

The Learning Experiences of Indigenous Peoples' (IP) Children in Glan

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the learning experiences of Indigenous Peoples (IP) children in the subject Filipino and how these experiences influenced their academic motivation at Leonard Young Sr. National High School in Glan, Sarangani Province. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the study explored the lived experiences of ten Grade 7 students with low academic performance in Filipino. Through in-depth interviews and reflexive thematic analysis, three major themes emerged: emotional and cultural experiences, self-development and self-valuation, and learning challenges. The findings revealed that IP students experienced enjoyment and increased motivation in learning Filipino when teachers incorporated culturally relevant stories and interactive activities that strengthened participation and self-confidence. However, they continued to face challenges such as difficulty understanding figurative language, limited access to technology, and classroom distractions. The study recommends the adoption of Culturally Sustaining and Responsive Pedagogy (CSR/P) to promote inclusive, meaningful, and culturally responsive Filipino instruction for Indigenous Peoples learners.

Keywords: Indigenous Peoples' children, influence, learning experiences, academic motivation, Filipino subject

INTRODUCTION

Education serves as a fundamental pillar of development, not only for individuals but also for communities. In the Philippine context, education plays a crucial role in preserving the identity and culture of Indigenous Peoples (IP). However, despite national efforts toward inclusive education, Indigenous learners continue to face structural, linguistic, and cultural barriers within the formal educational system. These challenges are particularly evident in the learning of Filipino as a subject.

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (2020) indicate that a significant number of Indigenous Peoples do not complete formal education due to poverty, geographical isolation, and limited government support. Recent studies (Wager et al., 2022; Buenaflor et al., 2023) further emphasize that inadequate access to inclusive and culturally responsive education contributes to the marginalization of Indigenous learners, often resulting in diminished academic confidence and motivation. Within the Filipino classroom, many IP students struggle with figurative language, limited technological resources, culturally distant instructional materials, and academic workload demands.

The use of Filipino as a medium of instruction is intended to promote inclusivity and national identity. Panicker (2020) argues that language use significantly influences comprehension and learner confidence. However, instruction becomes meaningful only when it acknowledges the cultural and experiential realities of students. Anchored in Freire's (2023) Critical Pedagogy, education becomes transformative when it is directly connected to learners' lived experiences, culture, and social context. To strengthen inclusive education, the Philippine government has implemented several policies, including Republic Act 10533 (Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013), DepEd Order No. 62, s. 2011 (National Indigenous Peoples Education Policy

Framework), DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2019 (Indigenous Peoples Curriculum), and DepEd Order No. 10, s. 2024 (MATATAG Curriculum).

These policies, together with the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program and the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (RA 8371), aim to institutionalize culturally grounded and rights-based education for Indigenous learners. Despite these frameworks, gaps remain in understanding how Indigenous students actually experience learning Filipino in real classroom settings.

Existing literature highlights several interconnected concerns. Indigenous learners often experience language gaps, limited culturally relevant materials, inadequate teacher preparation for culturally responsive pedagogy, and instances of discrimination or linguistic shaming (Cats-Baril, 2021; Abad, 2020; Amparo, 2020). Studies also demonstrate that culturally contextualized instruction, integration of local narratives, and community-based knowledge positively influence learner engagement and identity formation (Macapugay & Nakamura, 2024; Fabro et al., 2024; Lunda et al., 2024). Furthermore, motivation in language learning is strongly influenced by classroom experiences, teacher support, family involvement, and culturally sensitive instructional strategies (Falcasantos et al., 2024; Requillo, 2024).

While these studies provide important insights, there remains a need to closely examine the lived experiences of Indigenous learners in specific local contexts, particularly regarding how their experiences in learning Filipino influence their academic motivation. Understanding their narratives offers a pathway toward designing more culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogical approaches.

Thus, this study aims to explore the learning experiences of Indigenous Peoples (IP) children at Leonard Young Sr. National High School, Glan, Sarangani Province, during the School Year 2023–2024 in learning Filipino. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Describe the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples students in learning Filipino.
2. Examine how these experiences influence their motivation to study Filipino.

