

VOICES OF LEADERSHIP: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL HEADS IN MANAGING IP SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This research explored and investigates the experience, challenges, coping mechanism, strategies and insights among five selected school heads in Indigenous People Schools in New Bataan District, Davao de Oro. This study was employed phenomenological research design. The finding revealed that significant experiences encountered in Managing Indigenous People Schools were introduced and embraced the culture and tradition, good and welcoming parents and learners, dealing with different cultures, cultural preservation through celebration, realizing the importance of cultural sensitivity. The challenges faced by school heads in managing IP school were dealing with families long stay in school premises, alignment of curriculum, remote area schools and limited resources, students lack of parental support, cultural differences, handling sensitive feelings language barrier, no significant Issues experienced, alignment of national curriculum to actual field of teaching and slow government support and limited access to technology. In addition, an IP school were patience, good relationship, and staying positive, calling for meeting and collaborative decision-making, addressing language and reading difficulties, collaboration with stakeholders, and adjust. Support system or networks relied on to help manage the responsibilities effectively were stakeholders and MOOE budget. It suggested to other school heads in managing an IP School were assess and understand first the community, building strong relationships with stakeholders, promote culturally responsive teaching, allocation for students' needs, adjust, respect, listen and collaborate, and be resilient. Ways that experiences. The study concluded that leading Indigenous Peoples (IP) schools demands a culturally sustaining leadership approach, affirming successful practices, and positioning success across three mutually dependent and co-dependent communities.

Keywords: Educational administration, indigenous people, experiences, challenges, strategies, coping mechanism, insight, phenomenological study

1. INTRODUCTION

Indigenous People school has been implemented in the Department of Education which cater free education to all Filipinos indigenous learners who are living in the farthest area all over the Philippines. One of the major problems is the lack of contextualized learning materials that reflect Indigenous languages, traditions, and worldviews, which often results in disengagement among learners and disconnection between formal education and community values (Tadena, 2022). Indigenous People school has been implemented in the Department of Education which cater free education to all Filipinos indigenous learners who are living in the farthest area all over the Philippines. One of the major problems is the lack of contextualized learning materials that reflect Indigenous languages, traditions, and worldviews, which often results in disengagement among learners and disconnection between formal education and community values (Tadena, 2022). In the Philippine educational landscape, Indigenous People (IP) school heads face multifaceted challenges that hinder the delivery of culturally responsive education. One of the most pressing issues is the lack of contextualized learning materials that reflect Indigenous languages, traditions, and worldviews (Tadena, 2022). As study conducted in Talaingod, Davao del Norte revealed that school leaders in IP-integrated schools face

logistical difficulties, such as reaching geographically isolated schools, and must rely heavily on teamwork, resilience, and cultural sensitivity to fulfil their roles effectively (Bacalso, 2024).

Moreover, school principals in indigenous people face many challenges in implementing various programs and these challenges can vary from accountability, staffing, funding, discipline, parents, and support from various parties and departments (Logan & Burdick-Will, 2020). The majority of the school heads and teachers working in such areas are situated within or near cities. When they go to remote schools, it negatively affects their health, particularly when they have to cross several rivers and mountains to go to school (Diaz, 2015 as cited Lugatiman and Bauyot, 2024).

After a careful examination, the researcher learned that there are existing research studies that the voice of school heads in indigenous people in Malaysia, that principals encounter different difficulties regarding their task and responsibility in delivering quality education to indigenous people is also difficult, especially in providing mainstream learning whilst facing funding constraints. Some school leaders are not culturally responsive and make uncritical or intentional decisions that disadvantage certain students (Lopez et al., 2022). Principals working in indigenous communities may face additional challenges and dilemmas. This is because their leadership is subject to responsiveness and acceptance by the indigenous communities to facilitate the delivery of quality education (Furo, 2021).

This study also presents the real stories of school heads in managing Indigenous People Schools in the Division of Davao de Oro, particularly in New Bataan District, thus this study will be conducted. This dilemma serves as the motivation of the researcher to embark on a study that aims to hear the voices of these unsung heroes as they travel the complexities of leading an indigenous people school.

1.1 Research Questions

The study was aimed to navigate the lived experiences of school heads in IP Schools. It was answered the following questions.

1. What are the lived experiences of school heads in managing IP Schools?
2. What are the best practices in managing in an IP Schools?
3. What are the challenges of school heads in managing IP schools?
4. How do school heads cope with the challenges they face in managing IP Schools?
5. What are the insights that participants gain from their experiences in managing IP Schools?

