



Unveiling the Journey of Indigenous People (IP) Learners from the Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDA)

Rochelle G. Onrejas¹, Emie A. Genton, PhD²

¹Department of Education Region XII, Division of General Santos City, Lozano Elementary School, Philippines

²Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges, Philippines

Email: rochelle.onrejas@deped.gov.ph

Abstract

This multiple case study aimed to determine the journey of Indigenous People (IP) learners from the GIDA in Apopong District, Division of General Santos City. The participants of this study were (5) Indigenous People (IP) learners who were currently enrolled in Apopong District, Division of General Santos City. Five major challenges were identified, including lack of resources and limited teacher training, cultural barriers, experiences of discrimination, difficulties in persevering through hardships, and struggles in balancing cultural identity within the school setting. To address these difficulties, the learners employed coping strategies such as drawing strength from guidance, relying on the support of family and teachers, and maintaining focus and discipline in their studies. From these experiences, several insights were revealed, including the importance of perseverance when supported by others, the value of staying rooted in one's culture as a source of pride and resilience, and the recognition that education serves as a transformative tool that uplifts not only the individual but also the community as a whole. These findings imply the need to strengthen culturally responsive support systems to better assist IP learners in overcoming educational barriers.

Keywords

educational management, the journey of indigenous learners, GIDA, multiple case study, Philippines

1. Introduction

Understanding the reading abilities and study practices of Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) students is essential for promoting quality and inclusive education. Examining their educational experiences provides valuable insights into the factors influencing learning outcomes and supports the development of equitable educational policies and programs (Hipolito, 2024; Quimbo et al., 2023; Villaplaza, 2021).

Reading proficiency and effective study habits are essential for academic success and lifelong learning. Strong reading skills improve comprehension and communication, while good study habits enhance learning, critical thinking, and knowledge retention, preparing learners for higher education, employment, and lifelong success (Aron & Ferrera, 2024; Maniego et al., 2024; Sy, 2021; Quines & Albutra, 2023).



In the Philippines, reading proficiency remains a challenge due to unequal access to quality education, limited learning resources, and socio-economic constraints. These issues contribute to poor reading comprehension and study habits, highlighting the need for improved teacher preparation, instructional resources, and school-community collaboration to strengthen literacy development (Banes & Cruz, 2021; Ocampo et al., 2021; Quines & Monteza, 2023).

1.1 Research Question

This multiple case study aimed to determine the journey of Indigenous People (IP) learners from the GIDA in Apopong District, Division of General Santos City for the school year 2023–2024.

Specifically, it aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How do participants describe their experiences as indigenous people (IP) learners from the GIDA?
2. What are the similarities and dissimilarities among the participants in terms of their challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights learned?

1.2 Theoretical Lens

This study was anchored in Cultural Mismatch Theory, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasize that culturally responsive teaching, social interaction, and supportive family, school, and community environments are essential for improving Indigenous learners' reading proficiency and study habits.

2. Methodology

2. Methodology

This chapter presented the methodological parts of the study; it included research design, research material, data collection process, data analysis, the role of the researcher, trustworthiness, and the ethical considerations.

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of parents supporting the reading of learners with intellectual disabilities. Qualitative research is appropriate for understanding participants' experiences and the meanings they attribute to them through non-numerical data (Barry et al., 2023). As the primary research instrument, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews, documented observations, transcribed participants' narratives, and performed thematic analysis while practicing reflexivity to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Palting et al., 2023; Lariosa et al., 2022; Bennett, 2024; Jarvis et al., 2021).

2.2 Research Participants

The study involved five (5) Indigenous People (IP) learners from Apopong District, Division of General Santos City, selected through purposive sampling. Participation was voluntary, and ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and participants' right to withdraw were strictly observed.

2.3 Data Collection

After obtaining parental consent, Grade 4 struggling learners completed a validated 30-item pre-test, followed by a two-month intervention using teacher-made learning packages with Radio-Based Instruction (RBI). The same test was administered as a post-test to determine the intervention's



effectiveness in improving Mathematics performance (Zheng, 2021; Alwell et al., 2023; Kircher & Zipp, 2022).

Analysis of data

Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological method by identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, and organizing them into themes to describe the participants' lived experiences. The findings were validated through member checking to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Colicol, 2024; Magdadaro & Sacramento, 2022).

Ethical Consideration

The study adhered to the ethical guidelines of the RMMC Ethics and Review Committee by ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and participants' right to withdraw at any time. Data were securely managed in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, and the research upheld honesty, transparency, and academic integrity throughout the study.

3. Results and Discussion

This portion contains the study's findings from the interview of the participants on their experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights learned in the journey of Indigenous People (IP) learners from the GIDA in Apopong District, Division of General Santos City for the school year 2023–2024.

