

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES: A CASE STUDY OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' EDUCATION PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION IN THE DIVISION OF GINGOOG CITY

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ABSTRACT

Schools can play an essential role in preserving Indigenous cultures thriving in society. This study investigated the implementation of the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) program in the Division of Gingoog City. The case study design was used, and four school heads, teachers, and tribal leaders were purposively selected as the participants. Interview guides were used to gather the data that were analyzed using Yin's method of data analysis. The study revealed the roles of the various stakeholders in implementing the IPEd program, the challenges of the instructional leaders in the program implementation, the strategies used in addressing the challenges encountered, and the support received by school heads from other stakeholders. The study concludes that effective implementation of the program for Indigenous people requires collaboration among stakeholders and the provision of competent teaching personnel and material resources. Academic authorities in the field address the deficiencies identified in the study so that interventions can be instituted and the implementation of the IPEd program can be improved.

Keywords: *collaboration, school heads, stakeholders, support, teachers*

INTRODUCTION

In line with its thrust to promote culture-based education, the Department of Education (DepEd), through its Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program, continues to strengthen its engagement with Indigenous Peoples (IP) communities, especially in the contextualization of the K to 12 basic education curriculum. This initiative seeks to institutionalize sustained dialogue and collaboration with IP

elders and other community representatives in ensuring that education programs are inclusive, culture-sensitive, and relevant to the aspirations of the IP community.

The Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program will be realized if there is an inclusion among the various stakeholders. The best description in the African saying, "It takes a whole village to raise a child" (Rhaiti, 2018). DepEd officials, administrators, and teachers cannot make it, primarily because this program focuses on the cultural identity of the Indigenous Peoples. There is a need to collaborate with the culture bearers and community to realize the program and produce a curriculum framework that will mirror the community's Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs). Parents also need to understand the importance of the program to support the child academically. Local government officials and other government agencies are deemed necessary to assist the IPEd in implementing schools in different projects for the welfare of the IP learners (Oxtero, 2022).

The success and failure of school programs depend mainly on how the instructional leaders perform their role in creating an idea to improve the quality of the school. Therefore, the instructional leaders, as frontrunners in the school, have a very significant and strategic role and responsibility in improving the quality of education in the school (Anselmus et al., 2022). The role of instructional leaders can be described as one of bureaucratic and management responsibilities, such as responsibility for the school economy, facilities, schedule, and personnel (Hallinger et al., 2018). Quality education can be achieved in schools by improving the quality of teaching and learning (Briggs, 2012). As a result, many nations are reforming educational supervision because of its effectiveness as a critical instrument for monitoring and improving the quality of education (Murage et al., 2017). Educational supervision ensures that adequate academic standards are met and promotes teachers' professional development to meet students' learning needs (Mulatu, 2016; Ampofo et al., 2019). In addition, supervision is primarily seen as behaviorally oriented, process-focused educational leadership that contributes to organizational actions, coordinates interactions and provides for enhancements.

Instructional leaders face many management and leadership challenges as they navigate their new leadership role, such as time management, lack of policy knowledge, timely completion of paperwork, curriculum knowledge, and budget management (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). Hence, instructional leaders' program implementers' experience has been described as a difficult transition in all contextual settings. New heads often express frustration, anxiety, and role conflict as they begin their leadership careers and implementation of the school's programs (Lee, 2019).

In February 2013, the Department of Education of the Republic of the Philippines, the department that regulates K-12 education, addressed the nation's

intention to integrate the needs of the indigenous people of the Philippines into the Millennium Development Goals (Rimando, 2013). The Education Secretary, Armin Luistro, was speaking in promoting the department's national program known as Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda. In preparing this new program for indigenous people, the Department of Education involved leaders of different indigenous groups and leaders of both government and non-government groups that work with the education of indigenous people around the nation. According to this department, this work was done to promote indigenous people's participation, inclusion, and empowerment (Rimando, 2013).

Nelson et al. (2018) investigated how new instructional leaders applied their educational training in principal preparation programs to their new positions in Texas. They found that the principals were prepared for the technical or management aspects of the work but were challenged by developing and maintaining positive professional relationships. Instructional leadership values include communicating and modeling principles and standards for their school community, such as respect, work ethic, and fairness. Leadership focuses on how principals enact their vision, goals, and structures to develop others and foster school improvement through teacher professional development, resource management, and school culture. Leadership is also a function of context, and principals enact instructional leadership and approach school goals, students, staff, and community concerns differently based on their particular school and community environments (Hallinger, 2016).

Malaysia aims to identify the inherent issues and challenges that heads of departments face in their daily responsibilities as transformational leaders in schools. This research aimed to identify department heads' relevant policies and strategies in dealing with the issues and challenges. The research findings indicated that the challenges of the school heads are categorized as administrators, teachers, students, and parents. The outcome of this study can be beneficial for the heads of departments of schools to overcome the issues regarding their daily responsibilities (Ghavifekr et al., 2017).

Despite the challenges and intricacies that have been reported in research on the education of Indigenous people, it was interesting to hear the success story of a school implementation that has been very successful in educating Indigenous people in the country. However, despite the efforts exerted to intensify the IPed implementation in the DepEd schools for the realization of IP aspirations, several problems and challenges still need to be solved by instructional leaders. While there are laws and mandates from the DepEd in adopting IP education in the curriculum, it is relevant to explore the implementation of the IPed in the present educational system in the Division of Gingoog City.

FRAMEWORK

In the global pursuit of social equity and the empowerment of marginalized communities, the role of education as a transformative tool cannot be overstated. Indigenous Peoples (IPs) have long been at the forefront of the struggle for recognition, self-determination, and cultural preservation. For centuries, these communities have faced systemic injustices that have threatened their unique cultures and identities. Numerous education programs have been developed to empower Indigenous communities by providing them with the tools to navigate the complexities of the modern world while preserving their rich heritage.