1.2 Review of Related Literature

This section presents topics and literature related to the present concept under study; this is with the hope of giving the reader a clear view of the concept of the problems and challenges and motivation encounter by indigenous people school heads. The findings of the different research similar to this study will be presented to provide us a better understanding and clear views on what is being emphasized in this qualitative study. These are taken from various sources like manuals, journals, websites, and other reading materials

Managing Indigenous People Schools. Managing Indigenous People (IP) schools in the Philippines requires a leadership approach that is both culturally grounded and strategically adaptive. School heads must navigate the dual responsibility of delivering quality education while preserving and promoting indigenous identity, values, and knowledge systems. This involves integrating Indigenous languages, traditions, and worldviews into the curriculum, often through the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program, which was institutionalized by the Department of Education through DepEd Order No. 62, s. 2011. The study of Pedrajas & Mosquera, (2025) emphasized community involvement as a key component of the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program, highlighting its importance in curriculum contextualization and capacity building, which fosters cultural responsiveness and educational relevance for indigenous learners in IP schools.

Experiences in Managing Indigenous People School. The study conducted by Barcena (2020) experienced of school heads assigned to distant places have to deal with a range of inconvenient modes of transportation, such as "Big jeepney," "habal-habal," and even the usage of an animal such as a horse and walking for a long time merely to get to the station. If the weather is not cooperating, it gets much more difficult. Because the river is too dangerous to cross, public school principals would resort to trekking, which is a difficult task for them. Staffing is another potential challenge faced by principals. Principals are responsible for managing their administrative staff and educators (Nadeem et al., 2020). However, the study conducted by Lu & Habil (2024) stated that cultural sensitivity issues in intercultural misunderstandings arise from factors such as gender, language, social culture, research culture, and communication style.

The Leadership Styles of School Heads. Leadership is critical in creating a school culture in which teachers are satisfied with their job. Followers who are led by transformation leaders have been known to be more driven, motivated, and find more joy in their work Menon, (2020). Managing a school is a wonderful job, albeit a difficult one, particularly for any educator sent to remote area. Regardless of how frightening the situation seems to be, principals in far-flung areas remain unfazed. More than recognition, their passion and love to teaching that brings life-giving hope need continued support (Gallego, 2022). Research emphasizes that implementing principles of religious moderation in school leadership fosters understanding and patience among school principals, promoting an inclusive and harmonious environment, which is essential for effective leadership in educational settings, particularly in diverse communities (Fadilah et al., 2023).

2.METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study was employed qualitative in nature that using the phenomenological research design. By Creswell (2013) states that qualitative research is a process of knowing several methodological traditions to investigate social or human issues. In addition, qualitative research is a methodology for scientific inquiry that emphasizes the depth and richness of context and voice in understanding social phenomena. In the exploration of the subjective experiences, perspectives, and meanings that individuals attribute to their social world, qualitative research embraces openness and employs a variety of equivalent methods such as open-ended questions, in-depth and focus group interviews, and participant observation, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the phenomena (Lim et al., 2023).

Moreover, Hassan (2022) claims that phenomenology is a research methodology that emphasizes the study of individuals' lived experiences to understand the essence of a phenomenon. Originating from the works of philosophers like Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, it is grounded in the idea that subjective experiences are a rich source of knowledge. Researchers using phenomenology aim to describe how people experience particular phenomena without imposing their own interpretations or biases

In addition, the justification for using this approach will be based on the need to understand the experiences, motivations, insights, challenges and coping mechanism by school heads that are assign in indigenous people schools. Additionally, the advantage of using the in-depth interview in this study will provide the researcher with the chance to learn and question the views of the research participants. Moreover, in-depth interview will be useful in obtaining deeper pieces of information pertaining to the study.

2.2 Research Locale

This study was conducted in the Municipality of New Bataan, Davao de Oro particularly in the six Indigenous implementing schools. The six schools namely; Uduan Elementary School, Taytayan Elementary School, Pagsabangan Elementary School, Tadya Elementary School, Andap Elementary School and Pagsilaan Elementary School .

The municipality was founded on 18 June 1968, through Republic Act No. 4756. With then First Lady Luz Banzon Magsaysay who helped in the approval of the town site reservation in now Barangay Cabinuangan, the municipality got its name in honor to her who came and got prominence in Bataan, where also Tagalog settlers in the area came from during Commonwealth and post-World War II periods.

Moreover, the municipality was one of the hardest-hit towns of Typhoon Pablo when it hit the town on 4 December 2012. New Bataan has a total land area of 55,315 hectares (136,690 acres) and is situated north and west of Davao Oriental province; south of Municipality of Compostela and west of Municipality of Maragusan. It is

surrounded by mountain ranges, with over 50% of its territory being forest cover that has been the source of livelihood for some people living there. The barangays of New Bataan that are mostly covered with forest are Andap, Tandawan, Camanlangan, Manurigao.

