



# Navigating Intercultural Teaching in Indigenous Peoples' Education Schools: A Case Study on the Lived Experiences of Non-IPED Teachers Working with Subanen Learners

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## Abstract

**Background and Aim:** Culturally responsive education, grounded in sociocultural theory, affirms that learning is mediated by cultural tools, social interaction, and community knowledge systems. In the Philippines, Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) requires teachers to navigate culturally diverse classrooms while integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems into instruction. However, many educators assigned to IPEd-implementing schools lack specialized training in this area. This study explored the lived experiences of non-IPED teachers in schools serving Subanen learners, focusing on their expectations, preparations, pedagogical approaches, challenges, coping mechanisms, and perceived administrative support.

**Materials and Methods:** This qualitative case study, anchored in Merriam's (2009) framework, involved ten non-IPED teachers from IPEd-implementing schools in the District of Somnót, Zamboanga del Sur, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, field observations, and document analysis, and were analyzed using thematic analysis guided by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory.

**Results:** The findings revealed three interconnected dimensions of teachers' experiences. First, teachers entered IPEd assignments with apprehension rooted in cultural unfamiliarity, prompting self-initiated preparations including community immersion and self-directed cultural learning. Second, their pedagogical adaptations—contextualization, translanguaging, use of indigenous materials, and collaborative learning—demonstrated efforts to create culturally mediated learning environments. Third, persistent challenges comprising language barriers, scarcity of culturally appropriate materials, cultural dissonance, and geographic constraints were managed through community engagement, peer collaboration, personal reflexivity, and resourcefulness. Administrative support remained limited to encouragement without adequate resources, training, or consistent policy implementation.





**Conclusion:** Non-IPED teachers demonstrate significant adaptive capacity in creating culturally responsive learning environments despite systemic constraints. Their experiences illustrate how teachers function as cultural mediators who, through interaction with community members and peers, scaffold Indigenous learners' understanding while simultaneously developing their own intercultural competence. The study contributes to culturally responsive pedagogy by revealing how sociocultural processes operate in Indigenous education contexts and by identifying systemic gaps that hinder sustainable implementation. Recommendations include strengthening teacher preparation through community-embedded training, developing culturally appropriate materials with Indigenous elders, and establishing formal community partnership structures at the school level to enable effective IPED implementation.

**Keywords:** culturally responsive education, Indigenous Peoples Education, non-IPED teachers, Subanen learners, intercultural teaching

## Introduction

Education is fundamentally a culturally situated process. Learners do not enter classrooms as blank slates but as individuals shaped by their communities' languages, knowledge systems, and social practices. When schooling ignores or devalues these cultural foundations, it risks alienating the very students it seeks to educate. This tension becomes particularly acute when teachers and students come from different cultural backgrounds—a reality facing many educators assigned to Indigenous communities. These teachers must navigate not only the standard demands of instruction but also the complex terrain of cultural difference, often without adequate preparation or support.

In the Philippines, this challenge is institutionalized through the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) Program. Mandated by the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997 (Republic Act No. 8371) and operationalized through DepEd Order No. 62, s. In 2011, the IPED framework required schools to integrate Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs) into the national curriculum, involve Indigenous elders in educational planning, and contextualize pedagogy within local cultural practices. While this policy represents a significant departure from historically assimilationist models of schooling, its implementation depends critically on the teachers who translate these mandates into classroom practice.

Many educators assigned to IPED-implementing schools, however, are neither trained within Indigenous education frameworks nor members of the communities they serve. These non-IPED teachers enter intercultural classrooms characterized by linguistic diversity, distinct epistemologies, and geographically marginalized contexts. From a sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978), effective teaching in such settings requires more than content knowledge or generic pedagogical skills. Learning, Vygotsky argued, is mediated by cultural tools—most importantly language—and occurs through social interaction with more knowledgeable others. When teachers and students do not share these cultural tools, the very foundation of the learning process is disrupted. Teachers must therefore function not merely as content transmitters but as cultural mediators who, through engagement with community members, gradually acquire the cultural knowledge necessary to scaffold students' understanding.

The global literature on culturally responsive education supports this view. Scholars argue that mainstream curricula have historically privileged dominant epistemologies while rendering Indigenous knowledge systems invisible (Elias & Mansouri, 2023; Jayadi et al., 2022). Culturally sustaining pedagogies address this inequity by validating learners' identities, languages, and community knowledge as integral to meaningful learning. Within Indigenous education contexts, this requires structural transformation—the integration of IKSPs, community participation in curriculum design, and teaching strategies grounded in local epistemologies (Kyriakidis et al., 2024). Yet, as international scholarship documents, implementation consistently lags behind policy rhetoric due to institutional rigidity, insufficient teacher preparation, and tensions between national standards and local knowledge systems.

In the Philippine context, empirical evaluations of IPED implementation reveal a similar pattern. Studies document progress in localized curriculum development and increased community engagement (Ancheta & Casem, 2024). However, persistent gaps remain in sustained teacher development, authentic instructional resource generation, and consistent administrative support (Pedrajas &





Mosquera, 2025). Teachers assigned to IPED schools frequently encounter language barriers (Barrida et al., 2025), cultural dissonance (Cubi & Rollo, 2025), limited access to culturally grounded materials, and logistical constraints (Souza & Protacio, 2025). Qualitative research further indicates that these educators continually negotiate between national curriculum standards and the culturally specific needs of Indigenous learners, developing adaptive strategies such as contextualization, translanguaging, and community engagement (Firmansyah et al., 2025; Oreales-Tabile, 2024).

Yet despite growing scholarly attention to Indigenous education, significant gaps remain. First, much existing research emphasizes implementation metrics or competence assessments, offering limited insight into the nuanced processes through which teachers navigate intercultural boundaries, integrate IKSPs, and interpret systemic support structures. Second, studies frequently generalize across diverse Indigenous groups, treating "Indigenous learners" as a homogeneous category and obscuring culturally specific experiences. Third, focused analyses of educators teaching Subanen communities—an Indigenous group with rich ritual traditions, distinct epistemological systems, and unique sociocultural structures in the Zamboanga Peninsula (Villanueva & Balgoa, 2023; Sebrev, 2023)—remain notably absent from the literature.

This gap matters because culturally responsive pedagogy cannot be abstracted from the specific communities in which it is practiced. Effective teaching for Subanen learners requires knowledge of Subanen language practices, respect for Subanen social norms, and engagement with Subanen knowledge holders. Without contextually grounded research, policymakers and school administrators lack the empirical basis for designing targeted support systems, developing appropriate materials, or preparing teachers for the realities they will face.

Qualitative case study research is particularly suited to addressing this gap. As Merriam (2009) argues, a case study enables intensive, holistic analysis of a bounded system—in this instance, the experiences of non-IPED teachers within IPED-implementing schools serving Subanen learners. By foregrounding teachers' narratives, such an approach captures not only what challenges teachers face but also how they interpret those challenges, what strategies they develop, and how they construct meaning within intercultural classrooms. These thick descriptions are essential for understanding the dynamic, context-dependent nature of culturally responsive teaching and for generating insights that can inform both policy refinement and institutional practice.