This study focuses on ten Grade 7 Indigenous students who obtained low academic performance in Filipino during the first grading period. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research investigates their lived experiences through in-depth interviews. The inquiry is limited to their personal experiences in Filipino and does not include perspectives from teachers, parents, or administrators. The findings are contextual and are not intended for broad generalization beyond the specific school setting and participants involved.

By documenting and analyzing these experiences, the study contributes to the development of more inclusive, meaningful, and culturally responsive approaches to teaching Filipino, approaches that recognize the identity, dignity, and cultural heritage of Indigenous learners.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples (IP) students in learning Filipino. Qualitative research is appropriate when the objective is to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' subjective experiences, meanings, and perspectives within a specific context (Creswell & Creswell, 2016).

A phenomenological approach was specifically selected because the study aimed to describe and interpret the essence of the participants' lived experiences in learning Filipino. Phenomenology focuses on understanding how individuals perceive and make sense of their experiences from their own point of view (Saed, 2022). Rather than relying on numerical data or statistical generalizations, this approach prioritizes rich descriptions and detailed narratives.

In this study, the primary phenomenon under investigation was the learning experience of Indigenous Peoples students in Filipino and how these experiences influenced their motivation to study the subject. Through in-depth interviews, the researcher was able to capture nuanced insights regarding the students' challenges, coping strategies, emotional responses, cultural influences, and perceptions of their learning environment.

The phenomenological design allowed for a deeper exploration of how cultural identity, language background, and classroom experiences shaped the participants' engagement and motivation in Filipino. This approach was deemed most appropriate because the study sought not merely to measure academic performance but to understand the meaning behind the participants' experiences.

Researcher's Role

In qualitative phenomenological research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. As the researcher of this study, I assumed an active role in conducting in-depth interviews, transcribing responses, analyzing data, and interpreting the lived experiences of the participants.

Throughout the research process, I maintained reflexivity by being aware of my own assumptions, biases, and perspectives that could influence data interpretation. To ensure objectivity and rigor, I carefully documented the procedures undertaken during data collection and analysis. I also ensured that the voices of the participants remained central in the presentation of findings.

As part of my responsibility, I safeguarded the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants by using code names such as IPL1, IPL2, IPL3, IPL4, IPL5, IPL6, IPL7, IPL8, IPL9, and IPL10 to represent each Indigenous Peoples learner. This protected their identities while preserving the authenticity of their narratives.

Additionally, I facilitated the interviews in a respectful, culturally sensitive, and non-judgmental manner to create a safe environment where participants could openly share their experiences in learning Filipino.

Research Locale

This study was conducted at Leonard Young Sr. National High School, located in Glan, Sarangani Province, Philippines. The school serves students from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, including learners who belong to various Indigenous Peoples (IPs) communities in the municipality.

Glan is a geographically diverse area where several Indigenous groups reside. Many IP families in the locality experience socio-economic challenges, limited access to educational resources, and linguistic differences between their mother tongue and the Filipino language used in formal instruction. These contextual factors make the school an appropriate site for exploring the lived experiences of Indigenous learners in studying Filipino.

Leonard Young Sr. National High School implements the national curriculum prescribed by the Department of Education, including policies related to Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd). However, despite institutional efforts toward inclusivity, Indigenous learners may still encounter challenges in language acquisition, cultural representation, and academic engagement.

The selection of this locale was based on the presence of Indigenous learners enrolled in Grade 7 during the School Year 2023–2024 and the relevance of the setting to the research problem. The school provided an appropriate and accessible environment for conducting in-depth interviews while ensuring the comfort and safety of the participants.

Participants of the Study

The participants of this study consisted of ten (10) Grade 7 Indigenous Peoples (IP) students enrolled at Leonard Young Sr. National High School during the School Year 2023–2024. These learners were identified as belonging to Indigenous communities in Glan, Sarangani Province.