There are abundant examples of how Indigenous self-education is being reclaimed, revitalized, and sustained by individuals, communities, and non-Indigenous allies (Tom et al., 2019). A study emphasized several dimensions in Indigenous education that need considerable focus and action with Indigenous people at their core (Shay et al., 2023). In the Philippine context, historical accounts show that Indigenous Peoples (IPs) in the Philippines have long been suffering from discrimination and lack of access to education. The IPs comprise about 10% to 20% of the Philippines' 102.9 million total population (Eduardo & Gabriel, 2021).

Leading the Program Implementation. Everyone has leadership potential. It is an implied duty as leadership educators to help each person develop that potential. Even followership theories fall into this everyone-a-leader model by defining good followers as almost identical to good leaders who merely choose to follow in each instance (Rosile et al., 2018). A study on policy implementations holds that Indigenous access, participation, and equity remain the central themes (Swab, 2018). Relationships and collaboration with non-Indigenous Indigenous educators and systems need new forms of partnership that recognize and cultivate everyday Indigenous resurgence (Bang et al., 2018).

Bridging for cultural preservation. Pre-service teachers are provided with essential knowledge and learning opportunities that facilitate success in working with Indigenous students and helping mainstream students learn about Native history, peoples, and communities (McInnes, 2017). Critically sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy includes respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and caring relationships (Lee & McCarty, 2017). Solidarity work becomes diversified and strategized in response to the evolving multiple indigenous identities that modernity paradoxically endangers and engenders (Alejo, 2018).

Serving as a resource for the indigenous culture. Indigenous people are generative of knowledge, not peripheral (Deloria et al., 2018). Indigenous Knowledge is an essential resource for responsibly educating all students and improving relationships within and across communities (Jacob et al., 2018). A

crucial facet of the self-determination of peoples such as Indigenous nations and communities is the responsibility and the right to make plans using planning processes that are inclusive, well-informed, culturally relevant, and respectful of human interdependence (Whyte, 2017).

Challenges of the instructional leaders in the program implementation. Teacher educators are an occupational group currently experiencing increased scrutiny by international policymakers and researchers alike. This occupational group, however, is increasingly difficult to define and identify in a complex, internationally changing teacher education policy reform environment (White, 2019).

Having teachers who are non-speakers of the tribal language. Education is not only transmission but, more importantly, (re)construction, (re)generation, or (re)production of knowledge. Meanwhile, the International Decade of Indigenous Languages or IDIL (2022-2032) responds to the disappearance or endangerment of many languages worldwide. It mobilizes "member states, Indigenous Peoples (IPs), civil society organizations, academic institutions, public and private sectors, UN system entities, and other stakeholders" primarily "to preserve, revitalize, and promote Indigenous languages" (Grande et al., 2023). The language shifts that the education system tends to promote, in the long term, could result in the endangerment or near extinction of the local languages and the indigenous knowledge embodied in them (Anyidoho, 2018). A study conducted in the provinces of Nueva Ecija and Aurora found that English remains the widely used medium of instruction in most IP curricula (Eduardo & Gabriel, 2021)

Having teachers without adequate pedagogical knowledge and skills. Very little is known about how teaching and pedagogy can support Indigenous students' learning and persistence (Martin et al., 2017). The principles of local control; parental engagement, Indigenous knowledge, culture, and language; Indigenous teachers; and better-prepared non-Indigenous teachers are still as relevant and important (Reyhner, 2018). As this concern arises, it is also important to note the significance of indigenous knowledge as an important factor in their pursuit of completing their education. The content's relevance to addressing learners' needs affects their interest in pursuing their studies since they cannot relate to the lessons (Natano, 2023).

Lack of teachers with indigenous knowledge. Education is integral to achieving sustainable development. Through education, improved quality of life ensues with people acquiring knowledge and skills beneficial to society. Inclusive education, however, is an issue among countries with marginalized ethnic groups (Cucio & Roldan, 2020). A study argued the importance of perpetuating these cultural practices and incorporating Indigenous Knowledge in implementing educational interventions to meet the SDGs in indigenous settings (Sandoval-Rivera, 2020).

However, a study conducted in Butuan City indicated that many teachers in IP schools were newly hired, with few pursuing graduate studies, and most were non-IPs. Based on relevant training programs, their level of cultural literacy was moderate, with a few teachers considered experts who could contribute to future capacity-building efforts (Flores & Obod, 2023).

Lack of school provisions, facilities, and learning materials. Indigenous people have consistently demanded more from public educational institutions (Sabzalian, 2019). Rural schools are rarely funded on par with suburban schools. With the lack of school resources, native students are least likely to enroll (McClellan, 2018). Institutional efforts to improve the persistence and retention of Indigenous students have mainly been piecemeal, poorly integrated, and designed to remediate skill deficits (Martin et al., 2017). McGreal (2017) cited support for UNESCO for development and recommended that educational materials developed with public funds be made available because Open Educational Resources (OER) are open and can be translated into different languages and localized to meet the needs of different countries, regions, institutions, and learners (Butcher et al., 2015).

Lack of evaluation and feedback mechanism for the program. Despite the seemingly elementary nature of the problem, policy practitioners will be all too familiar with the complex nature of Indigenous education (Gillan et al., 2017). The inability to report progress continues to demoralize and ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students remain at the lower rungs of educational outcome indicators, maintaining societal and institutional constructs (Hogarth, 2018). Moreover, their school lacks school materials due to the lack of funding and poor accessibility; this condition hampers the students from learning. Even the classroom used could have been more conducive. Electrification also is a significant problem in the community. Hence, teachers cannot use their multi-media to aid teaching (Nedal & Alcoriza, 2018). The Philippine context for teaching mathematics through MTB-MLE needs to be investigated because the country is yet conceiving the academic and life-long effects of this new language policy on the numeracy skills of every Filipino (Alfonso-Mendoza, 2021).