Therefore, this study explored the lived experiences of non-IPED teachers in IPED-implementing schools serving Subanen communities. It examined how these educators navigated intercultural classrooms, integrated Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices into instruction, and constructed culturally responsive learning environments. By doing so, the study aimed to contribute a contextually grounded understanding of cross-cultural teaching dynamics, to illuminate the systemic supports and gaps that shape teachers' work, and to inform more effective policies and practices for culturally sustaining education in Indigenous communities.

## Objectives

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of non-IPED teachers teaching Indigenous learners in IPED-implementing schools serving Subanen communities in the school year 2025–2026. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the expectations of non-IPED teachers teaching in an IPED implementing school?
2. What are the preparations of non-IPED teachers teaching in an IPED implementing school?
3. What are the pedagogical approaches of non-IPED teachers in addressing the needs of the IP learners?
4. What are the challenges encountered by the non-IPED teachers in teaching in IPED implementing schools?
5. How do non-IPED teachers manage the challenges they encountered in teaching in IPED implementing schools?
6. What administrative support is given to non-IPED teachers teaching in IPED implementing schools?





## Literature Review

### Culturally Responsive Education and Sociocultural Theory

Culturally responsive education emerged from critiques of assimilationist schooling systems that historically marginalized Indigenous and minority learners. Scholars argue that mainstream curricula often privilege dominant epistemologies while rendering Indigenous knowledge systems invisible (Elias & Mansouri, 2023; Jayadi et al., 2022). In response, multicultural and culturally sustaining pedagogies emphasize the validation of learners' identities, languages, and community knowledge as integral components of meaningful learning. These approaches frame culture not as an additive element to curriculum but as a foundational dimension of knowledge construction and identity formation.

The theoretical grounding for culturally responsive teaching is found in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which posits that human learning and development are fundamentally mediated by social interaction, cultural tools, and historical context. Vygotsky argued that higher mental functions originate in social interaction before being internalized by the individual—a process he termed the Zone of Proximal Development, wherein learning occurs through engagement with more knowledgeable others. Language, as the most significant cultural tool, mediates this process. Applied to Indigenous education contexts, sociocultural theory suggests that effective teaching requires shared cultural tools between teachers and learners. When non-IPED teachers enter Subanen classrooms without knowledge of local languages, social norms, or epistemological frameworks, the mediation process essential to learning is disrupted. Teachers must therefore acquire these cultural tools through authentic engagement with the community, positioning themselves as learners alongside their students.

Within Indigenous education specifically, culturally responsive pedagogy extends beyond representation to structural transformation. It requires the integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs), community participation in curriculum design, and contextualized teaching strategies grounded in local epistemologies. International scholarship consistently demonstrates that when schooling aligns with learners' sociocultural realities, student engagement, identity affirmation, and educational persistence improve (Kyriakidis et al., 2024). However, implementation challenges frequently emerge due to institutional rigidity, insufficient teacher preparation, and tensions between national standards and local knowledge systems—challenges that are particularly acute for teachers who do not share their students' cultural backgrounds.

### Policy Context and Indigenous Education in the Philippines

In the Philippines, Indigenous education reform was institutionalized through the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997, which mandated culturally appropriate education for Indigenous communities. The subsequent operationalization of this mandate through DepEd Order No. 62, s. In 2011, the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program. The program formally recognized the legitimacy of IKSPs and sought to embed them within the national curriculum framework, requiring schools to integrate IKSPs into curricular content, involve Indigenous elders and community leaders in educational planning, and contextualize pedagogical strategies within local cultural practices.

Studies evaluating IPEd implementation report incremental progress in curriculum contextualization and increased community engagement (Ancheta & Casem, 2024). Nonetheless, persistent concerns are raised regarding uneven teacher training, limited culturally grounded instructional materials, and inconsistencies in administrative support (Pedrajas & Mosquera, 2025). These findings suggest that while policy frameworks articulate transformative goals, practical realization often depends on localized interpretation and teacher agency. Scholars further note that policy implementation varies significantly across Indigenous groups due to differences in cultural structures, language vitality, and community participation. Consequently, general assessments of IPEd effectiveness risk overlooking the nuanced realities of specific Indigenous communities—a limitation the present study addresses by focusing on Subanen learners.

### Non-Indigenous Teachers in Indigenous Contexts: Challenges and Adaptations

A substantial body of literature examines the experiences of non-Indigenous teachers assigned to Indigenous communities. These educators frequently encounter linguistic diversity, unfamiliar social norms, and epistemological differences that challenge conventional pedagogical assumptions (Cubi & Rollo, 2025). Language barriers, in particular, complicate classroom interaction and knowledge





mediation, especially in contexts where Indigenous languages function as primary modes of cultural transmission.

Research consistently shows that non-Indigenous teachers often enter Indigenous settings with limited cultural preparation. Souza and Protacio (2025) found that teachers assigned to IPED-implementing schools reported feeling unprepared for the linguistic and cultural realities of their classrooms. This lack of contextual familiarity frequently results in cultural dissonance, pedagogical uncertainty, and identity negotiation. Teachers are required to reconcile standardized curriculum mandates with locally embedded knowledge systems—a negotiation that demands reflexivity, adaptability, and sustained engagement with community members.

At the same time, studies document teachers' adaptive responses. Barrida et al. (2025) identified strategies, including translanguaging practices, where teachers flexibly shift between languages to facilitate comprehension. Firmansyah et al. (2025) described how teachers contextualize lessons to local realities, employ collaborative learning approaches that align with Indigenous communal traditions, and engage with communities as cultural learners themselves. These approaches reflect teachers' efforts to construct culturally meaningful learning experiences while maintaining alignment with institutional expectations.

Comparing these studies reveals both commonalities and variations. While most research identifies language as the primary barrier, the specific strategies teachers develop vary according to local contexts. For instance, translanguaging practices documented by Barrida et al. (2025) in one Indigenous community may differ in form and function from those employed in another, highlighting the need for context-specific inquiry. Similarly, while Cubi and Rollo (2025) emphasize cultural dissonance as a universal challenge, the manifestations of this dissonance—whether in communication styles, social norms, or epistemological assumptions—are shaped by the particular Indigenous group involved. These comparative insights underscore the importance of studying non-IPED teachers' experiences within specific cultural communities rather than generalizing across diverse Indigenous contexts.

### **Teacher Identity and Intercultural Competence**

The literature further highlights the transformation of teacher identity within intercultural settings. Rather than functioning solely as content transmitters, non-Indigenous educators increasingly assume roles as cultural mediators and bridge-builders (Oreales-Tabile, 2024). This identity shift aligns with sociocultural perspectives of teaching, which position educators as facilitators of meaning-making within culturally mediated contexts.