The selection of participants was based on specific criteria relevant to the objectives of the study. First, they must be officially identified as Indigenous Peoples learners. Second, they must be currently enrolled in Grade 7. Third, they must have obtained low academic performance in Filipino during the first grading period. These criteria ensured that the participants had direct and meaningful experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation.

To protect their identities and maintain confidentiality, the participants were assigned code names: IPL1, IPL2, IPL3, IPL4, IPL5, IPL6, IPL7, IPL8, IPL9, and IPL10. These codes were used in all transcripts, analyses, and presentations of findings to ensure anonymity while preserving the authenticity of their narratives.

The participants were selected because they could provide rich, firsthand accounts of their learning experiences in Filipino, particularly regarding the challenges they encountered and how these experiences influenced their motivation to study the subject.

Sampling Procedure

This study utilized purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly employed in qualitative research. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to intentionally select participants who possess specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives.

The selection process was conducted in several stages. First, a list of Grade 7 students officially identified as Indigenous Peoples was obtained from the school records. Second, from this list, students who obtained low academic performance in Filipino during the first grading period were identified. Third, additional criteria were considered, including the students' willingness to participate in the study and the consent of their parents or guardians.

After identifying eligible participants, formal communication was made with their parents or guardians to explain the purpose of the study, the nature of participation, and the ethical safeguards in place. Only students whose parents or guardians provided written informed consent, and who themselves expressed voluntary agreement, were included in the study.

The final sample consisted of ten (10) Indigenous Peoples learners who met all the inclusion criteria. This number is consistent with phenomenological research recommendations, which typically involve a small number of participants to allow for in-depth exploration of lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Data Gathering Procedure

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, guided by a validated interview guide prepared by the researcher. The interview guide was developed to align with the research objectives and was submitted for validation to qualified academic experts from the Graduate School of Holy Trinity College of General Santos City. Revisions were incorporated based on their recommendations to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the questions.

Before data collection, formal permission was secured from the School Division Superintendent of the Division of Sarangani and from the school principal of Leonard Young Sr. National High School. In addition, written informed consent was obtained from the parents or guardians of the participants, and assent was secured from the students themselves.

An audio recorder was used during the interviews to ensure accurate documentation of the participants' responses. This allowed for precise transcription and minimized the risk of misinterpretation or omission of significant statements. The interviews were conducted in locations chosen by the participants, either at school or in another setting where they felt comfortable and safe. This approach was intended to create a relaxed and supportive environment that encouraged open and honest sharing of experiences.

All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts served as the primary data for analysis. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher maintained cultural sensitivity and ensured that participants were treated with respect and dignity.

Trustworthiness

To ensure methodological rigor, the study adhered to the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Credibility was established through prolonged engagement with the data, verbatim transcription of audio-recorded interviews, and member checking. Participants reviewed summaries of their statements and emergent themes to verify the accuracy of interpretation.

Transferability was supported through a thick description of the research context, participants, and procedures, enabling readers to determine the applicability of findings to similar settings. Relevant research documents and records were systematically archived for future scholarly reference.

Dependability and confirmability were strengthened through an audit process. The study underwent review by a research adviser who examined the research design, data collection procedures, transcripts, coding processes, and thematic interpretations. An audit trail, including interview recordings, transcripts, analytic notes, and related documentation, was maintained to ensure transparency, consistency, and objectivity throughout the research process.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to institutional ethical guidelines and was conducted in compliance with the research standards of Holy Trinity College of General Santos City. Ethical safeguards were implemented to protect the rights, dignity, and well-being of all participants.

Informed consent was obtained from parents or legal guardians before data collection, and assent was secured from the student participants. The purpose of the study, procedures, potential questions, and use of audio recording were clearly explained in accessible language. Participants were informed that the data would be used solely for academic purposes.

Participation was strictly voluntary. Students were informed of their right to decline participation, withdraw at any time, or refuse to answer questions without penalty or academic consequence.