Coping Mechanisms for the Challenges Encountered. School administrators and teachers should replace school-based epistemologies with community-based epistemologies (Lindsey et al., 2018). Growing student diversity in today's classrooms calls for appropriate instructional strategies. Differentiated instruction (DI) is a key solution but seems challenging (Suprayogi et al., 2017).

Developing manpower for the IPed Program. Indigenous perspectives hold promising opportunities for education and practice. It is possible to entertain indigenous knowledge into adult education through modeling, guided practice, and application approaches. Schools play an important role in assisting students to learn

skills to manage their well-being and support the well-being of others (Assefa & Mohammed, 2022). Parental support and community involvement are essential in helping education (Schwab, 2018).

Collaborating and peer coaching. The ongoing education reform in the Philippines, or any intervention, must employ an evidence-, knowledge-, or research-based approach to various policies, programs, and projects. DepEd is coping by holding seminars, training, and conferences on research and publishing refereed journals (Grande et al., 2023). Teachers' experiences on the development of numeracy skills among primary pupils through MTB-MLE were a smooth flow of instruction in Mathematics when MTB-MLE is used as a language of instruction; there has been enhanced engagement to instruction showing confidence, interest, and enjoyment in the lesson (Alfonso-Mendoza, 2021).

Contextualizing instructional materials. Instructional materials are powerful tools for effective teaching and learning (Parallag, 2022). A study showed that students exposed to contextualized instructional materials (CMI) significantly improved than those exposed to CLM. The study concluded that contextualized instructional materials efficiently achieved maximum learning potential, as evidenced by students' enhanced performance (Rivera & Sanchez, 2020). A Division of Butuan City study assessed the effectiveness of instructional materials used for Indigenous Peoples (IP) learners during distance learning. The study found that IP learners generally had positive learning experiences when teachers incorporated indigenized big books, Weekly Learning Activity Sheets, and indigenized lesson plans (Flores & Obod, 2023).

Establishing a strong link with the IP community and local leaders. Strong family and school engagement programs are part of a good school organization. Well-organized partnership programs mobilize resources in schools, homes, and communities (Epstein et al., 2018). They argued that the community engagement element of the *Lumad* alternative schools is essential to community-led IP education that is responsive towards innovatively addressing problems and the preservation of IP culture (Magdadaro & Sacramento, 2022). Older people are the custodians of indigenous knowledge and, consequently, one of the most valuable transmission sources (Magni, 2017).

Support received by instructional leaders from other stakeholders. Among the especially significant practices are building productive partnerships among parents, schools, and the larger community and encouraging teachers to engage in forms of instruction with all ambitious and culturally responsive students. Leaders are likely more effective when they adopt a critical perspective on their schools' policies, practices, and procedures and develop a deep understanding of the

cultures, norms, values, and expectations of the students' families (Leithwood, 2021).

Commitment of Tribal Leaders for Availability and Assistance. Education, poverty, access to justice, and climate change only affect indigenous people's lives. However, indigenous groups are not passive actors (Magni, 2017). Indigenous elders participate in intergenerational solidarity by transmitting knowledge, values, and culture in a holistic approach (Viscogliosi et al., 2020). Indigenous family engagement and school leadership are again a focus in policy and practice wherein family engagement is mandated, measured, and resourced to reflect particular stances and goals (Bang et al., 2018). Vigorous community engagement provides venues for learning and unlearning histories and empowers marginalized peoples (Acabado & Martin, 2020).

Guidance and Inputs from Tribal Leaders. Incorporating indigenous knowledge into the education of IPs is a response to UNESCO's target "to ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations" (SDG #4). It is also relative to the Education 2030 Agenda, which states that "all age groups, especially adults, should have opportunities to learn and continue learning in all settings and at all levels of education (Natano, 2023). A paper underscores how the partnership between government and stakeholders is significant in arriving at the goal of inclusive education. This is reflected in the collaborative relationship fostered between the Philippine government and the Ayta and how the partnership positively affected the Ayta's cultural rights based on a more culturally appropriate educational curriculum (Cucio & Roldan, 2020).

Support from subordinates. A study highlighted the resilience, resistance, and strategic planning that Indigenous teachers use to challenge the system in teacher education while advancing their position within it and expressed support for Indigenous teacher candidates in teacher education (Marom, 2019). Strategies teachers use to develop numeracy skills of pupils using MTB-MLE along pedagogy were the use of locally made materials or objects found in the community, exposing pupils to more drills and exercises, attendance to seminars is helpful, and Differentiated Instruction (Alfonso-Mendoza, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in the Division of Gingoog City, located in the eastern part of Mindanao and the heart of the City of Goodluck. The city has a mix of cultural influences, with indigenous people and settlers from other parts of the Philippines contributing to the local culture. DepEd- Gingoog City has established

various initiatives and programs to promote integrating indigenous knowledge and culture into the formal education system with the 21 IPED-implementing schools. The study participants were four school heads, four teachers, and four Datu/elders in the Division of Gingoog City. They were chosen through purposive sampling based on the following inclusion criteria: 1) instructional leaders, teaching the IPED and Datu in the school community 2) five years as school head implementer, five years as teachers in IPED school and Datu implementer, and 3) willing to participate in the study.

This study used Yin's (2009) five components of an effective case study, (1) research questions, (2) proposition or purpose of the study, (3) unit analysis, (4) logic that links data to propositions, and (5) criteria for interpreting findings. The most appropriate questions for this type of qualitative case study research were "how" and "why" forms of questions. Specifically, the researcher asked the participants what the challenges of the instructional leaders are in implementing the Indigenous Peoples Education Program.