Rodriguez (2025) argues that leadership and institutional culture significantly influence teachers' capacity to adopt culturally responsive roles. Supportive school environments enable experimentation with localized pedagogies and foster the development of intercultural competence—the ability to communicate and interact effectively across cultural boundaries. Conversely, rigid administrative structures constrain innovation and may reinforce teachers' identification with traditional, transmission-oriented roles.

Intercultural competence, as discussed in the literature, encompasses not only knowledge of other cultures but also attitudes of openness, reflexivity, and willingness to learn from community members (Dela Cruz et al., 2025). For non-IPED teachers, developing this competence requires sustained engagement with Indigenous knowledge holders, critical examination of one's own cultural assumptions, and the ability to navigate situations of cultural dissonance without retreating into defensiveness. These competencies are not automatically acquired through experience but must be consciously cultivated—a process that institutional support can either enable or impede.

Despite teachers' adaptive efforts, evidence suggests a complex relationship between perceived competence and student achievement. Linggan and Ducot (2025) found that self-reported cultural and pedagogical competence among non-IPED teachers did not consistently correlate with measurable academic gains among Indigenous learners. This discrepancy underscores the limitations of relying on self-assessment instruments and reinforces the need for in-depth qualitative inquiry into lived experiences—not merely what teachers report about their competence but how they actually navigate the complexities of intercultural teaching.





### Structural and Systemic Constraints

Beyond individual teacher adaptation, systemic factors significantly shape Indigenous education outcomes. Studies identify rigid curricular mandates, insufficient localized materials, limited funding, and generic professional development programs as barriers to effective IPed implementation (Dela Cruz et al., 2025; Eduardo & Gabriel, 2021). These structural limitations often compel teachers to independently localize lessons without adequate institutional support.

Furthermore, administrative expectations sometimes prioritize standardized assessment metrics over culturally responsive practices. Dela Cruz et al. (2025) observed that teachers in Philippine higher education institutions faced tensions between the demand for measurable outcomes and the relational, process-oriented nature of culturally responsive pedagogy. Such misalignments create contradictions between policy rhetoric and classroom realities. Scholars emphasize that culturally sustaining education requires systemic coherence, including aligned curriculum frameworks, culturally grounded resource development, and sustained teacher professional development embedded in community contexts.

### Contextual Specificity: The Subanen Community

While studies on Indigenous education in the Philippines have expanded, focused analyses on specific ethnolinguistic groups remain limited. The present study centers on the Subanen communities in the Zamboanga Peninsula. The Subanen are characterized by rich ritual traditions, spiritual cosmologies, and distinctive sociocultural structures that shape communal identity (Villanueva & Balgoa, 2023). Their knowledge systems, language practices, and social organization differ in significant ways from those of other Indigenous groups in the Philippines.

Educational engagement within Subanen communities requires sensitivity to these local epistemologies, language practices, and community governance systems. Sebrevo (2023) observes that external labeling and homogenizing representations often conflict with Indigenous self-identification, reinforcing the importance of culturally grounded pedagogical approaches that recognize community-defined identities rather than externally imposed categories. Despite growing interest in Indigenous education, research focusing specifically on non-IPED teachers working with Subanen learners remains scarce. Much of the existing literature either generalizes across Indigenous groups or emphasizes program-level evaluations rather than in-depth experiential accounts.

The reviewed literature demonstrates substantial progress in understanding policy frameworks, teacher adaptation strategies, and systemic constraints in Indigenous education. Several key insights emerge from this body of work. First, sociocultural theory provides a robust lens for understanding why culturally responsive teaching matters: learning is mediated by cultural tools, and when teachers and students do not share these tools, the foundation of the learning process is compromised. Second, non-Indigenous teachers face persistent challenges, including language barriers, cultural dissonance, and insufficient institutional support, yet they also develop adaptive strategies that reflect their agency and resourcefulness. Third, teacher identity and intercultural competence are shaped through engagement with communities and are influenced by institutional cultures. Fourth, systemic constraints—from rigid curricula to inadequate materials—consistently limit the full realization of IPed objectives.

However, significant gaps persist. Existing studies frequently rely on competence indicators or macro-level implementation analyses, offering limited insight into the nuanced processes through which teachers negotiate intercultural realities. Indigenous communities are often treated as homogeneous entities, obscuring culturally specific experiences. Detailed case-based examinations of non-IPED teachers working with Subanen learners are notably absent from the literature. This gap is significant because, as sociocultural theory emphasizes, learning is situated within specific cultural contexts. Understanding how non-IPED teachers navigate the particular linguistic, social, and epistemological terrain of Subanen communities requires research that is equally situated and contextually grounded.

Addressing this gap, the present study explores the lived experiences of non-IPED teachers in IPed-implementing schools serving Subanen communities. By foregrounding teachers' narratives, it aims to illuminate how these educators navigate intercultural boundaries, integrate IKSPs, construct culturally responsive practices, and interpret the support systems available to them—contributing both to theoretical understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy and to practical recommendations for policy and institutional practice.



### Conceptual Framework

This research was anchored on Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which posits that human learning and development are fundamentally mediated by social interaction, cultural tools, and historical context. Within this theoretical lens, the lived experiences of non-IPED teachers in Indigenous Peoples Education–implementing schools were depicted as a multidimensional and interrelated process encompassing the pre-teaching phase, instructional praxis, and coping and support mechanisms. The framework illustrated how teachers' initial expectations and preparations shaped their readiness to engage with culturally diverse learners, which subsequently informed their pedagogical approaches and the challenges encountered in culturally responsive teaching. Consistent with sociocultural theory, these instructional experiences were mediated by coping strategies and institutional support structures, reflecting Vygotsky's emphasis on social mediation and the Zone of Proximal Development, wherein teachers functioned as cultural brokers who scaffolded Subanen learners' understanding while simultaneously being scaffolded by community members and peers in their own professional growth. Through the dynamic interaction of personal agency, cultural tools, and institutional support, the framework explained how non-IPED teachers constructed meaning, navigated intercultural complexities, and negotiated their professional roles within IPED-implementing schools.

