to design meaningful learning experiences and establish stronger relationships with students. Conversely, cultural dissonance and reliance on standardized instructional approaches may hinder learner engagement and marginalize Indigenous knowledge systems (Adams, 2021; Martinez, 2020; Rivera, 2023; Torres, 2023).

The literature emphasizes that culturally responsive pedagogy—such as storytelling, experiential learning, and community-based instruction—enhances instructional relevance and affirms Indigenous identity. Collaboration with Indigenous elders, parents, and community members is also identified as a key mechanism for bridging cultural gaps and integrating Indigenous knowledge into formal education systems (Evans, 2023; Flores, 2022; Mendoza, 2020; Reyes, 2022; Walker, 2021).

Furthermore, intercultural competence, mentorship, and reflective teaching practices are consistently highlighted as essential for sustaining teacher adaptation. These competencies enable teachers to critically examine assumptions, respond appropriately to cultural differences, and reposition themselves as co-learners within Indigenous contexts (Barrios, 2021; Hernandez, 2020; Ortega, 2022; Tan, 2023).

Despite these insights, persistent challenges such as burnout, limited institutional support, and inadequate localized training continue to affect IPED implementation. Moreover, existing research rarely focuses on geographically and culturally distinct Indigenous settings in the Philippines, particularly the lived realities of non-local teachers in the Tboli West District. This study addresses this gap by providing a phenomenological exploration of how teachers experience, interpret, and respond to cultural, emotional, and pedagogical demands within Indigenous education contexts.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of non-local teachers implementing the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) Program in the Tboli West District. This design was deemed appropriate as it focuses on understanding individuals' lived meanings, subjective interpretations, emotions, and experiences within a specific sociocultural context (Creswell & Poth, 2021; Merriam & Tisdell, 2020; Van Manen, 2021).

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which enabled participants to openly describe their experiences related to cultural adaptation, instructional challenges, emotional responses, community engagement, and professional identity formation in Indigenous learning environments.

For data analysis, the study primarily utilized Colaizzi's phenomenological method, which provided a systematic process for extracting, organizing, and synthesizing significant statements into formulated meanings and emergent themes. The steps included familiarization

with transcripts, identification of significant statements, formulation of meanings, clustering of themes, and development of exhaustive descriptions, followed by validation through participant feedback. Thematic analysis was integrated within Colaizzi's framework to support the organization and interpretation of recurring patterns across narratives (Giorgi, 2021; Moustakas, 2020).

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed. Bracketing and reflective journaling were used to minimize researcher bias and ensure openness to participants' perspectives. Member checking was conducted to validate interpretations, while an audit trail and memo writing ensured transparency of the analytic process. Data saturation was also observed to confirm that no new themes emerged from additional data collection. Trustworthiness was further strengthened through the use of thick description, enhancing transferability of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Guest et al., 2014).

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants were fully informed of the purpose of the research and provided voluntary informed consent. Confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw at any stage were ensured. Cultural sensitivity was likewise prioritized, particularly in engaging with participants working in Indigenous education contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2021; Zahavi, 2022).

Overall, phenomenology, guided specifically by Colaizzi's method, provided an appropriate lens for capturing the complex, culturally situated, and emotionally rich experiences of non-local teachers in IPED implementation. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of culturally responsive teacher preparation programs, improved institutional support mechanisms, and policy enhancements within the Department of Education's Indigenous Peoples Education framework.

Participants

This study involved ten (10) non-local public elementary school teachers assigned to Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED)-implementing schools in the Tboli West District, Division of South Cotabato. The district is a geographically remote and culturally diverse area in southern Mindanao, predominantly inhabited by the Tboli Indigenous Peoples. Its far-flung and resource-constrained school settings provided an appropriate context for examining how non-local teachers navigate cultural, instructional, and professional adaptation within Indigenous education environments.

The participants were teachers who were not originally from, nor culturally rooted in, the Indigenous communities where they were assigned. Most came from lowland or urban areas and brought diverse cultural backgrounds, pedagogical experiences, and educational perspectives. As key informants, they provided rich narratives regarding their cultural adjustment, instructional practices, emotional experiences, coping strategies, and professional reflections in the implementation of the IPED curriculum.