In addition, the municipality is also watered by various rivers. One of which is the Mayo River that flows from the mountain of Andap and empties into the Agusan River. The Batoto River is also one of the biggest; it flows from the western part of the area. The northwestern portion of the municipality forms part on the contiguous plain of Davao de Oro. It is about 16 kilometres (9.9 mi) from Compostela, 40 kilometres (25 mi) from the provincial capital Nabunturan, and 75 kilometres (47 mi) from Tagum (Wikipedia Contributors, 2024). Uduan Elementary School is a school in Davao de Oro, Davao Region. It is situated nearby to the waterfall Bagsak Falls. It is public schools owned by the government. It caters kindergarten to grade six levels. The school ID is 102234. Taytayan Elementary School is a school in Municipality of New Bataan, Davao de Oro, Davao Region. Taytayan Elementary School is situated nearby to the community center Purok 6 Center, as well as near the church Panon sa 12 ka Banay. It offers key stage 1 and 2 only. Pagsabangan Elementary School is a school in Municipality of New Bataan, Province of Davao de Oro, Davao Region. Pagsabangan Elementary School is situated nearby to the town hall Pagsabangan Barangay Hall. It is a public school offers kindergarten to grade six levels. Tadya Elementary School is a sitio School Located in Sitio Tadya, Barangay Bantacan, New Bataan, Davao de Oro. It offers Kindergarten to Grade 6 level. It was founded year 2005. Andap Elementary School is a school in Province of Davao de Oro, Region. It is a public educational institution located in Purok 3, Laak (San Vicente), Davao de Oro. With a commitment to providing quality education to children from diverse backgrounds, Andap Elementary School offers a comprehensive curriculum that focuses on academic excellence, character development, and holistic growth. Our dedicated team of educators are passionate about nurturing each child's unique talents and abilities, fostering a positive learning environment where students can thrive and reach their full potential. Pagsilaan Elementary School is a school that is located in the Province of Davao de Oro, Davao Region.

2.3 Research Participants

The participants of this study were the six school heads in an IP Schools implementing in selected schools in New Bataan District. This study was used purposive sampling generally believed to contribute to the richness in the range of data collected and help increase the possibilities of uncovering multiple realities (Wan, 2019).

Moreover, Cross-man (2020) stated that purposive sample is a non-probability and dissimilar from convenience sampling and is also known as selective, judgmental, or subjective sampling.

Lastly, to obtain relevant and encompassing perspectives on school heads experiences and motivation, this study was set the following criteria in choosing the participants of the study such as; (a) Permanent employee in the DepEd for almost 1-10 years; (b) He/ she must handle administrative functions in indigenous people schools. (c) Assigned as school heads in elementary and integrated schools. Meanwhile the exclusions were not TICs, head teacher and school principal. Only the selected school mentioned are included as research participants.

2.4 Data Analysis

The obtained data were kept in the researchers' computer for safekeeping, transcription, interpretation, and analysis. Filed copies were stored in another device to secure a duplicate in case of troubleshooting and loss of data due to external factors.

Moreover, the researcher used interpretive approach that will be used to thematize, analyse, and evaluate the gathered data from the participants. Data was analysed using thematic analysis. This technique is useful for finding the themes, synthesizing, analysing, and contrasting the data (Johnson & Christensen, 2008 as cited in Trabado, 2023). The aim of this research is to provide a encompassing and comprehensive perspective based on the transcribed information obtained during the interview with the participants. Data were submitted to the data analyst for precision, accuracy, and credibility. In the final analysis, themes were drawn from the gathered information for conclusion.

Addition, in qualitative research technique, interview and discussion were the primary methods of information collection, primarily in the form of audio tape recordings, observation, documentary analysis and/or field notes (Halai, 2007). Lastly, data were gathered from the participants both in-depth interview.

2.5 Ethical Consideration

In conducting research, it is crucial to get the validity of the data or method used for the research, the confidentiality and privacy of the participant, sampling, and accessibility to relevant information, integrity, and transparency.

Rana et al., (2021) clarified that ethical considerations were significant moral guidelines for researchers to prevent deception in conducting and reporting research findings. Research ethics also guard against any potential harm to the study participants. This also served to legitimize any research. With this, the researcher was guaranteed that the ethical standards were followed to the letter during the study covering the areas that follows:

Social Justice. This research had undertaken to respond to the present issues of the school heads in managing IP Schools. This research aimed to listen to the voices of school heads experiences, insights, coping mechanism and best practices. The results will be shared to the higher authority of Division Davao de Oro to assist them to match the rigorous implementation of IPED program and will be published in this online journal, thereby serving as a guide for other comparative research studies to make use of it.