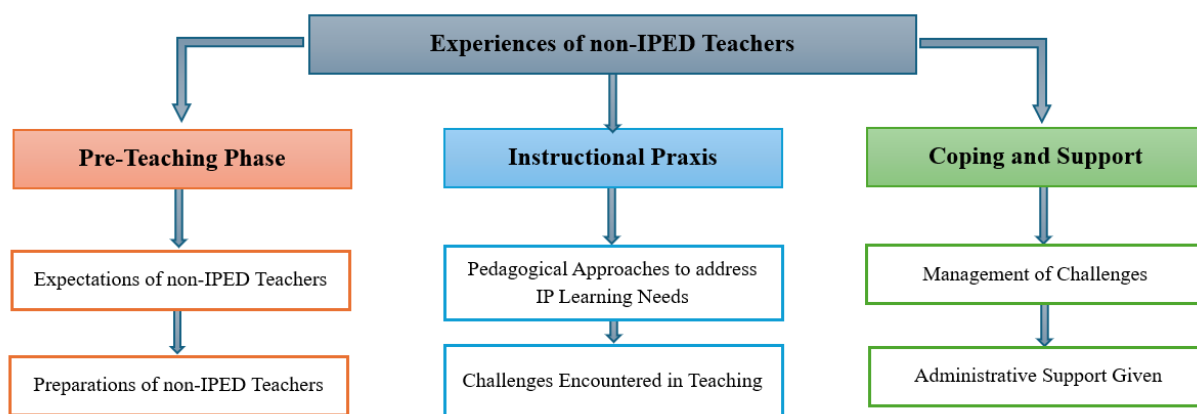


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

### Methodology

#### 1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine the lived experiences of non-IPED teachers in Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED)-implementing schools. Guided by Merriam's (2009) conceptualization of case study as an intensive, holistic analysis of a bounded system, the research generated rich, descriptive accounts of teachers' cultural interactions, pedagogical adaptations, and challenges within Indigenous contexts, particularly among Subanen learners.

The case study approach was selected for three reasons aligned with the study's purpose and theoretical framework. First, a case study is particularly appropriate when the research seeks to understand a phenomenon in depth within its real-life context (Merriam, 2009). The experiences of non-IPED teachers cannot be separated from the specific cultural, social, and institutional settings in which they occur—the Subanen communities, the IPED-implementing schools, and the broader policy environment. Second, case study design aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes that learning and development are mediated by social interaction and cultural context. By bounding the study to a specific group of teachers within a particular Indigenous community, the research captures the situated, context-dependent nature of intercultural teaching—precisely the kind of phenomenon sociocultural theory seeks to illuminate. Third, a case study enables the use of multiple data sources (interviews, observations, documents), allowing for methodological triangulation that strengthens the credibility of findings. The bounded cases comprised ten non-IPED teachers from IPED-implementing schools in the District of Somnot, Division of Zamboanga del Sur, representing both



elementary and secondary levels and varying years of teaching experience, thereby offering a multidimensional perspective on cross-cultural teaching practice.

## 2. Research Participants

The participants consisted of ten non-IPED teachers assigned to elementary and secondary schools implementing Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) programs in the District of Sominot, Division of Zamboanga del Sur. Purposive sampling was employed to select teachers with direct experience teaching Subanen learners, ensuring in-depth exploration of the intercultural teaching context. Inclusion criteria required that participants (1) were currently teaching in schools with Subanen learners, (2) had at least one year of teaching experience in an IPED setting, (3) had no formal IPED specialization or certification, and (4) voluntarily consented to participate. Excluded were teachers with formal IPED training and those with less than one year of experience in IPED schools. The selection of ten participants was guided by qualitative research principles emphasizing information richness over sample size. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved—the point at which additional interviews no longer generated new insights—which occurred after approximately eight interviews.

**Table 1** Demographic Profile of Participants

Participant Code	Sex	Age	Subject Area	Grade Level Assigned	Subjects Handled
Teacher 1	F	28	4	Elementary	All subjects
Teacher 2	F	34	9	Elementary	All subjects
Teacher 3	M	31	6	Secondary	Mathematics
Teacher 4	F	45	18	Elementary	All subjects
Teacher 5	F	29	5	Secondary	Filipino
Teacher 6	M	38	12	Secondary	Science
Teacher 7	F	26	3	Elementary	All subjects
Teacher 8	F	42	15	Elementary	All subjects
Teacher 9	M	33	8	Secondary	Social Studies
Teacher 10	F	36	10	Secondary	English

## 3. Research Instrument

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher served as the primary instrument for data collection and interpretation. Data were gathered through a semi-structured interview guide composed of open-ended questions designed to elicit rich, reflective accounts of participants' experiences teaching in IPED-implementing schools. The questions were developed based on an extensive review of related literature and aligned with the study's central and subsidiary research questions, particularly those concerning challenges encountered, coping strategies employed, and cultural adaptations in intercultural classrooms.

The interview guide underwent expert validation by three specialists in qualitative research and educational policy to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. Revisions were made based on their feedback, including rephrasing several questions for greater clarity and adding probes to encourage deeper reflection. A pilot interview with a non-participating teacher (who met the inclusion criteria but was not part of the final sample) was conducted to refine the wording, sequencing, and flow of questions. This pilot resulted in minor adjustments to question order and the addition of follow-up probes for culturally sensitive topics.

To enhance data credibility, interviews were complemented by two additional data sources. First, detailed field notes were recorded during and immediately after each interview, capturing non-verbal cues, contextual observations, and the researcher's initial interpretations. Second, document analysis was conducted on relevant materials voluntarily shared by participants, including training certificates, professional development records, lesson plans showing contextualization efforts, and samples of locally developed instructional materials. The triangulation of interviews, observations, and documents strengthened the depth, rigor, and trustworthiness of the qualitative findings.





#### 4. Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection was conducted systematically among ten non-IPED teachers assigned to IPED-implementing schools in the District of Sominot, Division of Zamboanga del Sur. Before data gathering, formal approval was secured from the Dean of the Graduate School and the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent, followed by clearance from the District Supervisor and coordination with school principals. An orientation was conducted with potential participants to explain the study's purpose, procedures, and ethical safeguards, emphasizing voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were then conducted either face-to-face or online, depending on participants' availability and preference. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in locations chosen by participants (usually their schools or nearby community centers) to ensure comfort and privacy. Online interviews were conducted via video conferencing platforms for participants who preferred this mode. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded with permission, transcribed verbatim within 48 hours, and returned to participants for clarification and validation (member checking) when necessary. Field observations were conducted in four participants' classrooms (two elementary, two secondary) to observe directly how teachers implemented culturally responsive strategies. Observation notes focused on teacher-student interactions, use of language, instructional materials, and classroom activities that reflected cultural contextualization. Document collection occurred throughout the data gathering period, with participants providing relevant materials they had developed or received.

All data, including recordings, transcripts, field notes, and documents, were securely stored in password-protected files and anonymized using coded identifiers to ensure confidentiality and ethical integrity before analysis.

#### 5. Data Analysis

This qualitative case study, anchored in Merriam's (2009) framework, analyzed the lived experiences of ten non-IPED teachers through thematic analysis of in-depth interview data, field observations, and documents. The analytical process followed a systematic, multi-stage approach.

Stage 1: Data Familiarization. The analytical process commenced with comprehensive transcript readings to develop a holistic understanding of each participant's narrative within the intercultural classroom context. Researchers read each transcript multiple times, listening to audio recordings simultaneously to ensure accuracy and to capture emotional nuances.

Stage 2: Initial Coding. Through systematic open coding, the researcher identified salient statements, phrases, and passages that illuminated critical dimensions of the teachers' realities, including their pedagogical practices, encountered difficulties, and adaptive strategies. Codes were descriptive labels attached to segments of text (e.g., "fear of unknown," "asking elders for guidance," "using local objects as materials").