A criterion-based purposive sampling technique was employed in selecting participants. Inclusion criteria required that participants: (1) be non-local public elementary school teachers assigned in IPED-implementing schools in the Tboli West District; (2) have at least three (3) years of continuous teaching experience in Indigenous education settings; and (3) be willing to participate in an in-depth qualitative interview. Teachers with less than three years of IPED teaching experience, Indigenous teachers belonging to the local community, and those unavailable or unwilling to participate were excluded from the study.

The sample size of ten participants was considered appropriate for a phenomenological inquiry, which prioritizes depth, meaning, and richness of lived experience over statistical representation. Data saturation was determined through iterative data analysis occurring concurrently with data collection. After the eighth interview, preliminary coding indicated recurring patterns with no emergence of substantially new themes. Two additional interviews were conducted to confirm thematic redundancy, and no new categories or meaningful variations emerged. This confirmed that saturation had been reached, ensuring that the sample size was sufficient to fully capture the essence of the phenomenon under investigation.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Ethical safeguards were strictly observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity through the use of pseudonyms, cultural sensitivity in conducting interviews within Indigenous contexts, and the right of participants to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or consequence.

Instrument

The primary research instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide developed by the researcher. The interview guide was designed to elicit rich, in-depth narratives on the lived experiences of non-local teachers implementing the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) Program in the Tboli West District. It was anchored on the study's research questions and phenomenological orientation, focusing on participants' cultural adaptation, instructional experiences, emotional responses, coping strategies, and perceived professional growth.

The interview guide consisted of open-ended core questions and flexible probing questions to allow participants to freely articulate their experiences while enabling the researcher to explore emerging meanings in greater depth. Sample guiding questions included: "Can you describe your experiences as a non-local teacher implementing the IPED curriculum?"; "What challenges have you encountered in teaching Indigenous learners?"; "How do you cope with difficulties in cultural and instructional adaptation?"; and "In what ways have these experiences influenced your teaching practices and professional growth?"

To ensure content validity and cultural appropriateness, the interview guide underwent expert validation by specialists in qualitative

research, Indigenous education, and educational psychology. The experts evaluated the clarity, relevance, sequencing, and cultural sensitivity of the questions. Their feedback was incorporated to refine wording, eliminate ambiguity, and ensure alignment with Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) contexts.

In addition, a pilot test was conducted with two non-participant teachers who met the inclusion criteria but were not part of the final sample. The pilot testing aimed to assess the clarity, flow, and comprehensibility of the questions, as well as the estimated duration of interviews. Based on the pilot results, minor revisions were made, including rephrasing of complex questions and improving the sequencing of follow-up prompts to enhance conversational flow.

Follow-up probing questions were systematically used during the actual interviews to clarify responses, deepen participant reflections, and capture nuanced meanings related to their lived experiences. This flexible structure ensured both consistency across interviews and responsiveness to participants' narratives.

Procedure

To gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of non-local teachers in the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) Program, a systematic and ethically grounded data collection procedure was employed. Initial coordination was conducted with the Schools Division Office of South Cotabato, school principals, and relevant community stakeholders to secure permission and access to participants. Ethical clearance was obtained prior to data gathering, and all procedures adhered to principles of informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and respect for cultural norms (Creswell, 2020).

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews with ten (10) non-local teachers in the Tboli West District who were selected through criterion-based purposive sampling. Each participant had at least three (3) years of continuous teaching experience in IPED-implementing schools, ensuring that they possessed substantial exposure to Indigenous education contexts and could provide rich, experience-based narratives. The sample size was deemed sufficient to achieve data saturation, as no new themes emerged in the final stages of data collection.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes, depending on the depth of participants' responses. Interviews were conducted in a flexible combination of English and Filipino, with occasional use of local expressions when necessary to facilitate clarity and comfort among participants. This multilingual approach ensured that participants could express their experiences more naturally and accurately.

With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and supplemented by field notes capturing non-verbal cues, contextual observations, and emotional expressions. The recordings were transcribed verbatim shortly after each interview to preserve accuracy and meaning. For responses delivered in Filipino or mixed language, a translation and back-checking process was conducted to ensure that meanings were accurately retained in English while maintaining contextual integrity.

Cultural protocols were strictly observed throughout the research process. Prior to each interview, the researcher engaged in appropriate courtesy communication with school heads and respected local protocols within Indigenous communities. Interviews were conducted in respectful, non-disruptive settings that ensured participants' comfort and cultural dignity. Sensitivity to Indigenous norms, communication styles, and community expectations was maintained at all times.