Informed Consent. The researcher was distributed Informed Consent Forms (ICF) to the identified participants. The researcher will disclose the essential information such as the name and affiliation of the researcher. It will also be emphasized that the participation of the participants is purely voluntary and they are free to withdraw anytime they feel any discomfort. The purpose of the study will also be explained, along with the procedures that will be carried out for the study.

Vulnerability of the Research Participants. The researcher was explained the entire process of the in-depth interview that will be conducted and will also emphasize that the participants have the freedom to opt out of the interview if they experience any discomfort and it will not affect them in any aspect.

Risks, Benefits, and Safety. The researcher was clarified the advantages of the participation of the participant in the study. The in-depth interview was also be conducted at the most convenient time and location for the participants and any costs incurred by them for the study will be reimbursed by the researcher.

Privacy and Confidentiality of Information. The researcher took into consideration on the strict compliance of the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act 10173), which protected individuals from unauthorized processing of personal information in which the identity of an individual was easily identified through direct attribution. It was also referred to the technical and legal framework designed to ensure that personal data are safe from unforeseen, unintended, or malevolent use. To ensure, data protection measures concerning collection, access to data, communication, and conversation of data will be kept.

Justice. Justice, according to Townsend et al. (2010), refers to providing what is due to each participant without partiality, but instead with fair treatment. All classifications of people (race, gender, ethnicity, age, etc.) should be equally included or excluded only for reasons that have to do with research questions or hypotheses. The research participants will be chosen based on the inclusion criteria: must be a permanent employee and assign in indigenous people school. In any case that research participants might incur their expenses during the conduct of the interview, the researcher will reimburse them. They will also be given a token of appreciation for the inconvenience that the study might have caused.

Transparency. To be provided for this aspect, the researcher made the affiliations and the purpose of the study public. The participants in the research will also be provided with a copy of the transcript of their responses in order to authenticate the reliability and validity of the information collected.

3. FINDINGS

This chapter presented the findings of the research questions that explored the experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms, as well as the insights of the school heads managing Indigenous People Schools in District of New Bataan, Davao de oro, for school year 2025-2026.

Further, it was the themes from all the responses that were content analyzed in the outcome of the responses. Accordingly, these codes have formerly been deduced to try to cover-up the identities of the research subjects, as indicated by qualitative research in ethics. The result was presented according to the series of particular research questions used in this research.

Significant Experiences Encountered in Managing Indigenous People School. The emerging themes in this structured theme were four namely; introduced and embraced the culture and tradition, good and welcoming parents and learners, dealing with different cultures, cultural preservation through celebration, realizing the importance of cultural sensitivity, becoming more understanding and patient, building trust and respect within community and overcoming language barriers. The theme introduced and embraced the culture and tradition was resulted from the informants' responses. This theme covers how school heads in an indigenous people school embraced the culture and tradition where they were assigned. They need to adhere to the tradition and culture of the indigenous people in the community. It was emphasized on the statement of Constantino (2020) that education is therefore a vital means for the enjoyment, maintenance, and transmission of indigenous cultures, languages, traditions, and traditional

knowledge, as well as a vehicle for individual empowerment and agency. On the other hand, the study of Shiller (2020) stated that embracing indigenous concepts to practice culturally sustaining leadership, countering a colorblind stance and recognizing the importance of Indigenous culture and traditions in educational settings.

Disadvantages Experienced in Managing IP School. The emerging themes in this structured theme were five namely; cultural difference and language barrier, geographical inaccessibility and irregular attendance, cultural sensitivity and misunderstanding issues, managing different classes and no disadvantages experiences. The cultural difference and language barrier most of the school heads were the experienced on language barrier since they don't know how to speak the language of IP in the community. There is a big problem when it comes to language context. According to Nantin and Morales (2025) contending with language barriers that hinder comprehension and engagement among learners. In addition, Tac-on and Musico (2024) highlighted that addressing language differences through translation, differentiated instruction, and culturally sensitive teaching methods helps school heads and teachers cope with the linguistic and cognitive challenges faced by Indigenous learners.

Ways of Navigating Relationships with Indigenous Community Leaders and Elders. The emerging themes in this structured theme were five namely; showing respect and seeking guidance and help, engaging in collaborative decision-making, adapting to the community's culture, having fellowship and communication, and joining community meetings and activities. The showing respect and seeking guidance and help school heads managing in IP school must possess attitude that are aligning the community standard. They must respect the right and culture of the tribes specifically the lives of learners inside the classroom. This statement was anchored on the statement of Eslaban et al., (2022) emphasized that the school principal made their management approaches and adjustments to meet the job's demands without jeopardizing the system's personnel and members. By recognizing and valuing diverse cultural backgrounds, school leaders can enhance positive engagement and build a cohesive school culture that supports the well-being and academic success of all students (Buising, 2025).