Stage 3: Category Formation. Related codes were grouped into categories based on patterns and relationships. For example, codes such as "asking elders," "attending community events," and "seeking parent advice" were grouped under the category "community engagement strategies."

Stage 4: Theme Development. Categories were further synthesized into emergent themes that captured the essential structures of the participants' experiences. This involved moving from descriptive categories to interpretive themes that addressed the research questions. For instance, the category "community engagement strategies," combined with categories related to "peer collaboration" and "personal reflection," contributed to the overarching theme "Management of Challenges."

Stage 5: Review and Refinement. Themes were reviewed against the data to ensure they accurately represented participants' experiences. Disconfirming evidence was actively sought—instances where participants' experiences diverged from emerging patterns—to ensure themes captured the full range of experiences, not merely the most common.

Throughout this process, the researcher engaged in reflective interpretation, conscientiously bracketing personal preconceptions to authentically represent the participants' voices. An audit trail was maintained documenting analytical decisions, coding schemes, and theme development processes.





The analytical journey culminated in a synthesized composite description that integrated both textual and structural meanings, thereby distilling the essence of how non-IPED teachers navigate culturally responsive teaching, construct inclusive learning environments for Subanen learners, and negotiate their professional identities within IPED-implementing schools.

## 6. Trustworthiness and Rigor

To enhance the trustworthiness of findings, multiple strategies were employed consistent with established qualitative research criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Credibility.** Prolonged engagement with the research context (the researchers had prior professional connections to the District of Sominot) enabled a deeper understanding of the setting. Triangulation across data sources (interviews, observations, documents) and across researchers (multiple authors involved in analysis) strengthened credibility. Member checking was conducted by returning transcripts and initial findings to participants for verification; participants confirmed that the interpretations accurately reflected their experiences.

**Transferability.** Thick description of the research context, participants, and findings enables readers to assess the applicability of findings to their own contexts. While qualitative research does not aim for statistical generalizability, the detailed portrayal of the Subanen context and teacher experiences allows for analytical generalization to similar settings.

**Dependability and Confirmability.** An audit trail documenting all research decisions, from sampling to theme development, was maintained. Peer debriefing sessions were conducted with two qualitative research colleagues who reviewed coding decisions and theme development, challenged assumptions, and offered alternative interpretations. Reflexive journaling allowed the researcher to document personal reflections, assumptions, and potential biases throughout the research process, ensuring that findings emerged from participant data rather than researcher preconceptions.

## 7. Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to strict ethical protocols for research in culturally sensitive Indigenous contexts. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants after full disclosure of the study's nature and purpose, ensuring voluntary participation without coercion. Confidentiality was maintained through pseudonyms and the removal of all identifying information from transcripts and reports. Throughout the research process, cultural sensitivity was observed by respecting Subanen traditions, languages, and practices; this included seeking advice from community elders about appropriate conduct during school visits and community interactions. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence, reinforcing that willingness, not obligation, governed their involvement. All research procedures were reviewed and approved by the relevant ethics committees and education authorities before data collection.

## Results

The findings of this study illuminate the lived experiences of non-IPED teachers in IPED-implementing schools serving Subanen learners. Analysis of interview transcripts, field observations, and documents revealed six major themes aligned with the research objectives: (1) expectations of non-IPED teachers, (2) preparations undertaken, (3) pedagogical approaches employed, (4) challenges encountered, (5) management of challenges, and (6) administrative support received. Each theme is presented below with supporting participant narratives and analytical synthesis.

### Expectations of Non-IPED Teachers in IPED-Implementing Schools

Upon receiving their assignments to IPED-implementing schools, participants articulated a range of anticipations shaped by limited familiarity with Indigenous communities. Analysis revealed three subthemes capturing their initial expectations.

**Apprehension and Uncertainty.** Teachers expressed profound anxiety stemming from their lack of exposure to Subanen culture and uncertainty about how they would be received by both learners and the community.

*"Sa una, hadlok ko kay wala ko kabalo kung unsa ang ilang kultura... magkaila ba kaha mi?"* [At first, I was afraid because I didn't know their culture... would we even get to know each other?] (Teacher 3)





"*Expectation ko nga lisod kay lahi ang tribu, lahi ang pagsabot sa mga bata.*" [I expected that it would be difficult because the tribe is different, and the children's understanding is different.] (Teacher 7)

These excerpts reveal that teachers' fear stemmed from recognizing that their existing pedagogical tools, developed through mainstream training, might prove inadequate without cultural knowledge. From Vygotsky's (1978) perspective, this apprehension reflected an intuitive understanding that learning depends on shared cultural tools—particularly language and social norms.

**Anticipation of Language Barriers.** Participants consistently expected communication difficulties, recognizing that linguistic differences would pose significant obstacles to instruction and relationship-building.

"*Nag-expect jud ko nga maglisod ko sa simultihan kay Subanen man sila, Bisaya ako.*" [I really expected that I would struggle with language because they are Subanen, and I am Bisaya.] (Teacher 1)

"*Ang akong expectation, maglisod mi magkasinabot sa mga bata kay lahi ilang linggwaha.*" [My expectation was that we would have difficulty understanding each other because their language is different.] (Teacher 5)

Teachers identified language as the primary anticipated obstacle because, without shared linguistic tools, the social mediation essential for learning would be severely constrained.

**Expectation of Cultural Richness.** Despite apprehensions, several teachers expressed curiosity and openness to learning from the Indigenous community, viewing the assignment as an opportunity for personal growth.

"*Para nako, exciting kay makakat-on ko og bag-ong kultura, bag-ong tradisyon.*" [For me, it was exciting because I would learn a new culture, new traditions.] (Teacher 9)

"*Naghuna-huna ko nga daghan ko makat-onan dili lang sa pagtudlo kundi sa ilang kinabuhi.*" [I thought that I would learn a lot not only in teaching but also about their way of life.] (Teacher 2)

These teachers positioned themselves as learners, recognizing that community members could serve as cultural guides—an orientation that creates conditions for mutual mediation and shared meaning-making.

Teachers' expectations ranged from fear to curiosity, revealing that entry into intercultural teaching is emotionally complex. The predominance of apprehension signals a critical gap in institutional preparation: without formal orientation to Indigenous contexts, teachers rely on their own anticipations to frame their initial approach.

#### **Preparations of Non-IPED Teachers**

Before classroom entry, teachers engaged in various preparatory activities, though these were largely self-initiated rather than institutionally mandated.

**Informal Community Immersion.** Teachers proactively sought contact with Subanen community members to build familiarity and trust before formal teaching began.

"*Nag-una ko ug duaw sa ilang lugar, nakig-istorya sa mga ginikanan para makabalo ko sa ilang batasan.*" [I visited their place ahead, talked to the parents, so I would know their customs.] (Teacher 4)

"*Nagpa-introduce ako sa kapitan para ma-accept ako sa community.*" [I had myself introduced to the barangay captain so I would be accepted in the community.] (Teacher 8)

Teachers recognized that cultural knowledge resided in the community and that acceptance by leadership was essential for legitimacy in intercultural teaching.