Following transcription, data were systematically organized and analyzed thematically following phenomenological procedures to identify significant statements and emerging meanings. This process facilitated a contextualized understanding of how non-local teachers navigate cultural, social, emotional, and professional demands within Indigenous education settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2021).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological method, which provides a systematic and rigorous framework for interpreting lived experiences. The analysis followed a structured, step-by-step process to ensure depth, transparency, and methodological rigor.

First, all interview transcripts were read repeatedly to gain a holistic understanding of participants' narratives. Second, significant statements directly related to the lived experiences of non-local teachers in the implementation of the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) Program were identified and extracted from the transcripts.

Third, initial codes were developed by carefully examining significant statements and assigning concise labels that captured their essential meanings. These codes were generated inductively to remain grounded in participants' narratives rather than pre-existing theoretical categories. Fourth, the coded data were systematically grouped into formulated meanings, ensuring that the original intent of participants' statements was preserved.

Fifth, the formulated meanings were organized into clusters of themes, representing patterns of shared experiences across participants. Theme development was an iterative process, involving constant comparison of codes and refinement of categories until coherent thematic structures were established.

To strengthen analytical rigor, peer debriefing was conducted, wherein emerging codes and themes were reviewed and discussed with



a qualitative research expert to enhance consistency and reduce potential researcher bias. In addition, selected portions of the data were subjected to cross-checking (multiple coding review) to ensure that interpretations were consistent and accurately reflected the raw data.

Sixth, an exhaustive description of the phenomenon was developed by integrating all thematic clusters into a comprehensive narrative of the participants' lived experiences. Seventh, the fundamental structure of the phenomenon was derived to capture its essential meaning in relation to non-local teachers' experiences in IPED implementation.

Finally, member checking was conducted by returning the synthesized findings to selected participants to verify accuracy, credibility, and resonance with their lived experiences. Feedback from participants confirmed that the interpretations authentically reflected their narratives.

Ethical Considerations

This study complied with established ethical standards for research involving human participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional review board prior to data collection. In addition, permission to conduct the study was secured from the Schools Division Office of South Cotabato and concerned school authorities. Participation in the study was strictly voluntary. All participants were fully informed about the purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the study before obtaining written informed consent. They were also assured of their right to refuse participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without any form of penalty or consequence.

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly observed throughout the research process. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants, and any identifying information was removed from transcripts and reports. All data were securely stored and accessed only by the researcher to ensure data protection and privacy. Given the Indigenous context of the study, cultural sensitivity was prioritized at all stages of the research process. Respect for Indigenous values, traditions, and community protocols was observed during data collection. Interviews were conducted in a respectful, non-intrusive manner to ensure participants' dignity, comfort, and cultural integrity.

Results and Discussion

This section discusses the themes that emerged from the data analysis of this qualitative study, which explores the lived experiences of non-local teachers in the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) program. The research aimed to describe how these teachers address their professional development needs, offering a deeper understanding of the factors influencing their growth in a transcultural educational setting.

Table 1. *Views on the Experiences of Implementing the Indigenous Peoples Education Program within a Transcultural Educational Context*

<i>Clustered Themes</i>	<i>Emergent Themes</i>		
Challenged to communicate Unfamiliar with the language used Communication barrier Tend to miscommunication with students at first	Difficulty in Communicating Effectively		
Learned the IP language Joined re-echo about IPED program Equipped oneself about IPED curriculum Kept on learning about the said program		Sustained Professional Growth	
Worked closely with Indigenous community members Employed shared responsibility for students' welfare Get involve in shaping IPED initiatives			Equitable Collaborative Partnership
Build rapport among students Catered students' learning needs Employed localization in teaching Created lessons that respect culture			
Participated actively in the implementation of IPED activities Promoted cultural awareness Showed great prioritization in preserving culture Address sensitive cultural issues	Active Participation in Cultural Practices		
Build good relationship with the students and communities Emphasized the value of accepting different culture, beliefs, and traditions Helped in building good communication		Bridging Cultural Differences through Education	
Provided quality education for all Adjusted with IP culture Learned different languages	Adaptation to New Perspectives		
Adapted cultural norms and traditions Understand how words are being used Adjusted with the students' native language			

Table 1 reveals that non-local teachers experienced significant communication challenges in implementing the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) program. These difficulties were primarily attributed to language differences, unfamiliarity with Indigenous dialects, and limited understanding of culturally embedded communication practices. As a result, classroom interaction was often constrained, affecting student participation and clarity of instruction.