Before the actual interviews, the researcher secured permission and a letter request from the Schools Division Superintendent that he might be allowed to conduct his study. As soon as approval to conduct the interview was secured, arrangements were made concerning the conduct of the interviews. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The interviews were done during office hours and during their available time. The interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes. Based on the responses, questions were dec supplemented to foster more detailed and thoughtful answers. A face-to-face interview format was used to add the benefit of clarifying questions, asking further probing questions, and observing non-verbal communication. The researcher took notes at the interview, observed participant behavior, and added memos to his journal. Moreover, the researcher also used a voice recorder to review what transpired during the interview. Finally, the researcher transcribed the interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study involved 12 instructional leaders as the participants in the study. The instructional leaders are school heads, teachers, and Datu/ Elders, who are the movers of the community's Indigenous Peoples' education program. The participants have an average of 46 years old. In the actual statements/responses of the participants, the following codes were used: SH for school head, T for teachers, and D for Datu. The next were the main themes formulated in the study: roles of various stakeholders in the implementation of the IPed program, challenges of instructional leaders in the program implementation, strategies used in addressing

the challenges encountered, and support received by school heads from other stakeholders.

Roles of Various Stakeholders in the Implementation of the IPEd Program

Leading the Program Implementation. From the perspective of the School Heads as study participants, they carry the task of leading schools in implementing the program. However, they claimed that the IP program needs to be reviewed based on the problems encountered during its implementation. The actual experiences of the school heads and the teachers could serve as valuable bases in making recommendations for the areas to be improved, the materials needed to be in place, and the mechanisms to enhance the program's objectives. With the actual implementation, the nuances of the program might have been foreseen, which the implementers in the field found difficult to perform accordingly based on the program's requirements.

"When it comes to the implementation, it should be good to revisit the program due to challenges encountered in the field...The role of the school is to implement the IPEd program through education. Teachers will do the contextualized and indigenized lesson plan for teaching the IP learners." (SH1)

"It has to know the extent of when, what, why, and how the services must be offered so that it will be anchored on the school and the department programs." (SH 2)

As cited by SH1, problems were encountered in the field during the implementation. Either the teachers need more language facilities in the mother tongue of the people in the locality or the instructional materials containing indigenous languages are absent. Also, some teachers could need to gain the necessary experience using pedagogical practices to make teaching culture effective. On the part of SH2, it is unclear for schools the extent of their role in promoting indigenous culture through instruction.

The Philippine historical accounts show that Indigenous Peoples (IPs) in the Philippines have long suffered discrimination and lack of access to Education. The IPs comprise about 10% to 20% of the Philippines' 102.9 million total population (Eduardo & Gabriel, 2021). Thus, school leaders' perspectives specified practices of creating a shared mission and vision through the school's core values, curriculum, and co-curricular activities while encouraging harmonious interaction. Despite challenges stemming from cultural differences, the school leaders highlighted the vitality of their role in providing a safe learning environment (Adams & Velarde,

2021). School leaders employ essential skills and requisites to lead culturally diversified teams to achieve organizational objectives (Adams & Velarde, 2021).

Bridging for cultural preservation. Educators at the classroom level play an essential role in realizing the IP program according to how it has been conceptualized. They are the ones to deliver the contents of the program, facilitate the cultural activities with the leadership of the school heads, and adhere to the guidance of the traditional leaders.

Based on the interviews conducted, schools take the initiative in putting into written form the oral tradition of the IP people. Since indigenous knowledge, systems, and practices are usually kept in the minds of the leaders and elders of the cultural community, the academic personnel needs to put the non-material culture in print form for preservation. Also, not all members of the IP community are well-versed in their culture. The written forms of the tradition can be very valuable in orientating, if not educating further, the members so they can gain a better understanding and appreciation of what their ancestors have valued amid the passing of time. As cited by SH1, teachers recorded and even wrote about the traditions of the IP community.

"One of the initiatives of the teachers and school is to record some of the oral tradition of IP in the community." (SH1)

"Conduct the school activities that promote the Indigenous cultures." (T2)

"The role of the teachers is the bridge in preserving their culture and tradition. The teachers also consider as the source of information and knowledge in upholding their culture." (T4)

For T2 participant, he stressed the conduct of school activities that explicitly promote the cultural practices of the Higaunon tribe. Since the IPEd program is conceptualized as a venue for promoting cultural awareness and appreciation, relevant activities must be conducted to exemplify what is taught in school. Young generations of the IP community might have yet to witness the nuances of their culture in a community setting.

School principals are pivotal in leading educational institutions (Cahapay, 2021). Helping teacher education students develop the requisite abilities and dispositions to fulfill educational objectives contributes to developing future teachers as competent professionals and allies in Indigenous and diversity education (McInnes, 2017). School administrators need to develop skills that enable them to interact with others consciously, with full awareness of how their actions impact themselves, others, and their environments (Mahfouz, 2018).

Serving as a resource for the indigenous culture. The program of DepEd catering to indigenous people can be well implemented when the people themselves participate in the process. Especially for local leaders and elders have the authority and traditional expertise to make the program valuable to the learners and the local community in general.

In the study, the IP culture explored is the Higaonon culture, which the Datu believes needs to be inculcated in the daily living of the tribal members. Especially with the strong influence of mainstream society, tribal leaders take a decisive role in making the educational system program relevant and effective.