**Self-Directed Cultural Learning.** Participants attempted to acquire basic cultural knowledge through independent research and conversations with knowledgeable individuals.

"*Nangutana-utana ko sa mga tawo kung unsa ang angay ug dili angay buhaton sa ilang kultura.*" [I asked around to find out what is appropriate and inappropriate in their culture.] (Teacher 3)

"*Nagbasa-basa ko online ug nagtan-aw videos about Subanen.*" [I read online and watched videos about Subanen.] (Teacher 10)

These efforts demonstrated resourcefulness, yet the limitations of available resources highlighted a critical gap in institutional provision of culturally mediated learning materials.





**Emotional and Mental Preparation.** Recognizing anticipated difficulties, teachers engaged in internal preparation to strengthen their resolve and adaptability.

"*Giandam nako akong kaugalingon nga dili ko mag-expect og dali, nga magpailob lang.*" [I prepared myself not to expect things to be easy, to just be patient.] (Teacher 6)

"*Nag-ampo ko nga tabangan ko sa Ginoo nga ma-accept ko nila.*" [I prayed that God would help me be accepted by them.] (Teacher 1)

Teachers demonstrated metacognitive awareness of the emotional labor required for intercultural teaching, consciously managing expectations and cultivating patience.

Teachers' preparations were characterized by individual initiative rather than systematic institutional support. While their efforts—community immersion, self-directed learning, emotional preparation—demonstrated agency, the absence of structured orientation left them to navigate cultural entry without adequate scaffolding.

### **Pedagogical Approaches of Non-IPED Teachers**

In response to cultural and linguistic diversity, participants developed various instructional strategies adapted to Indigenous learners' needs.

**Contextualization and Localization.** Teachers intentionally connected curriculum content to Subanen learners' immediate environment and lived experiences.

"*Gina-integrate nako ang ilang palibot sa akong pagtudlo. Kung mag-storya mi bahin sa tanom, mangutana ko kung unsa tawag ana sa Subanen.*" [I integrate their environment in my teaching. If we talk about plants, I ask what that is called in Subanen.] (Teacher 2)

"*Ginagamit nako ang mga istorya nga familiar sa ilaha, mga sugilanon nga ilang nadungog sa balay.*" [I use stories that are familiar to them, folktales they've heard at home.] (Teacher 7)

This contextualization provided culturally mediated learning experiences where new information was filtered through familiar cultural tools.

**Translanguaging Practices.** Teachers flexibly shifted between languages—primarily Bisaya, Tagalog, and basic Subanen phrases—to facilitate comprehension and participation.

"*Bisaya akong gamit pero kung di gyud makasabot, mangutana ko sa mga bata kung unsa sa Subanen, dayon akong sublion.*" [I use Bisaya but if they really don't understand, I ask the children what it is in Subanen, then I repeat it.] (Teacher 5)

"*Ginatudloan ko sa mga bata og Subanen, dayon itudlo nako sila og Bisaya. Nagtinabangay mi.*" [The children teach me Subanen, then I teach them Bisaya. We help each other.] (Teacher 4)

These practices transformed the teacher-student dynamic into mutual scaffolding where both parties served as more knowledgeable others in different domains.

**Use of Indigenous Materials and Resources.** Teachers incorporated locally available materials and culturally significant objects into instructional activities.

"*Nangolekta mi og mga dahon, sanga, bato... kung unsay naa sa palibot, mao among gamiton sa pagtudlo.*" [We collected leaves, branches, stones... whatever was in the environment, that's what we used in teaching.] (Teacher 9)

"*Gipatan-aw nako sila og mga butang nga naa sa ilang kultura, sama sa ilang panghinabuhi, para ma-interested sila.*" [I show them things from their culture, like their livelihood, so they become interested.] (Teacher 6)

These indigenous materials served as culturally appropriate artifacts connecting abstract concepts to students' tangible lived experiences.

**Collaborative and Peer-Assisted Learning.** Teachers strategically utilized students' existing social structures and peer relationships to enhance learning engagement.

"*Gipapundok-pundok nako sila, ang mga makasabot ipatudlo sa wala makasabot. Mas epektibo kay sila-sila mismo.*" [I group them, those who understand teach those who don't. It's more effective because it's among themselves.] (Teacher 1)

"*Ginagamit nako ang ilang daan nga grupo sa dula, dayon i-integrate sa leksyon.*" [I use their existing play groups, then integrate into the lesson.] (Teacher 8)

These approaches positioned students who mastered concepts as mediators for their classmates within culturally congruent social structures, reflecting Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development.





Teachers developed culturally responsive pedagogical strategies through experimentation and responsiveness to student needs. Their approaches—contextualization, translanguaging, indigenous materials, peer collaboration—demonstrated efforts to create culturally mediated learning environments despite the absence of formal training or resources.

### **Challenges Encountered by Non-IPED Teachers**

Participants confronted persistent and multifaceted obstacles that tested their professional and personal capacities.

**Language and Communication Barriers.** The most universally cited challenge involved difficulties in mutual comprehension between teachers and Subanen learners.

*"Lisod jud kay naay mga bata nga Bisaya ra gyud ang nasabtan, naa pud nga Subanen ra. Usahay maglisod mi magkasinabot sa leksyon."* [It's really difficult because some children only understand Bisaya, some only Subanen. Sometimes we struggle to understand each other in the lesson.] (Teacher 3)

*"Ang uban bata, nahadlok motubag kay di sila kabalo mo-Bisaya, maulaw."* [Some children are afraid to answer because they don't know Bisaya, they get shy.] (Teacher 10)

Linguistic diversity within single classrooms created complex communication challenges that affected both instruction and participation. From a Vygotskian perspective, these barriers fundamentally disrupted the mediation process essential to learning.

**Scarcity of Culturally Appropriate Materials.** Teachers consistently reported the absence of learning resources that reflected Indigenous knowledge and contexts.

*"Wala gyud mi materials nga Subanen. Ako mismo ga-himo, ga-drawing, ga-himo og istorya nga naay Subanen."* [We really don't have Subanen materials. I myself make them, I draw, I create stories with Subanen elements.] (Teacher 2)

*"Ang libro, wala Subanen. Kung naa man, dili pud angay sa ilang kultura."* [The books, there are no Subanen. If there are, they're not appropriate to their culture.] (Teacher 7)

Teachers bore the extensive additional labor of personally creating all Subanen-related resources, as existing materials were culturally inappropriate.

**Cultural Dissonance and Misunderstandings.** Teachers encountered situations where their pedagogical assumptions conflicted with community norms and expectations.