Participants consistently emphasized this difficulty. One teacher shared, “There are times I cannot explain my lesson well because I do not speak their language, so I rely on gestures or classmates to translate.” Another noted, “Even simple instructions become difficult because I am not familiar with their dialect.” These statements illustrate how linguistic barriers directly shaped instructional delivery and learner engagement.

The findings align with literature indicating that communication gaps in multilingual classrooms may lead to misunderstanding and reduced academic participation (Aminah et al., 2022; Phillips et al., 2025). Theoretically, this supports Bandura’s Social Learning Theory and Schramm’s Interactive Model, which emphasize that learning and communication depend on shared symbols and feedback loops. In IPED contexts, the absence of a shared linguistic framework limits reciprocal understanding, thereby weakening instructional interaction.

Despite communication barriers, participants demonstrated sustained professional growth through continuous learning and adaptation. Teachers reported actively engaging in IPED re-echo seminars, self-learning Indigenous language phrases, and adopting culturally responsive pedagogies.

One participant stated, “I attend trainings and try to learn their language little by little because I want my learners to understand me better.” Another reflected, “Every seminar helps me adjust my teaching and understand their culture more deeply.” These narratives highlight teachers’ proactive engagement in professional development as a coping and growth mechanism.

This aligns with studies emphasizing that culturally grounded continuous professional development enhances instructional competence and cultural sensitivity (Amadora & Labastida, 2024; Ocampo & Arzadon, 2022). However, participants also noted limitations, particularly the irregularity of training opportunities. As one teacher expressed, “We learn on our own most of the time because trainings are not always available in our area.” This highlights the need for sustained, localized, and community-responsive CPD programs that address contextual realities in Indigenous education settings.

A key theme that emerged was the development of collaborative relationships between non-local teachers and Indigenous communities. Participants described working closely with parents, elders, and local leaders to support learner development and integrate cultural knowledge into instruction. One teacher shared, “I always ask the elders about their traditions so I can include them in my lessons.” Another noted, “The community helps me understand what is appropriate to teach and how to handle learners better.” These accounts reflect an emerging shift toward shared responsibility in education delivery.

Such findings support literature emphasizing that collaboration with Indigenous stakeholders enhances cultural authenticity and instructional relevance (Amadora & Labastida, 2024; Navas et al., 2023). However, participants also pointed out the absence of formal structures supporting collaboration, with one stating, “We only coordinate informally; there is no clear system for community involvement in planning lessons.”

This indicates the need for institutionalizing participatory governance mechanisms to sustain meaningful school-community partnerships. Participants highlighted that building strong relationships with learners and communities was essential for effective teaching in IPED contexts. Teachers who developed rapport reported higher learner engagement and trust.

One participant explained, “When learners feel I care for them, they participate more even if I am not fluent in their language.” Another stated, “Being close to the community makes teaching easier because they also support my lessons.” These experiences demonstrate the relational nature of learning in Indigenous contexts. This supports findings that relational engagement strengthens participation, trust, and learning outcomes (Anderson & Lee, 2021; Johnson & Carter, 2021). It also reflects the transformation of teaching into a culturally embedded and emotionally grounded practice.

Active participation in cultural practices emerged as a significant strategy for adaptation. Teachers engaged in community rituals, cultural events, and local gatherings to better understand Indigenous traditions and values. A participant shared, “When I join their activities, I understand their culture better and it becomes easier to teach my lessons.” Another noted, “Being part of their celebrations made me feel accepted in the community.” These narratives highlight that cultural immersion fosters both pedagogical relevance and emotional belonging. This aligns with studies emphasizing that experiential engagement enhances cultural competence and instructional authenticity (Bautista, 2020; Harris, 2021; Kim, 2023).

Non-local teachers also described their role as cultural bridges by integrating Indigenous knowledge into classroom instruction and promoting inclusivity. One participant stated, “I try to connect our lesson to their traditions so they can relate better.” Another explained, “I always remind myself to respect their beliefs while teaching mine.” These accounts reflect the use of culturally responsive pedagogy to foster inclusivity and mutual respect. Literature confirms that such approaches improve engagement and intercultural understanding (Carter, 2021; Walker, 2021; Wilson, 2021).