Best Practices Executed in Handling IP Schools. The emerging themes in this structured theme were five namely; community collaboration, conducting weekly activities from IP, conducting welcome Program, Being Culturally Responsive in Teaching and Leadership and Visiting Families and Understanding the learners. The community collaboration was the best practices applied by IP school heads. They make it sure that community must be heard and valued. According to Buenaflor et al. (2023) stated that many remained committed to fostering inclusive education and preserving indigenous identity through collaborative governance and localized curriculum development. One effective approach is the integration of indigenous knowledge systems into the curriculum, which involves collaborating with tribal elders and community members to ensure that lessons reflect local traditions, values, and languages (Basiwal-Ao-wat and Ayang-ang, 2024). Conducting weekly activities from indigenous People school heads implemented activities weekly align with needs of the community and learners.

Ways School Head Support Teachers in Delivering Culturally Relevant and Effective Lessons. The emerging themes in this structured theme were encouraging to contextualized localized lessons, teachers to use and understand the indigenous language, providing training and coordination, and providing feedback and motivation. Encouraging to contextualized localized lesson the localized lessons as one of the best practices of these school in the alignment of Indigenous education context. The school must adhere the curriculum that suits to the needs of the learners. In support with the study of Ortiz et al. (2025) revealed that distributed instructional leadership is highly utilized by school heads to engage teachers in collaborative planning and culturally responsive instruction.

Ways to Ensure Curriculum is Culturally Responsive and Inclusive of Indigenous Knowledge and Traditions. The emerging themes in this structured themes were contextualizing and localizing lessons, regular community consultation and organizing cultural activities and community immersions. The contextualizing and localizing lessons ensure that the curriculum must align with the context of the IP education. According Nataño, (2023) argued that strengthening curriculum contextualization and localization through indigenization is critical for groups with cultural practices that differ from those of the majority of people in the same area. Teachers and school systems must ensure that the IP community is engaged in indigenization procedures so that the curriculum is accurate and authentic to the culture in consideration. Pedroso et al., (2023) revealed that providing IP learners with strategic contexts improves their learning process by inspiring interest, curiosity, motivation, and engagement with knowledge. Flores and Obod (2023), it was emphasized that the contextualization of the learning objective must be taught in to allow future teachers to be culturally aware and be more competent in the field especially when they are assigned to teach in the IP communities.

Challenges Faced by School Heads in Managing IP School. The responses generated six themes namely; dealing with families' long stay in school premises, alignment of curriculum, remote area schools and limited resources, students' lack of parental support, cultural differences, handling sensitive feelings and language barriers. Dealing with families long stay in school premises they met challenges along the way. The community became their one call neighbour. They sacrificed much to give better education to IP learners. This was supported the study of Bang

et al., (2020) stated that families are the archetype for Indigenous nations and often reflect a complex web of interdependence between all things. Families are the primary contexts in which Indigenous children learn who they are, indigenous ways of knowing, and what is expected of them as they become adults and eventually become good elders. In this way, the strength and well-being of Indigenous families are fundamental to the strength and well-being of Indigenous nations.

Significant Issue Experienced in Managing IP School. Themes in this section are generated also on five themes namely; remote area school and language Barrier. No significant Issues experienced on community sensitivity, alignment of national curriculum to actual field of teaching and slow government support and limited access technology. Remote area school and language Barrier was the issued experienced by IP school heads. According to Alegado (2021) revealed that far flung school its physical aspect, its location. Most of the school heads and teachers assigned in these areas live in the town or near the town and traveling to far-flung schools that will take its toll on their health, especially when they must cross several rivers and mountains to reach the school. Assigned in far-flung areas, alongside their teachers and students, had to walk for hours each day, Climb Mountains and hills, wade across brooks, or cross rivers on a makeshift bridge to go to school and travel back daily, in sweltering heat or pounding rain. In addition it was supported the study of Buenaflor et al. (2023) that indigenous learners struggled with language barriers and limited access to gadgets, which placed additional pressure on school heads to innovate and adapt their leadership strategies to ensure educational continuity. No significant issues experienced School head in IP School sometimes experience. No significant issues in their leadership and even their challenges.

Way that Socio-Economic Factors in the Community Affect Management of the School. The emerging themes in this structured theme generated six themes namely; students scare and limited access to resources, limiting contributions, understanding the situation of the community, adjusting of time, having projects, and irregularities of students attendance. Students scare and limited access to resources was on of the responses. According to Shi Xian (2024) revealed that the lack of educational opportunities sometimes hampers access to other basic services such as healthcare and technology as well. Mellnick (2021) pointed out that school heads were encountered by making use of the available resources at that particular time when they assumed the post. Some of them took the initiative to improvise to let the school run despite meagre resources. The responses about Limiting contributions was also experience by the school is located in a remote area and not easy to visit. Mercado (2021) stated that teachers' understanding of cultural practices, however, is limited to superficial knowledge.