"In my point of view as Datu, I have a big role in preserving our Higaonon culture through inculcating it with our daily lives.... Also, I want to encourage the children to live the culture of the Higaonon." (D1)

As claimed by the D1 participant as a tribal leader, he recognized that he has an important role in the culture of their tribe to be preserved. With the thrust of DepEd in giving value to IP cultures now, traditional leaders need to extend their cooperation in promoting their Higaonon tribe in the academic setting. Tribal leaders know that young children may be unaware of their customs and traditions. Through schools teaching the IP culture, the leaders and elders can be assisted in strengthening the culture of their tribe.

Leadership is not viewed as static and reified but co-created within in-the-moment relationships (Rosile et al., 2018). Educating the community about their indigenous knowledge is a way to prevent or at least lessen the adversities they are facing. One way of making them more engaged is by integrating IK into the curriculum (Natano, 2023). A study in Australia evaluated the existing programs and policies, definitions of 'quality' and outcomes in Indigenous education, the roles of schools in Indigenous communities; the processes of educational consultation and funding; and the complex issues surrounding mainstream versus Indigenous community-controlled schools (Swab, 2018).

Challenges of Instructional Leaders in the Program Implementation

Having teachers who are non-speakers of the tribal language. The IPed program requires the teaching of the culture of the community. The current study focused on the Higaonons as the indigenous people in Gingoog City. The DepEd mandates the Schools Division in the locality to be an instrument for the appreciation of the culture of these people, where school activities can be geared toward preserving and demonstrating living traditions. However, as claimed by the school heads as study participants, their concern has been having teachers to teach in the program despite being non-speakers of the tribal language. Thus, there has been an observable

language deficiency among IPed teachers in communicating with indigenous learners using the latter's mother tongue. The schools in the area face the reality of a language barrier in delivering the program, a major impediment to achieving the goals of the Indigenous Peoples' education. A few of the participants gave the following statements:

"One important challenge I have encountered is the deployment of teachers. Most of the IP schools lack IP teachers who can communicate with the IP learners." (SH1)

"Most of the teachers in the IPed schools are not IPed teachers. They cannot teach and use the language." (T4)

"... communication barriers to non-IP teacher serving IP implementing school." (SH3)

As cited by Participant SH1, the challenge one encountered was assigning teachers to the program despite needing the language facility. Many teachers are not Higaonons. Thus, they need to speak the learners' language. Though the teachers have been tasked to help the IP leaders preserve the culture of the tribal community, the educators given the task do not possess the skills nor knowledge of the language and culture that are supposed to be the target of the IPed program. In this vein, the school head believed the program could be difficult to deliver at the desired level.

Communication is an indispensable tool in human society as it allows humans to successfully give or share their thoughts, feelings, ideas, and information with others. Though humans communicate through body movements, signs, and other means, speech and the writing systems based on it are far superior in terms of accuracy, effectiveness, and efficiency. When people come together to achieve a common purpose in the home, community, society, and nation, speech becomes a requisite tool for the success of that enterprise (Anyidoho, 2018). A study revealed that all five indigenous learner-participants demonstrated English vocabulary deficiency in naming depicted objects in the surroundings. They needed help reciting weekdays and months and citing common Philippine events. They needed help in conveying illustrated antonyms and synonyms. These findings denote a language intervention to improve essential skills in English semantics (Leaño & Piragasam, 2019).

Having teachers without adequate pedagogical knowledge and skills. Aside from not having the linguistic skills of the target tribal language, many IPed teachers do not also have the needed pedagogical skills. Those hired or assigned to teach in the program must be licensed teachers. As mandated by law, indigenous professionals

are given priority to be hired in the teaching profession when they have the certification from the community leaders that they are cultural community members. In this regard, though the applicants may need to demonstrate exemplary teaching skills or the needed pedagogical skills, they are accepted to teach in the program. Two participants gave the following statements,

"Most of the IP teachers cannot teach to a full extent using pedagogies and variation of strategies. There are many non-readers from IP schools where there are IP teachers stationed." (SH2)

"As a teacher in the IPEd school, one of the problems is lack of expertise in integrating the IPEd lesson." (T3)

Based on the statement of SH2, there are teachers assigned to the IPEd program who need training on how to teach effectively. The teaching-learning process requires teachers to be knowledgeable on pedagogies that can make them impart their cultural knowledge to the learners. When one does not know of strategies that can make classroom instruction engaging to the learners, the level of learning can be compromised. On the part of Participant T3, one admitted the need for more expertise among the teachers in integrating lessons related to indigenous education. The teachers could only effectively teach in the program when they had the necessary knowledge to deliver the contents and activities effectively.

Lack of teachers with indigenous knowledge. The IPEd program is designed to uplift the level of education among Indigenous people. Aside from discussing pertinent lessons for the various subjects in the curriculum for Basic Education, the teachers are also tasked with promoting the cultural heritage of the young learners and the tribal community in a particular locality in the country. However, there can be teachers who are assigned to the IPEd program despite needing to gain adequate knowledge of the culture of the people being taught, and these educators have fallen short of emphasizing the various aspects of indigenous existence.

"Lack of IP teachers knowledgeable of the cultures...Not all the teachers assigned to the IP community are IP teachers. Most IP schools are Multigrade classes, and not all teachers are good at teaching multigrade classes. Teachers lack training for IPEd...Lack of IP teachers knowledgeable of the cultures." (SH2)

"Lack of available teachers who are knowledgeable on the customs and traditions of Higa-onon Tribe." (SH4)

"The school encountered scarcity of the budget and experts to teach the culture." (T4)

As claimed by the school heads as instructional leaders, most teachers assigned to carry out IPed education are not members of the tribe. Thus, these educators in the field can need to improve in delivering what the program has been designed to offer to the IP community. The program should integrate cultural inputs while teaching the learners basic literacy and numeracy to strengthen the cultural integrity of the indigenous people. Especially that young generations of the Higaonons may have yet to grow completely immersed in their own culture, schools are supposed to be venues for cultural revitalization.