Finally, adaptation emerged as a transformative process in which teachers redefined their professional identity. Exposure to Indigenous knowledge systems led to shifts in teaching perspectives and practices. One participant reflected, “I learned to adjust my teaching because not all methods I used before work here.” Another shared, “I used to be strict with my methods, but now I learn with my students and the community.” This reflects a shift toward co-learning and culturally responsive pedagogy, consistent with literature on transformative teacher identity in Indigenous contexts (Garcia, 2020; Walker, 2021). Adaptation, therefore, is not only technical but also deeply personal and professional.

Table 2. *Feelings of Transcultural Educational Frontier on the Implementation of Indigenous People Education Program*

<i>Clustered Themes</i>	<i>Emergent Themes</i>
Evoke a mix of gratitude, humility, and occasional discomfort Felt a mix of gratitude, empathy, and uneasiness Enthusiastic and curious Range of emotions like sadness, happiness, and concern Happy at the same time overwhelmed upon learning other culture Overcoming overwhelm feelings through being fulfilled in sharing knowledge	Navigating a Complex Emotional Landscape Overwhelmed, Yet Deeply Fulfilled
Overwhelmed but happy on the IP learners’ achievement Overwhelmed and thankful because of the implementation of IPED Happy because of the chance given by the division to implement IPED Blessed of the opportunity Felt happy when a plan comes together upon implementing IPED Glad on the implementation of IPED	Gratitude Coupled with a Sense of Responsibility
Excited upon learning other languages Excited on the offerings of IPED program Fueling the excitement to adapt and adjust different culture Felt proud to contribute to the community Proud when learners confidently share their traditions	Experiencing Shared Excitement Pride in Fostering Empowerment
Honored to support a program that respects and uplifts indigenous traditions Privileged on the growing recognition of the value of indigenous people Positive in encouraging IP learners Maintained a positive outlook on the IPED implementation process Believing in oneself to implement IPED successfully	Harnessing Positivity and Perseverance

Table 2 reveals that non-local teachers experienced a complex emotional landscape characterized by overlapping feelings of anxiety, gratitude, curiosity, discomfort, and fulfillment. Rather than following a linear progression, these emotions coexisted and evolved throughout their engagement with Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED), reflecting the dynamic nature of transcultural teaching experiences.

Initially, participants described feelings of anxiety and disorientation upon assignment to Indigenous communities. One teacher expressed, “At first, I was really nervous because I did not know their language and culture, I felt like I did not belong.” Another shared, “Everything was new to me, and I was always afraid I might say or do something wrong in class.” These accounts highlight the emotional uncertainty associated with cultural transition and instructional adjustment.

Over time, however, these initial struggles gradually shifted toward emotional adaptation and connection. Participants reported developing deeper emotional ties with learners and communities. As one teacher reflected, “Later on, I started to feel comfortable because the learners were very warm and accepting.” Another noted, “Even if it was difficult at first, I learned to love teaching here because of the children.” This transition illustrates the evolving emotional adjustment process in IPED contexts.

A prominent emotional theme was the coexistence of overwhelm and fulfillment. Teachers acknowledged feeling burdened by cultural demands, language barriers, and expanded roles, yet simultaneously expressed satisfaction in their work. One participant stated, “Sometimes I feel exhausted because everything is new, but when I see my learners improve, I feel fulfilled.” Another explained, “It is hard, especially when I cannot fully express myself, but it is rewarding when students learn from me.” This emotional duality reflects the demanding yet meaningful nature of Indigenous education engagement.

A strong sense of gratitude and responsibility also emerged. Participants expressed appreciation for their assignment while recognizing their role in supporting Indigenous education. One teacher shared, “I am thankful to be assigned here because I learn not just as a teacher but as a person.” Another stated, “I feel responsible to respect their culture and make sure I do not change their identity through teaching.” These reflections suggest an ethical positioning of teachers as cultural partners rather than authority figures.

Participants also described shared excitement and engagement with learners and communities, particularly during culturally relevant activities. One teacher remarked, “My learners become very active when lessons are related to their culture.” Another noted, “I also get excited when we do activities that involve their traditions because I learn with them.” Such experiences enhanced classroom interaction and motivation, reinforcing the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy.



A further emotional dimension involved pride and sense of purpose. Teachers expressed fulfillment in witnessing learner growth and cultural affirmation. One participant stated, “I feel proud every time my students show confidence in their identity and learning.” Another shared, “Seeing them succeed makes me realize that my effort is worth it despite the difficulties.” These narratives reflect education as a space for empowerment and cultural continuity.