Ways to Cope with the Challenges Faced in Managing the IP School. The emerging themes in this structured themes six themes namely; patience, good relationship, and staying positive, embracing the culture, calling for meeting and collaborative decision-making, addressing Language and reading difficulties, collaboration with stakeholders, and adjust. Patience, good relationship, and staying positive was among the challenges met by the school heads. According to Shih (2025) emphasized fostering positive peer relationships among Indigenous students by enhancing teachers' cultural sensitivity, promoting inclusive perceptions of ethnic diversity, and preventing gender segregation, which collectively contribute to patience, good relationships, and a positive environment in schools. It was also supported the study of Goforth et al., (2025) that indigenous communities teach children to maintain good relationships with themselves, their land, and their people, which contrasts with Western educational standards. This cultural foundation supports patience, positive interactions, and social-emotional learning in Indigenous student well-being. Embracing the culture was one of the coping mechanisms among school heads and teachers.

Most Effective Means to Cope with Challenges. Responses generated four significant themes namely; collaboration with the community or Bayanihan, providing teachers' training, good communication and adjusting of time. Collaboration with the community or Bayanihan this was the themes delivered by participants. This statement was supported by Josol et al., (2025) suggested that effective collaboration practices could be beneficial in various educational contexts, including those involving indigenous peoples. Public school heads are encouraged to sustain educational initiatives and best practices to maximize stakeholder contributions, which could be applicable in indigenous settings as well. In addition Medel & Gallardo, (2025) emphasized the importance of community engagement and trust building as a key theme in the experiences of teachers working with Indigenous Peoples (IP) learners. Teachers established strong links with tribal leaders and parents, highlighting the necessity of collaboration with stakeholders, including school heads, to enhance educational outcomes.

Support System or Networks Relied on to Help Manage the Responsibilities Effectively. The emerging themes in this structured theme were stakeholders, colleagues and MOOE budget. Stockholders were helped to manage the school heads. Wang (2021) says that good leadership in schools fosters nurturing learning environments that help children grow and develop. To cultivate such an environment, school heads must navigate and promote collaboration

across the often-complex network of stakeholders: education authorities, teachers, students, parents, and local communities. The study conducted by Otxero (2022) said that the implementation of indigenous people schools resulted school governance and management, curriculum and instruction, teacher's development, facilities and management of resources, the role of the culture bearers, parents' support, culture bearer's support, support from the local government units, and support from the other government agencies. It was found that the implementation of the Indigenous Peoples (IPEd) Program is still in the process, and the different stakeholders have a significant role in the program implementation. On the other hand, Masrukhin (2025) revealed that strengthening school-community relationships through interactive communication and respectful engagement is essential for educational advancement, suggesting that participation in community meetings and activities can enhance social interaction skills and collective capacity among stakeholders in IP schools.

Realizations in Managing IP Schools. Responses were generated five significant themes namely; understanding and immersing in the cultural and building good relationships, importance of Patience, respect, building trust and recognizing IP culture, ability to lead beyond cultural boundaries, resilience in handling different people and empowering students. The understanding and immersing in the cultural and building good relationships was one of the insight gained of the school heads in IP school good relation towards the community, teachers and learners so that there were effective leadership in the school. This was supportive by Martinez et al., (2021) revealed administrator perceptions of equity and access among various constituents at their school, including teachers, support staff, students, parents, and members of the broader school community.

Suggest to Other School Heads in Managing an IP School. The responses generated six significant themes namely: assess and understand first the community, building strong relationships with stakeholders, promote culturally responsive teaching, allocation for students' needs, adjust, respect, listen and collaborate, and be resilient. School heads assess and understand first the community in order to work harmoniously. By recognizing and valuing diverse cultural backgrounds, school leaders can enhance positive engagement and build a cohesive school culture that supports the well-being and academic success of all students (Buising, 2025). The study of Mellnick (2021) revealed that school heads were able to rise above the challenges they encountered took the initiative to improvise to let the school run despite meager resources.

Ways that Experiences Shaped the Perspective on the Importance of Culturally. The responses generated five significant themes namely; becoming an advocate of contextualized learning, becoming more creative, becoming a better leader, becoming open and understanding and emphasized growth and learning. Becoming an advocate of contextualized learning in able to manage in an IP school needs to connect the curriculum in the IP context in order to suit the learning outcomes among learners. According to Flores and Obod (2023) emphasized that the contextualization of the learning objective must be taught to allow future teachers to be culturally aware and be more competent in the field especially when they are assigned to teach in the IP communities.