Indigenous people youth do not have a "sense of pride" for being members of the IP community because they are less likely to be immersed in their indigenous knowledge. Their lack of cultural engagement as IP members influence how they identify as Indigenous People to others (Natano, 2023). Collective recognition may encourage compliance with the state by fostering legitimating beliefs and creating a sense of belonging within the broader national community, even as it reinforces a subnational indigenous identity (McMurry, 2022).

Lack of school provisions, facilities, and learning materials. Many IPed teachers may need to gain adequate knowledge of the indigenous culture of the immediate community which public schools serve, and most schools need instructional materials specifically containing cultural inputs to be taught in the class for the IPed program. The teachers still need to learn what to teach. Though they can solicit input from a few IP colleagues in the teaching profession, more is needed to maximize the teaching-learning process. Also, schools need to have sample materials of the cultures of the IP people, and having specific classrooms where they can be stored can be most helpful. However, it is a reality that public schools lack classrooms to cater to all learners. Thus, there is no space specifically intended for the IPed program. Four participants gave the following statements:

"No classroom." (SH2)

"The learning materials are not available in the school." (SH1)

"Lack of learning resources, facilities...." (SH3)

"Budget! Financial constraints hinder the implementation of the program." (T1)

As cited by the three school heads and a teacher-participant, schools need more material resources to implement effectively the IPed program of DepEd. More is needed for the Department to conceptualize a program to cater to the various

needs of society. It also needs to consider the preparedness and logistics needed to realize the programs in place.

Two Datu participants observed that schools do not have instructional materials containing the Higaonon culture. This deficiency is known to tribal leaders, indirectly presupposing the inadequacy of teaching the culture of the tribe in the classroom setting. They cited that the absence of materials for instruction can make the program's implementation ineffective. In this regard, school heads and teachers carry the burden of producing instructional materials that can aid in the teaching of the culture of the people.

"Based on my observation, we do not have resources like books for Higaonon. Lack of resources, insufficient resources, or materials, can hinder the successful implementation of a program." (D1)

"As Datu, I think the situations which are difficult are resources of the program is quite insufficient. Which makes the implementation more difficult." (D3)

The materials required for the IPEd program must be more present in schools. Tribal leaders are aware of this deficiency. Like the school heads and teachers, they recognize the value of having the material resources needed for the program. The implementation can be difficult to achieve when schools do not have the books and other instructional materials that teachers in the field can use for their learners.

Contextualization is an incredible technique for steering learners' interest in exploring the content in a meaningful and relevant setting. The curriculum shall be flexible enough to enable and allow schools to localize, indigenize, and enhance based on their respective educational and social context (Flores, 2021). Moreover, the lack of instructional materials (100%) and classrooms (100%) is one of the major problems of the teachers. They cannot teach well because of the students' unavailability of reading materials, and they often use old books. The classroom is also not conducive to learning; there are no walls and no chairs (Nedal & Alcoriza, 2018).

Lack of evaluation and feedback mechanism for the program. School heads claimed that the Department of Education needs to be informed on the conditions in the field and the implementation status of IPEd. However, instructional leaders need to give feedback on the program so that timely intervention can be given. Though the program has been in place for a considerable time already, the program seems not, given an evaluation, that the problems encountered in the field continue and are left unattended. The following are sample statements given by the participants of the study.

"Feedbacking and intervoention must be considered on this program." (SH1)

"As a teacher for IPED school, the program has no focus on the curriculum implementation. There are many activities in the IPED which will be not used in the delivery of the lesson in the classroom." (T3)

As claimed by SH1, the program needs to be given feedback by educators in the field. DepEd must look into the implementation status as an educational agency to address deficiencies. The program will only be effective if concerns are duly attended. As cited by Participant T3, the program has no focus, maybe because the implementers need a clearer understanding of the program's direction. While many activities could be done in schools, the teachers only sometimes see their relevance to what the IPED program has been designed to cater to. Thus, higher academic authorities need to look into the curriculum, the implementation, the materials needed, and the activities performed to deliver the program according to its objectives and goals.

In most countries, indigenous children have low school enrollments, poor school performance, low literacy rates, high dropout rates, and lag behind other groups in academic achievements nationally" (Milne, 2017). Pairing linguistic diversity with increasing urbanization and diaspora realities creates additional challenges for Indigenous revitalization-immersion education, as does the diversity of school systems that Native students attend. Public schools – by far the most common school type – tend to have few Native teachers and minimal or no Native language and culture content (McIvor & McCarty, 2017).

Strategies Using in Addressing the Challenges Encountered

Developing manpower for the IPEd Program. The school head-participants of the study claimed that they had tapped people who could help them develop and prepare learning materials relevant to the program. Recognizing the need to continue delivering what the program envisions to attain, school leaders must utilize whatever resources they can use, including the assistance of the volunteers for the school community. Also, school heads use the Learning Action Cell so that master teachers and other colleagues in the teaching profession can share their knowledge and best practices to help improve the present capacity of the teachers struggling to participate in the IPed program. Two school heads gave the following statements:

"To capacitate the school in the implementation of the program, we were able to tap for volunteers from the community to aid us in the reproduction of learning materials." (SH2)

“There are factors to consider that a program like the Indigenous Peoples Education Program would be successful and effective in its implementation. There should have manpower which are the people who are knowledgeable on the customs and traditions of Higa-onon Tribe and of course, the financial for the compensation of the elders acting as teachers.” (SH 4)

The move of DepEd through the public schools with the IP community can be maximized when there is evident cooperation among the various stakeholders, like the volunteers and the elders. Schools can only effectively implement the program if they are able to respond to the identified needs. Aside from volunteers, elders could be tapped as the teachers themselves, explicitly teaching the customs and traditions of the Higaonon tribe.