Finally, positivity and resilience emerged as defining emotional strengths among participants. Despite persistent challenges, teachers maintained optimism and commitment to their roles. One teacher explained, “I always try to stay positive because if I give up, my learners will also be affected.” Another reflected, “The challenges made me stronger and more patient as a teacher.” This resilience illustrates adaptive coping and sustained professional dedication in transcultural contexts.

Overall, these findings indicate that non-local teachers in IPED settings navigate a deeply layered emotional experience shaped by tension, adaptation, fulfillment, and transformation. Consistent with Garcia and Kim (2021), Harris (2021), and Orcales-Tabile (2020), these emotional dynamics contribute to the development of empathy, cultural humility, and professional resilience in Indigenous education contexts.

Table 3. *Impact of Transcultural Educational Frontier on the Implementation of Indigenous People Education Program*

<i>Clustered Themes</i>	<i>Emergent Themes</i>
Built a strong connection with students	Fostered Strong Community Bonds
Had a good relationship with community members	
Was able to discover multiple pathways to connect with content which support diverse learning styles	
Inspired to make lesson more inclusive and culturally respectful	Strengthening Professional Competence
Motivated to develop oneself	
Was able to create more inclusive and culturally sensitive lessons	
More interested to join seminars about IPED	Enhanced Understanding of Indigenous Cultures
Improved teaching methods	
Showed love and care to Indigenous people	
Understand Indigenous culture and history	Promoted Fair and Collaborative Partnerships
Learned the rich culture and tradition of learners	
Was able to collaborate with learners	
Guided the IPs so that they can be good in their own way	Encouraged Valuing of Diverse Cultural Practices
Supported and encouraged learners	
Adjusted with the IP learners	
Helped me value cultural diversity more	Encouraged Valuing of Diverse Cultural Practices
Had a lot of respect for the tribe	
Was able to show more respect to other indigenous people	
Learned to embraced diversity	
Become more culturally sensitive	

Table 3 reveals that the transcultural educational experiences of non-local teachers generated profound impacts on both educational practice and community engagement. Five interrelated themes emerged: strengthened community bonds, enhanced professional competence, deepened understanding of Indigenous cultures, promotion of fair and collaborative partnerships, and valuing of cultural diversity. These impacts reflect a transformative process shaped by continuous interaction between teachers and Indigenous communities.

One of the most significant impacts was the development of strong and meaningful community relationships. Although participants initially perceived themselves as outsiders, sustained engagement gradually transformed these relationships into bonds grounded in trust and mutual respect. One teacher shared, “At first, I felt like I did not belong, but when I started joining community activities, they slowly accepted me.” Another stated, “The elders taught me how to respect their culture, and that made me closer to the community.” These narratives illustrate how cultural immersion facilitated acceptance and relational integration.

Participants further emphasized that these bonds extended beyond professional interaction. One teacher explained, “It is no longer just about teaching; they already treat me like part of their community.” Another reflected, “Because of their support, I feel stronger and more motivated to continue teaching here.” These emotional and relational connections functioned as protective factors against burnout and strengthened teacher retention.

Participants reported that their transcultural experiences significantly strengthened their professional competence through continuous adaptation and learning. Exposure to Indigenous contexts compelled teachers to refine instructional strategies and engage in ongoing professional development. One participant noted, “I learned to adjust my lessons because what I used before does not always work here.” Another shared, “Attending trainings and learning from the community helped me become a better teacher.” These experiences highlight the interplay between formal training and experiential learning.

Teachers also described assuming leadership roles in their schools. One stated, “I started helping other teachers by sharing what I

learned from the community.” Another added, “We support each other through informal learning groups.” These accounts indicate a shift from passive recipients of training to active contributors to professional learning communities, reinforcing sustainable professional growth in IPED contexts.

A central impact of transcultural exposure was the transformation of teachers’ understanding of Indigenous cultures. Immersion in community life allowed participants to challenge prior assumptions and develop cultural sensitivity. One teacher expressed, “I realized that their way of life is different but meaningful, and I learned to respect it.” Another stated, “Living here changed my perspective; I now understand their traditions better.” These reflections demonstrate a shift in worldview shaped by lived experience. Participants also integrated Indigenous knowledge into their teaching. One noted, “I now include their stories and traditions in my lessons so learners can relate.” Another shared, “Their culture became part of how I teach, not just something I observe.” This illustrates how cultural understanding translated into culturally responsive pedagogy and advocacy for Indigenous knowledge systems.