*"Naay mga butang nga sa ako tan-aw okay lang, pero sa ilaha diay dili pala. Like pag-storya nako sa ginikanan diretso, nasuko diay."* [There are things that I thought were okay, but for them they weren't. Like when I talked directly to a parent, they got angry.] (Teacher 4)

*"Naa koy giingon nga joke, nasabtan nila lahi. Nagdahum ko katawa sila, pero wala."* [I told a joke, and they understood it differently. I expected them to laugh, but they didn't.] (Teacher 6)

These incidents revealed that interactional norms varied significantly between cultures, and effective teaching required deep cultural knowledge acquired through sustained community participation.

**Geographic and Logistical Constraints.** The physical location of IPED-implementing schools presented significant access and mobility challenges.

*"Layo ang eskwelahan, magbaktas pa og tunga sa oras. Kon uwan, lapokon, delikado."* [The school is far, you still have to walk for half an hour. When it rains, it's muddy and dangerous.] (Teacher 5)

*"Ang uban estudyante, layo pud ang gina-agian, mag-sayo og mata, kapoy abot sa eskwelahan."* [Some students also travel far; they wake up early, and they're tired when they arrive at school.] (Teacher 8)

These material conditions highlight that culturally responsive pedagogy must also attend to the infrastructure that enables or inhibits sustained educational engagement.

Teachers faced interconnected challenges spanning linguistic, material, cultural, and geographic domains. These obstacles were not merely inconveniences but fundamental barriers that disrupted the mediation processes essential to learning and required sustained adaptive effort to overcome.

### **Management of Challenges**

Participants developed and employed various strategies to address the challenges they encountered in IPED-implementing schools.





**Community Engagement and Partnership.** Teachers actively sought relationships with community elders, parents, and leaders as resources for navigating cultural challenges.

*"Nakig-uban ko sa ilang kapitan ug mga elders. Sila nagtudlo nako unsay angay ug dili angay."* [I associated with their captain and elders. They taught me what is appropriate and inappropriate.] (Teacher 4)

*"Kon naay problema, didto ko sa ginikanan mangayo ug tambag kung unsay buhaton."* [If there's a problem, I go to the parents to ask for advice on what to do.] (Teacher 7)

Teachers recognized community members as authentic cultural knowledge sources, positioning elders as mentors who mediated their understanding of norms and practices.

**Peer Learning and Collaboration Among Teachers.** Teachers formed informal support networks with colleagues facing similar challenges.

*"Nagshare-share mi sa among mga naagian. Kon naay effective nga estratehiya, ipatudlo sa uban."* [We share our experiences. If there's an effective strategy, we teach it to others.] (Teacher 2)

*"Magtinabangay mi maghimo og materials. Kon naay kahibalo sa kultura, itudlo sa mga bag-o."* [We help each other make materials. If someone knows about the culture, they teach the new ones.] (Teacher 9)

These peer networks functioned as communities of practice where knowledge was socially constructed and mediated through collegial interaction.

**Personal Adaptation and Reflexivity.** Teachers consciously examined and adjusted their own assumptions, behaviors, and expectations.

*"Nakat-onan nako nga dapat mapailobon ka, dili magdali-dali. Ang ilang oras lahi, ang ilang pagsabot lahi."* [I learned that you have to be patient, not rush things. Their time is different, their understanding is different.] (Teacher 3)

*"Giusab nako akong pagtan-aw. Dili sila ang dapat mo-adjust sa ako; ako ang dapat mo-adjust sa ilaha."* [I changed my perspective. They shouldn't be the ones to adjust to me; I should be the one to adjust to them.] (Teacher 6)

These reflective shifts represented internalization of new cultural understandings that reorganized professional identities.

**Resourcefulness and Creativity.** In the absence of ready-made materials, teachers innovated using locally available resources.

*"Kon walay libro, maghimo ko og istorya. Kon walay drowing, mangolekta og natural nga butang."* [If there are no books, I create stories. If there are no drawings, I collect natural objects.] (Teacher 1)

*"Ginahimu nakog storya ang ilang inadlaw nga kinabuhi, dayon gamiton sa pagbasa ug pagsulat."* [I turn their daily life into stories, then use them for reading and writing.] (Teacher 5)

This resourcefulness aligned with culturally responsive principles as tools emerged from and reflected students' own cultural context.

Teachers' coping strategies demonstrated significant adaptive capacity. By turning to community elders, collaborating with peers, engaging in personal reflexivity, and exercising creativity, they constructed support systems that compensated for absent institutional scaffolding.

### **Administrative Support Received**

Participants' perceptions of institutional support varied, revealing both enabling factors and critical gaps in IPED implementation.

**School Head Encouragement.** Several teachers acknowledged the moral and motivational support provided by their school principals.

*"Ang among principal, nagaingon nga 'Kaya niyo yan.' Gina-encourage mi, ginahatagan og paglaum."* [Our principal says, 'You can do that.' We are encouraged, given hope.] (Teacher 8)

*"Naga-monitor ang among principal, nangutana kung unsay need namo."* [Our principal monitors, asks what we need.] (Teacher 10)

While encouragement functioned as social mediation supporting psychological resilience, verbal support without corresponding material resources left teachers to mediate their own professional development without institutional scaffolding.





**Provision of Basic Resources.** Some schools provided fundamental instructional materials, though these were rarely culturally specific.

"*Ginahatagan mi og chalk, papel, libro---pero ang libro dili gyud pang Subanen.*" [We are given chalk, paper, books---but the books are really not for Subanen.] (Teacher 2)

"*Naa mi TV sa eskwelahan, pero wala may kuryente pirme.*" [We have a TV in school, but there's no electricity always.] (Teacher 4)

Resource allocation without cultural sensitivity proved ineffective, as materials that did not reflect students' context could not mediate learning.

**Training and Development Opportunities.** Access to professional development specifically oriented to IPed was limited and often generic.

"*Naka-attend ko og seminar about IPed, pero paminaw nako, general ra kaayo. Dili applicable sa among Subanen.*" [I attended a seminar about IPed, but I felt it was too general. Not applicable to our Subanen.] (Teacher 6)

"*Wala pa jud ko ka-attend og training nga specific sa pagtudlo sa Subanen.*" [I haven't really attended training specific to teaching Subanen.] (Teacher 3)

Generic seminars divorced from specific cultural contexts failed to address teachers' actual needs, highlighting systematic gaps in teacher preparation.

**Inconsistent Policy Implementation.** Teachers observed that IPed policies were not consistently enforced or supported across schools.

"*Naa man toy order from DepEd, pero sa amo eskwelahan, wala man gyuy m nahimutangan.*" [There is an order from DepEd, but in our school, nothing really materialized.] (Teacher 5)

"*Mura ug tokenism lang usahay. Naa mi IPed, pero walay substance.*" [It feels like tokenism sometimes. We have IPed, but there's no substance.] (Teacher 9)

DepEd orders failed to materialize at the school level, leaving teachers to navigate intercultural challenges without systemic support.

Administrative support was characterized by encouragement without resources, generic training without contextual relevance, and policy without implementation. These gaps forced teachers to rely on their own initiative and community relationships, revealing a fundamental disconnect between policy rhetoric and classroom reality.