Ways of Managing the School Impacted Understanding of the Challenges Indigenous Students Face. The responses generated three significant themes namely becoming more understanding, supportive, and resilient, becoming stronger and learn to weigh things right. Becoming more understanding was also the ways in managing school head as impacted understanding of the challenges students face. Verdida, Malon, and Macalisang (2024) suggested that Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) curriculum these included gaining deeper appreciation for indigenous cultures, receiving community recognition, and developing flexible, open-minded approaches to teaching. Mayasari et al., (2024) emphasized that effective interpersonal communication fosters trust and respect among teachers in IP schools, enhancing collaboration and preventing conflicts. This harmonious environment ultimately leads to improved job satisfaction, motivation, and the quality of education for students. However, supportive, and resilient, becoming stronger and learn to weigh things right were also resulted.

Implications for Practice

Based on the findings, the following implications for practice were offered.

On Significant Experiences Encountered in Managing IP School. Managing an Indigenous Peoples school comes with some real challenges. One big one involved weaving indigenous knowledge systems right into the formal curriculum. You still have to hold onto those academic standards at the same time. This kind of situation really points out how crucial culturally responsive leadership turns out to be.

On Disadvantages Experienced in Managing IP School. One notable disadvantage in managing an Indigenous Peoples (IP) school is the persistent lack of adequate infrastructure and learning facilities tailored to the

cultural and geographic context of the community. Many IP schools are located in remote areas, making access to electricity, internet connectivity, and basic classroom resources a challenge.

On Ways of Navigating Relationships with Indigenous Community Leaders and Elders. One important thing for school leaders to keep in mind when building relationships with Indigenous community leaders and elders is the need to build trust. They do this through steady and respectful interactions that show real cultural humility. *On Best Practices Executed in Handling IP Schools.* One thing that stands out in running schools for Indigenous Peoples, or IP schools, involves weaving in education that's contextualized and based on culture. It pulls from the values, traditions, and knowledge systems right out of the indigenous community. This method really strengthens the learners' sense of who they are. It also ramps up their participation and helps them do better academically. School leaders and educators have to keep partnering with community elders and those who carry the culture.

On Ways School Head Support Teachers in Delivering Culturally Relevant and Effective Lessons. One key thing school leaders can do to help teachers deliver lessons that are culturally fitting and really work well is to take an active part in building a sense of teamwork and on-going growth. This means putting together steady training sessions like workshops or group learning circles and even one-on-one guidance from fellow teachers, all centre on ways to teach that draw from local indigenous approaches and adapt to the specific setting.

On Ways to Ensure Curriculum are Culturally Responsive and Inclusive of Indigenous Knowledge and Traditions. The significantly different and culturally-oriented curriculum that is inclusive of Indigenous knowledge and recognizes and respects Indigenous traditions is the incorporation of Indigenous community members in all stages of the curriculum - designing and implementing. School leaders and educators need to work closely with elders, cultural bearers, and local experts not only to bring in the traditional practices, languages, and worldviews but also to immerse students in these through materials and activities.

On Challenges Faced by School Heads in Managing IP School. The lack of teachers trained in delivering culturally responsive education is one of the biggest challenges that school heads face while managing IP schools. An educator who is assigned to an IP school, but is not familiar with the indigenous language, culture, and educational methods might have difficulty in teaching and the students in learning. As a school head implication to practice, they have to ensure that the teachers undergo professional development programs which are focused on indigenous education frameworks and instruction that is localized.

On Significant Issue Experienced in Managing IP School. One major concern in the oversight of Indigenous Peoples (IP) schools is the conflict between standard educational policies and the different cultural needs of indigenous students. Educational frameworks and national assessment models are usually designed with little or no consideration for the integration of indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and ways of learning. As a consequence of this, school heads are required to take the responsibility of pushing for the adaptation of policies that provide education which is contextualized and culture-based.

On Ways to Cope with the Challenges Faced in Managing the IP School. One of the powerful methods to deal with the issues that arise in the management of an Indigenous Peoples (IP) school is through community engagement and joint problem-solving. In fact, challenges such as resource limitations, lack of teachers, and cultural disconnects can be solved by involving Indigenous leaders, elders, and parents in school planning and decision-making. As a repercussion to the practice, school heads are required to create regular dialogue forums like community assemblies, cultural councils, or parent-teacher partnerships for facilitating mutual understanding and shared responsibility.

On Most Effective Means to Cope with Challenges. Working together continuously with the local community is one of the most potent ways to tackle the difficulties that arise in the management of Indigenous Peoples (IP) schools. Schools become a place where leaders can solve the problem of lack of resources, cultural disconnects, and teacher empowerment by getting the wisdom and help of the Indigenous elders, parents, and local organizations all together.