The study also found that non-local teachers actively contributed to the development of fair and collaborative partnerships within IPED communities. Teachers emphasized shared decision-making and recognition of community members as co-educators. One participant explained, “I always ask the elders before planning my lessons because they know what is appropriate.” Another shared, “We plan activities together with the community, not just the teachers alone.” These statements reflect participatory approaches to education.

Teachers also noted changes in school dynamics. One stated, “Now, decisions are not only made by teachers; parents and elders also have a voice.” Another added, “Working together makes the program more meaningful and effective.” These narratives highlight a shift from hierarchical to collaborative educational structures that strengthen community ownership.

Finally, participants developed a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity, which influenced both classroom practice and broader advocacy efforts. Exposure to Indigenous traditions fostered respect and intentional inclusion of cultural elements in teaching. One teacher reflected, “I learned that diversity should not be ignored but celebrated in the classroom.” Another stated, “I now encourage my learners to be proud of their identity.” These responses demonstrate a pedagogical shift toward inclusivity.

Participants also described advocacy roles beyond the classroom. One shared, “I help promote their culture during school activities so others will understand them better.” Another noted, “We try to make sure their language and traditions are respected in school programs.” These accounts suggest that teachers actively contribute to institutional recognition of Indigenous culture and educational equity.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that transcultural experiences in IPED settings transform non-local teachers into culturally responsive educators, community partners, and advocates for Indigenous education. These impacts extend beyond instructional improvement to include relational, emotional, and advocacy dimensions of teaching practice, consistent with the literature on culturally sustaining pedagogy and educational transformation (Anderson, 2020; Gonzales & Mabanag, 2023; Navas et al., 2023; Ocampo & Arzadon, 2022).

Conclusions

This study, situated within the framework of Transcultural Educational Frontiers, illuminated the lived experiences of non-local teachers implementing the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) Program. Findings revealed that these teachers function not only as classroom instructors but also as cultural mediators, reflective practitioners, and collaborative partners within Indigenous communities. Their experiences extended beyond instructional difficulties in geographically isolated settings and reflected a dynamic interplay of communication barriers, emotional negotiation, cultural adaptation, and continuous professional growth. Despite initial challenges, the participants demonstrated resilience, humility, and transformative engagement as they navigated unfamiliar cultural environments. Through sustained interaction with learners, Indigenous elders, and community stakeholders, they gradually developed meaningful relational connections and deeper cultural understanding. Their active participation in cultural practices and collaborative learning processes reflects the essence of transcultural pedagogy grounded in respect, reciprocity, and cultural responsiveness.

In light of these findings, several practical implications are proposed. The Department of Education (DepEd) should strengthen IPED implementation by providing sustained, context-specific professional development programs that focus on Indigenous language learning, cultural immersion, and culturally responsive pedagogy. DepEd may also consider institutionalizing structured mentoring and psychosocial support systems to assist non-local teachers in their cultural and professional adjustment. School leaders are encouraged to establish school-based mentoring programs and learning communities that foster collaboration between non-local teachers, Indigenous educators, and community elders. Strengthening formal school–community partnerships is also essential to ensure shared decision-making and culturally grounded instructional planning. For teacher education institutions, there is a need to integrate Indigenous education, intercultural competence, and experiential field exposure into pre-service training to better prepare future teachers for transcultural teaching environments. Policymakers and education stakeholders are likewise encouraged to allocate resources that address the unique needs of geographically isolated and disadvantaged schools, including instructional materials, logistical support, and teacher well-being programs. Finally, future researchers may expand this inquiry by exploring the perspectives of Indigenous learners, parents, and community leaders, as well as conducting comparative and longitudinal studies to further understand teacher adaptation, effectiveness, and retention in Indigenous education contexts.

Overall, the study emphasizes that effective IPED implementation extends beyond policy and curriculum frameworks. It requires sustained relational engagement, cultural validation, and collaborative partnerships between schools and Indigenous communities. When supported by appropriate institutional mechanisms, transcultural educational experiences can transform non-local teachers into culturally responsive educators who contribute meaningfully to inclusive, equitable, and culturally sustaining education.

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