Collaborating and peer coaching. Aside from tapping the tribal leaders and elders, school heads can use the Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions already in place. It is a DepEd mechanism wherein teachers collaborate to enhance their content knowledge and even pedagogical practices. Amid the shared challenges experienced in the IPEd program, school heads must identify any available means for the teachers to withstand the difficulties. The following expressed by the participants regarding collaboration and peer mentoring:

“Continuous LAC sessions for teachers and class observations are strictly carried-out. Peer coaching and collaborative teamwork have been engaged to look for quality results.” (SH2)

“I can help, especially since I am Higaonon teacher. I have something to do for assisting our school head.” (T1)

“As Datu, I appreciate integrating the IPEd schools into the Higaonon culture. I hope there is interdisciplinary learning, where teachers from different subjects work together to design and implement integrated lessons.” (D1)

As cited by SH2, the LAC sessions can be utilized for collaboration among the teachers. The teachers assigned to participate in the IPEd program could be helping one another. Amid the professed weaknesses in the program implementation, the teachers had to collaborate so they may be able to discharge their duties and achieve favorable results for their learners. On the part of T1 as a participant in the study, she claimed that being a Higaonon herself posed an advantage and could be helpful to one's school head's efforts to address the challenges encountered. Datu1, on the other hand, expressed the hope for the

educators to share professional expertise so that the culture of the tribe could be integrated effectively into the lessons.

Contextualizing instructional materials. As an outcome of professional collaboration, they also considered contextualizing their lesson plans according to the objective of DepEd. There are cultural aspects integrated into the lessons. Thus, having Higaonon teachers has been considered a valuable resource for making indigenized instructional materials.

"For the teachers, we have conducted a series of LAC sessions intended to contextualize lesson plans." (SH1)

"Higaonon teachers to be assigned here in our school use indigenization lesson plan and of course delivered indigenized lesson." (T1)

The responses of the school head and the teacher-participants could mean that they serve the IPed program better by working together. Their way of carrying out their educator duties was to seek ways to improve instruction. They have to work together so that school goals can be attained.

Establishing a strong link with the IP community and local leaders. The effective implementation of IPed does not solely rest on the school heads and teachers. They need to link with the tribal leaders to teach the community's culture and make the learners see the value of its preservation and perpetuation. The culture of the Higaonon tribe is mainly the one that is taught in the Division of Gingoog, apart from the other indigenous cultures that the IPed program may also introduce. Since many of the academic personnel in the Division are not Higaonons, the schools need to tap the IP leaders themselves as the authority and credible sources of the people's IKSPs. In this regard, school heads must connect with the Datus and elders to implement the program. Educators need to establish a strong link with them, especially with the scarcity of instructional materials containing the lores and traditions of this indigenous group of people.

"I addressed these difficulties and challenges by being resilient and resourceful with a strong relationship with the IP community." (SH3)

"Ask strong support from the tribal leaders, the community, and the Brgy. Council." (SH4)

As admitted by Participant SH3, there are difficulties and challenges in implementing the IPed program. Thus, she stressed the need to be resilient and resourceful by building a strong relationship with the local community, if not a partnership. The academic personnel can only deliver extensively the scope of the program by directly linking with the community. Culture is best taught or delivered

when it is derived from the people themselves. As added by Participant SH 4, school personnel have to solicit the profound support of the tribal community, leaders, and members alike. Also, the Barangay Council, whether comprised of Higaonons or Christians, is a valuable source of support. Schools need to collaborate with the locals to facilitate cultural activities that require the participation of other stakeholders.

Support Received by School Heads from Other Stakeholders

Need for Commitment of Tribal Leaders for Availability and Assistance. Tribal leaders serve as the cornerstone in implementing a cultural program of the Department of Education. While the Department tasks school heads and teachers to implement what IPED has been designed for, these educators need the local leaders to help them carry out the mandate. In this study, traditional leaders expressed commitment to serve as partners for the academic institutions in the locality. The following were the statements given by the participants:

"Tribal leaders are always there to help the school." (SH 1)

"Tribal Leaders are committed that they would be available anytime that the school needed them." (SH4)

"As Datu, I should always help the instructional leaders in solving problems in the school." (D3)

School Heads 1 and 2 claimed that the tribal leaders extended support to the schools in the locality. These traditional leaders let the school heads be counted on whenever assistance was needed. Despite the cultural differences between or among the people in the school setting and the outside community, the tribal leaders made their presence and support be felt by those given the task of educating the young generation of learners, not only on general knowledge as indicated in the school curriculum but also on the culture of the Higaonon people. It is a reality that there can be young members of the tribe who may not be fully aware anymore of what their culture is, not live according to the ways of their ancestors, that the role of schools to re-orient them on their culture can be most essential. In this regard, the tribal leaders expressed their commitment to be available for assistance.

Guidance and Inputs from Tribal Leaders. The sharing of culture is done best by tribal leaders recognized as the repositories of lore and traditions. They possess firsthand knowledge of cultural systems, practices, beliefs, and values that some members of the tribe, especially the young generation, may not be aware of or living with. Thus, the participation and cooperation of these traditional leaders are essential for the IPED program to be meaningfully implemented. The guidance they

can give can enable the school heads to carry out the traditional activities learners witness in the school setting. School heads, as participants of the study, disclosed the contributions of the community leaders to the implementation of the IPED program. There following were statements given by two school heads:

"The community leaders provided us IKSPs through oral tradition. They are also consultative bodies making IPED framework and validating Higaunon Orthography. They are also the key informants to oral traditions and provide feedback on the IPED program." (SH1)

"Tribal leaders offer us their assistance by sharing their knowledge, skills, values, and practices with full support." (SH3)

As cited by participant SH1, the community leaders provided them with indigenous knowledge, systems, and practices (IKSPs). The statement means that the Datus and elders of the Higaonon tribe have shared their culture with them through actual explications that non-members of the tribe may not have known nor have fully understood. Since IP people live side-by-side with non-tribal residents, the culture of the Higaonon tribe may have been observed by the latter without necessarily understanding the traditional beliefs and principles behind it. Thus, these local leaders must equip academic personnel with the needed knowledge of the IP culture so that classroom instruction can be well grounded on the very knowledge of individuals who live with the culture.