On Support System or Networks Relied on to Help Manage the Responsibilities Effectively. One important outcome of using support systems or networks to manage responsibilities in Indigenous Peoples (IP) schools is the deliberate building of partnerships across different sectors. School leaders need to actively interact with local government, non-government organizations, cultural institutions, and community elders. This helps create a strong support network that meets both administrative and instructional needs.

On Realizations in Managing IP Schools. One of the main learning in the management of Indigenous Peoples (IP) schools is that learning should extend beyond the classroom to serve as a means of cultural preservation and empowerment. This knowledge identifies the significance of basing school practice on the everyday experiences,

values, and traditions of the Indigenous group. As a practice implication, school leaders ought to initiate efforts to integrate indigenous knowledge systems in the curriculum, encourage the use of local languages for teaching, and engage elders in the development of school programs. They have to support an inclusive school climate that values diversity and facilitates intercultural communication among teachers and students. By linking educational leadership to the cultural identity of the community, IP schools can then become transformational sites for learning as well as for preserving heritage.

On Suggest to Other School Heads in Managing an IP School. One valuable suggestion to other school heads in managing an Indigenous Peoples (IP) school is to embrace culturally grounded leadership that prioritizes community engagement and inclusivity. As an implication to practice, school heads should establish strong partnerships with Indigenous elders, parents, and local leaders to ensure that school programs reflect the community's values, traditions, and aspirations. They must also promote teacher capacity-building focused on culturally responsive pedagogy and contextualized curriculum development. Creating spaces for intercultural dialogue, honoring traditional protocols, and integrating indigenous knowledge systems into school governance are essential steps toward building a respectful and empowering learning environment. Through these practices, school heads can lead IP schools with integrity, relevance, and cultural sensitivity.

On Ways that Experiences Shaped the Perspective on the Importance of Culturally. One compelling implication to enact derived from experience in managing Indigenous Peoples (IP) schools is an understanding that culturally responsive education is not a choice it's a necessity. First hand encounters with learners, families, and older-generation community members usually uncover how deeply identity, language, and tradition affect student engagement and achievement. Consequently, heads of schools need to put special emphasis on the incorporation of indigenous systems of knowledge in curriculum and pedagogy. This means enabling teacher training in pedagogy that is culturally appropriate, encouraging teaching in local languages, and making school activities consistent with community values.

On Ways of Managing the School Impacted Understanding of the Challenges Indigenous Students Face. One significant implication to practice learned from leading an Indigenous Peoples (IP) school is the heightened appreciation of the systemic and cultural difficulties Indigenous students experience like language access, economic disadvantage, and perceptions of exclusion from regular education. These realizations prompt school heads to embrace more inclusive and compassionate leadership approaches. Consequently, they have to place culturally responsive policies first, like incorporating community languages into pedagogy, offering adaptable learning opportunities for low-resourced students, and building safe spaces that validate

Implications for Future Researchers

As much as the research was confined to the teachers' responses within New Bataan District elementary schools, Division of Davao de Oro, the following implications regarding future studies are regarded:

The management of an Indigenous Peoples (IP) school has enriched the understanding of the unique barriers that Indigenous students encounter, including cultural dislocation, communicated through language complexities, and being resource deficient. In terms of implications to practice may be taken by the school heads: first, engage indigenous elders and parents in regular consultation processes to understand students' cultural and educational experiences.

Second, add Indigenous knowledge, values, and language to the curriculum or school program in ways that are relevant to students' lived experiences.

Third, offer teacher mindfulness training in work towards culturally-relevant pedagogy so that it is present in their classroom work

Fourth, access support for advocacy from local government agencies and national non-government organizations to fill resource and logistical gaps.

Lastly, develop and implement school policies that express respect for Indigenous identity and traditions. That is, not only is responsive academics prioritized, but the school learning environment allows Indigenous learners to engage and be empowered through their identity.

4.CONCLUSION

The research has examined the voices of leadership a qualitative study on the experiences of school heads in managing Indigenous People schools across five schools located at New Bataan District, Davao de Oro. It provided information on their experiences and challenges as well as coping mechanisms and insights.

In summary, leading Indigenous Peoples (IP) schools demands a culturally sustaining leadership approach, affirming successful practices, and positioning success across three mutually dependent and co-dependent communities. For school leaders, it is a question of leading and building bridges for students' transformative learning between mainstream education and Indigenous ways of knowing. We have learned that resources, the curriculum, and whether the IP school is represented in the community are all questions requiring empathetic and responsive leadership. If organizations are to become transformative learning contexts for Indigenous students, colleges and universities have to be advocates to support Indigenous communities which put Indigenous identities, cultures and values at the centre of schools or learner futures.

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