To ensure data privacy and confidentiality, pseudonyms (e.g., IPL1–IPL10) were used in all transcripts and reports. Audio recordings and related documents were securely stored in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher.

The study also upheld principles of gender sensitivity and cultural sensitivity. Interview questions were framed in neutral, non-discriminatory language, and all participants were treated with equal respect. Cultural beliefs, traditions, and identities of the Indigenous learners were acknowledged and honored throughout the research process. Interviews were conducted in settings where participants felt safe and comfortable, ensuring respectful and ethical engagement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Learning Experiences of Indigenous Peoples (IP) Children in Filipino

Thematic analysis revealed three major themes describing the learning experiences of Indigenous Peoples (IP) students in Filipino:

1. Interest in Learning Activities and Cultural Appreciation

2. Personal Growth and Self-Development

3. Facing Learning Challenges

Theme 1: Interest in Learning Activities and Cultural Appreciation

This theme reflects the positive emotions, meaningful engagement, and culturally grounded experiences of IP learners in Filipino. Despite encountering academic difficulties, participants described their learning experiences as enjoyable and relevant.

Two subthemes emerged:

- Enjoyment in Stories and Classroom Activities (General)

Most participants expressed enthusiasm for storytelling, class discussions, and interactive activities. They associated Filipino lessons with enjoyment and active participation.

- Emotional Connection to Inherited Culture and Traditions

Learners reported valuing lessons that resonated with their cultural background. Cultural references within stories and discussions strengthened their sense of identity and belonging.

Overall, this theme highlights how culturally responsive learning experiences enhanced engagement and positive emotional connections to the subject.

Theme 2: Personal Growth and Self-Development

This theme captures the transformative impact of learning Filipino on students' self-perception and behavior.

Two primary ideas emerged:

- Expansion of Knowledge

Students reported acquiring new vocabulary, deeper comprehension skills, and broader awareness of language use.

- Positive Behavioral Change (General)

Participants indicated improvements in discipline, confidence, and classroom participation. Learning Filipino was perceived not only as academic growth but also as personal development.

This theme suggests that Filipino instruction contributed to both cognitive and socio-emotional development.

Theme 3: Facing Learning Challenges

While positive experiences were prominent, participants also described several difficulties.

Three subthemes were identified:

- Difficulty Understanding Textual Meaning (General)

Many learners struggled with figurative language, deep vocabulary, and complex texts in Filipino.

- Limited Access to Technology (Rare)

A few participants reported lacking mobile phones or digital resources needed for research and academic tasks.

- Classroom Distractions (Rare)

Some students experienced environmental or peer-related distractions that affected concentration.

Despite these challenges, students did not express complete disengagement from the subject; rather, the challenges formed part of their broader learning experience.

Influence of Learning Experiences on Motivation in Filipino

Analysis of the second research question revealed three major motivational themes:

1. Development of Determination to Study
2. Valuing Education
3. Positive Response to Learning Challenges

Theme 1: Development of Determination to Study

This primary theme (General) reflects increased confidence, motivation, and commitment to learning Filipino. Positive classroom experiences strengthened students' willingness to participate actively and invest effort in academic tasks.

Subthemes include:

- Active Initiative and Dedication in Learning (General)
- Full Participation and Compliance with Class Requirements (Typical)

Students demonstrated increased engagement and responsibility toward their academic work.

Theme 5: Valuing Education

This theme highlights the role of Filipino learning in reinforcing cultural pride and educational appreciation.

Subthemes include:

- Pride in Learned Culture (Typical)
- Recognition of Filipino as a Language of Education (Typical)

Students acknowledged Filipino as important for academic success and personal identity formation.

Theme 6: Positive Response to Learning Challenges

Despite encountering obstacles, students used challenges as motivation rather than deterrents.

Subthemes include:

- Effort to Overcome Academic Difficulties (General)
- Adjustment to Limited Technology (Rare)
- Perseverance Despite Distractions (Variant)

Participants demonstrated resilience and adaptive coping strategies, indicating that challenges strengthened rather than weakened their motivation.