Across all six themes, a coherent narrative emerges: non-IPED teachers enter Subanen classrooms with apprehension and limited preparation, yet through self-initiated learning, pedagogical experimentation, and community engagement, they develop culturally responsive practices. Their journey is marked by persistent challenges—language barriers, material scarcity, cultural dissonance, geographic constraints—which they manage through resourcefulness, peer collaboration, and personal reflexivity. However, this adaptive capacity operates in a policy vacuum: administrative support remains largely symbolic, training is generic rather than context-specific, and culturally appropriate materials are absent. The findings reveal that while teachers demonstrate remarkable agency in creating culturally mediated learning environments, their efforts are unsustainable without systemic institutional scaffolding. From a sociocultural perspective, teachers function as cultural mediators who scaffold Subanen learners' understanding, yet they themselves lack the institutional scaffolding necessary for their own professional development in intercultural contexts.

## Discussion

The findings of this study illuminate the complex realities faced by non-IPED teachers in schools serving Subanen learners, revealing both their adaptive strategies and the systemic gaps that constrain their efforts. Teachers' initial apprehension and uncertainty upon entering Indigenous contexts, rooted in unfamiliarity with Subanen culture and language, align with previous research documenting that non-Indigenous educators frequently enter such settings with limited cultural preparation (Cubi & Rollo, 2025; Souza & Protacio, 2025). From Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective, this anxiety reflects teachers' intuitive recognition that without shared cultural tools—particularly language—the social mediation essential for learning would be disrupted. Language barriers, as the most pervasive challenge, directly affected classroom interaction by limiting student participation and confidence, while cultural



dissonance incidents revealed how well-intentioned efforts at rapport-building could misfire when interactional norms diverged. These findings underscore that cultural barriers are not merely obstacles to instruction but fundamentally shape the relational dynamics through which trust and communication are built. Developing intercultural competence through sustained community engagement, as teachers in this study demonstrated by seeking guidance from elders and parents, enables teachers to bridge these gaps and establish the shared cultural tools necessary for effective mediation of learning. This process aligns with culturally responsive pedagogy, which emphasizes that validating learners' cultural identities and positioning community members as knowledge holders are essential for creating inclusive learning environments (Elias & Mansouri, 2023; Jayadi et al., 2022).

The adaptive strategies teachers employed—contextualization, translanguaging, use of indigenous materials, and collaborative learning—demonstrate their capacity to create culturally mediated learning environments despite limited institutional support. These practices reflect teachers' transformation from content transmitters to cultural mediators, consistent with previous studies documenting similar adaptations in Indigenous education contexts (Barrida et al., 2025; Firmansyah et al., 2025; Oreales-Tabile, 2024). However, the sustainability of these individual efforts depends on systemic institutional scaffolding. The proposed policy framework addresses this gap by recommending mandatory pre-assignment orientation, community-embedded training through NEAP, funded development of culturally appropriate materials created with Indigenous elders, and the establishment of formal Indigenous Education Advisory Groups in every IPed school. For school leadership, this means moving beyond verbal encouragement to concrete actions: ensuring teachers have access to contextualized professional development, allocating resources for locally developed materials, and creating accountability mechanisms that prioritize meaningful IPed implementation over token compliance. Professional development programs must shift from generic seminars to community-partnered learning experiences where teachers engage directly with Indigenous knowledge holders. Together, these systemic supports would provide the institutional scaffolding that teachers currently lack, enabling them to focus their considerable adaptive capacity on what matters most: creating culturally responsive learning environments where Subanen learners can thrive.

### Knowledge Contribution



**Figure 2.** IPed Policy Framework for Strengthening Indigenous Peoples' Education Implementation

This study contributes a contextually grounded framework for strengthening Indigenous Peoples Education (IPed) implementation at the Department of Education level, organized around three interconnected pillars derived from the lived experiences of non-IPED teachers in Subanen communities. Under Teacher and Leader Readiness, the study recommends mandatory pre-assignment orientation for teachers bound for IPed schools, contextualized training programs developed by NEAP in partnership with Indigenous communities, and the inclusion of IPed implementation as a key result



area in school head performance indicators to ensure administrative accountability. For Instructional Localization, the findings support funded development of culturally appropriate learning materials created with Indigenous elders and community members, the establishment of formal Indigenous Education Advisory Groups in every IPed school to guide cultural validation and community engagement, and DepEd guidelines allowing flexible use of local and community materials as legitimate instructional resources. Finally, under System Sustainability, the study proposes prioritizing IPed schools in the allocation of geographic hardship allowances and infrastructure support, developing simple but support-oriented monitoring and evaluation tools that focus on actual teacher and learner needs rather than mere compliance, and strengthening local inter-agency coordination between Schools Division Offices, NCIP, and LGUs to address the multifaceted barriers affecting educational access and quality in Indigenous communities. These contributions collectively aim to transform IPed from policy rhetoric into meaningful, sustainable practice that genuinely supports teachers and learners in Indigenous contexts.

## Conclusion

This study explored the lived experiences of non-IPED teachers teaching Indigenous learners in schools serving Subanen communities. The findings show that teachers enter these assignments with fear and uncertainty because they lack knowledge of the Subanen culture and language. To cope, they visit communities before teaching, ask elders for guidance, and prepare themselves emotionally. In the classroom, they adapt by connecting lessons to students' lives, mixing languages so students can understand, using local materials like leaves and stones, and letting students help each other learn. These strategies show that teachers become cultural mediators who find ways to teach even when they lack formal training or resources. From a sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978), these efforts reflect teachers' understanding that learning happens through social interaction and shared cultural tools like language. However, teachers also face persistent problems: language barriers make students shy to participate, no books or materials fit the Subanen culture, and long walks to school leave teachers and students tired. Administrative support is mostly words of encouragement without real help, like training, materials, or consistent policy implementation.

The study contributes a new understanding by showing how teachers in Subanen communities learn to teach across cultures through their own efforts and community relationships rather than through institutional support. It reveals that while teachers are creative and resourceful, their individual efforts cannot replace what the education system should provide. To improve Indigenous Peoples' Education, schools must give teachers proper training before assignment, develop learning materials together with Subanen elders, and ensure that DepEd policies are actually followed, not just displayed. School heads should move beyond saying "you can do it" to providing real support like community-embedded training and resources that fit the local context. Without these systemic changes, the burden of bridging cultural gaps will continue to fall on individual teachers, and Indigenous learners will not receive the culturally responsive education they deserve.

## Recommendation

According to the results of the study, based on the findings, it is recommended that schools strengthen their existing partnerships with Indigenous community members by inviting elders and parents to serve as resource speakers during school activities and classroom lessons. Teachers may also establish informal peer support groups within their schools to share effective strategies, develop materials together, and mentor newer colleagues handling IPed classes. School heads can support teachers by regularly checking on their needs, providing opportunities for community engagement, and recognizing their efforts in contextualizing lessons for Subanen learners.

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[17/19]

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