"The tribal leaders also will extend their help to our school head by answering a call for a meeting or forum. They are willing to give their pieces of advice as well as their suggestions for the development of the program." (T1)

Participant T1 claimed that the tribal leaders of their community extend them assistance by heeding meetings called by the school heads. Through a meeting or forum, school personnel can present the leaders with any plans for cultural activities or undertakings that require the cooperation or participation of the Higaonon themselves. Through the facilitation that a Datu can do with one's tribal members, the weight of the work for the program can be manageable for the school community. Participant D2 expressed the desire to always be available for the school for any matters concerning the IP program, especially since he knew the very purpose of its creation: to help cultural groups of people sustain their identity and distinct way of life. Also, as explicitly claimed by the tribal leaders, making the members live daily in a manner that exemplifies what a Higaonon is can be the best means of helping schools accomplish what DepEd envisions to achieve.

"As Datu, I want to be involved in all programs designed with sustainability for our culture. I will guide strategies for maintaining cultural programs beyond the school setting, such as involving local institutions, establishing community centers, or integrating cultural practices into everyday life." (D2)

Need to participate in school activities. The IPed program has several objectives and specific activities that schools are mandated to be accomplished. Nevertheless, tribal leaders recognize the noble purpose of the program and the need to extend support to the program objectives. Thus, Participant D2 asserted giving support to any school activity that involves the promotion and perpetuation of their culture. Hence, Participant D2, a Datu of the tribal community, conveyed the willingness to assist the school leaders through participation in the school's cultural activities. Similarly, D3 stressed extending support to the thrust of DepEd by taking part in program implementation. The expression of support for the educational program is indicative of the appreciation of the local leaders of the importance of their role in realizing educational goals centered on the culture of the community.

"I will support the school leaders by participating in the different activities in the school relative to our culture." (D2)

"I should participate in the program's implementation from the Department of Education so that I will be the steward in sustaining our own culture and tradition. The assistance that I gave to the instructional leaders is through attending programs relative to IPed." (D3)

"Our tribal leaders are diligently following or supporting the school like monthly meetings, pahina, and others." (T2)

"The community is supporting the program through IP activities conducted in the school. Most of the activities are held in the school with the parents." (SH1)

As affirmed by Participant T2, the tribal leaders have spearheaded the school's activities through their regular attendance at school meetings. In the case also of communal activities referred to as 'pahina,' the tribal leaders actively involved themselves to show they are vital stakeholders. SH1 also recognized the support of the community in which one had observed that school activities were attended by parents, in which many are IPs. The participants' statements prove that stakeholders have their share of responsibility for realizing what DepEd envisions to achieve.

Indigenous Peoples also self-identify as native and marginalized peoples whose basic rights must be recognized and who advocate for equal treatment as

citizens (Leepreecha, 2019). Vigorous community engagement provides venues for learning and unlearning histories and empowers marginalized peoples (Acabado & Martin, 2020). The value of interconnectedness serves as an overarching theme that forms the worldview of the indigenous communities in Southeast Asia. Interconnectedness was important to the indigenous peoples as they considered themselves extensions of their family, community, ancestors, future descendants, the land, and all living things and creations that reside on their lands (Chua et al., 2019).

Need of Support from subordinates. Apart from the support given to the school heads by the tribal leaders, the latter also received assistance from the teachers in the field. The school heads recognized the effort of the teachers in the field through the performance of the expected outputs to be given based on the data gathered on how the learners achieved the program's performance indicators. As cited by SH2, school heads are to submit to the Division Office reports related to IPed, wherein they need the teachers to provide them with the data to be interpreted to evaluate the program's effectiveness.

"The assistance I have received from the field, especially from the teachers, are the collected data and result of program progression for interpretation." (SH2)

"The assistance that other teachers may offer is to follow the instruction of our school head as the instructional leaders of the program implementation and to willingly contribute any amount as much as needed to the implementation." (T1)

The statement of T1 conveys the need for teachers in the field to head to the instruction of their school heads. Each member of the academic community has a role to play though a school head takes a bigger responsibility in implementing the IPed program. Thus, the cooperation teachers can demonstrate is crucial for the school leaders to implement the program effectively. IPed teachers need to work together with the school heads so that these instructional leaders may achieve the program's goals in collaboration with other stakeholders, like the tribal leaders.

In the long term, the language shifts the education system tends to promote could endanger or bring near extinction to the local languages and the indigenous knowledge embodied in them (Anyidoho, 2018). Thus, the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) personnel and IP teachers can play a vital role as change agents and may act to correct the historical injustices on IPs' rights and welfare (Eduardo & Gabriel, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following are the conclusions:

1. Collaboration among stakeholders is integral for realizing the goals and objectives of the IPed program of DepEd. The school and tribal communities need to work together for the program to take its course as intended.

2. The Indigenous Peoples Education program has various limitations that need intervention, with the deficiencies posing impediments to its effective implementation.

3. School heads as instructional leaders have responded proactively to the challenges in implementing the IPed program by utilizing the human resources that assist in achieving the program's goals.

4. Various stakeholders recognize the value of their varied contributions to the school community for the IPed program to become effective and beneficial to the learners as target beneficiaries of the program.

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