Summary of Findings

The results indicate that Indigenous Peoples learners experience Filipino as both a culturally meaningful and

developmentally transformative subject. While they encounter linguistic and contextual challenges, these experiences contribute to stronger determination, cultural pride, and academic resilience

DISCUSSION

This study explored the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples (IP) students in learning Filipino and examined how these experiences influenced their motivation. The findings reveal a dynamic interplay between cultural identity, classroom engagement, personal development, and resilience in the face of academic challenges.

Cultural Relevance as a Catalyst for Engagement

The emergence of the theme Interest in Learning Activities and Cultural Appreciation underscores the importance of culturally responsive instruction. Participants expressed enjoyment in stories and activities that resonated with their lived experiences and cultural background. This finding aligns with studies emphasizing that culturally grounded pedagogy strengthens learner engagement and emotional connection to academic content (Macapugay & Nakamura, 2024; Fabro et al., 2024).

When students recognized elements of their identity within classroom instruction, they reported stronger interest and participation. This supports Freire's (2023) perspective that education becomes meaningful when it is connected to learners' lived realities. The findings suggest that Filipino instruction, when contextualized within Indigenous cultural frameworks, moves beyond linguistic competence and becomes a space for identity affirmation.

Filipino Learning as a Medium for Personal Growth

The theme Personal Growth and Self-Development highlights that learning Filipino contributed not only to cognitive development but also to behavioral and emotional growth. Students described increased confidence, improved discipline, and expanded knowledge.

These results support Wilson et al. (2021), who argue that cultural grounding strengthens self-concept and academic engagement among Indigenous learners. When learners perceive their culture as valued rather than marginalized, they demonstrate stronger self-efficacy and participation (Gabio & Cajandig, 2025). Similarly, the findings resonate with Yunkaporta and Dobson (2022), who emphasize that pedagogy rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems enhances both identity development and academic confidence.

Thus, Filipino instruction in this context functioned not merely as language learning but as a developmental space where identity, confidence, and academic agency were cultivated.

Structural and Linguistic Barriers to Learning

Despite positive experiences, participants reported persistent challenges, particularly difficulty understanding figurative language and complex texts. This aligns with Amparo (2020), who identified language gaps as a major barrier for Indigenous learners when Filipino is not their first language.

The rare but notable reports of limited access to technology also reflect broader structural inequities documented by Romero et al. (2024), particularly among marginalized communities. These challenges highlight systemic factors beyond the classroom that influence learning outcomes.

However, unlike deficit-based narratives often associated with marginalized learners, participants in this study did not express withdrawal or disengagement. Instead, their responses suggest adaptive resilience.

Resilience and Motivation Amid Challenges

A significant contribution of this study is the identification of Positive Response to Learning Challenges as a central motivational outcome. Participants demonstrated determination, perseverance, and adaptive coping strategies despite academic and contextual difficulties.

This finding complicates common portrayals of Indigenous learners as passive recipients of disadvantage. Instead, the results illustrate agency and resilience. The theme Development of Determination to Study suggests that positive classroom experiences—particularly those rooted in cultural recognition—can transform challenges into motivational drivers.

This aligns with culturally responsive education frameworks, which argue that recognition of identity strengthens intrinsic motivation and academic persistence (Lunda et al., 2024). Moreover, it supports self-determination perspectives in education, wherein autonomy, competence, and relatedness enhance sustained motivation.

Implications for Inclusive Filipino Instruction

The findings indicate that inclusive education for Indigenous learners cannot rely solely on access or policy frameworks. Instead, inclusion must be operationalized through:

- Culturally contextualized learning materials
- Recognition of Indigenous identity within classroom discourse
- Linguistic scaffolding to address figurative and abstract language
- Pedagogical sensitivity to structural inequalities

Filipino instruction, when culturally grounded, has the potential to serve as a bridge between national identity and Indigenous identity rather than as a source of cultural displacement.

Conflict Of Interests

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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