Table 1. Challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights learned in the journey of Bantay

Clustered Themes	Emergent Themes
Challenges	
Students need more books, technology, and learning materials in school. Lack of resources makes learning harder for many students. Teachers need proper training to meet students' diverse needs. Lack of resources and judgment from others are challenges. Lack of learning materials makes schoolwork more difficult to manage.	Lack of Resources and Teacher Training
Some students experience discrimination because of their cultural background. There is a lack of understanding and respect for culture. Limited support for language and traditions affects student confidence.	Cultural Barriers
Discrimination from classmates adds emotional stress to learning. Long travel distance to school causes daily physical hardship.	Hard Time in School



Coping Strategies	
Seeking advice from elders helps in facing challenges. Talking to fellow Indigenous people gives strength and guidance. Trusting in God builds emotional strength and resilience.	Strength Through Guidance
Education is seen as the path to a better future. Hardships build stronger determination to persevere and succeed.	Pushing Through Hardship
Family members provide emotional and practical support in learning. Some teachers offer help and encouragement during hard times. Support from others strengthens students' motivation and confidence.	Support from Family and Teachers
Insights	
IP learners are encouraged to keep striving despite challenges. Asking for help is important when facing difficulties. Staying positive and believing in yourself brings success.	Never Give Up with Support
Hard work and perseverance lead to success despite challenges. Limited resources and distance make learning more difficult. Preserving culture and helping the community are important values.	Staying Strong with Culture
Challenges helped me realize my culture is my strength. Being proud of my identity motivates me to study. Support from teachers and peers encourages educational perseverance.	Culture Builds Strength

Table 1 shows that Bantay faced challenges such as lack of learning resources, limited teacher training, cultural barriers, discrimination, and long travel distance. Despite these difficulties, Bantay coped through guidance from elders, faith, family support, and teacher encouragement. The findings show that perseverance, support, and cultural pride helped the learner continue studying.



Table 2. Challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights learned in the journey of Sapa

Clustered Themes	Emergent Themes
Challenges	
Lack of books and technology limits student learning. Teachers need training to understand diverse learners. Insufficient learning materials hinder academic progress.	Lack of Resources and Teacher Training
Discrimination and misunderstanding of culture affect self-esteem. Lack of support for language and traditions challenges identity. Perseverance shows pride and value in cultural heritage.	Discrimination and Cultural Challenges
Insufficient learning materials hinder academic progress. Discrimination negatively affects the learning experience. Long travel distances add difficulty to school attendance.	Hard Time in School
Coping Strategies	
Goal setting helps students stay focused and motivated. Support from teachers and peers eases difficult situations. Personal dedication combined with help strengthens resilience.	Coping Through Focus and Support
Education is seen as a pathway to a better future. Challenges like discrimination and lack of resources persist. Difficulties serve as motivation to persevere in learning	Pushing through Hardship
Teacher guidance boosts student learning and confidence. Classmate encouragement fosters a supportive school environment.	Support from Family and Teachers



Sharing resources helps overcome learning challenges.	
Insights	
Self-belief empowers learners to overcome challenges. Asking for help is key to coping with difficulties. Support from others strengthens persistence and motivation.	Never Give Up with Support
Hard work and perseverance lead to personal success. Cultural preservation builds strong identity and pride. Showcasing traditions helps keep culture alive and valued.	Cultural Preservation and Teamwork
Being an IP is embraced as a source of strength. Support from teachers and family fosters determination. Cultural appreciation shapes identity and future goals.	Culture Builds Strength

Table 2 reveals that Sapa experienced limited books, technology, teacher support, discrimination, and cultural misunderstanding. Sapa coped by setting goals, staying focused, and receiving help from teachers, classmates, and family. This shows that support and determination helped the learner overcome school difficulties.

Table 3. Challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights learned in the journey of Kapatagan

Clustered Themes	Emergent Themes
Challenges	
Lack of language and learning materials hinders comprehension. Distance and limited technology access affect school participation. Cultural misunderstandings from teachers impact learning experiences.	Hard Time in School
Coping Strategies	
Focusing on dreams builds inner strength and resilience. Support from teachers and peers sustains motivation.	Strength Through Guidance



Positive mindset helps overcome academic challenges.	
Lack of materials and distance make schooling difficult. Language barriers add to educational struggles. Despite these challenges, learners demonstrate a strong desire to succeed, which motivates them to persist in their studies and continue pursuing their education.	Pushing Through Hardship
Family support provides strength during educational hardships. Encouragement from elders motivates academic persistence. Basic needs and guidance help overcome GIDA school challenges.	Support from Family and Teachers
Insights	
Determination empowers IP learners to overcome obstacles. Believing in oneself is essential for academic success. Seeking help supports learning and builds resilience.	Never Give Up with Support
Cultural identity is valued as a source of pride. Support from teachers and family fuels motivation. Success is seen as a way to uplift the community.	Culture Builds Strength

Table 3 shows that Kapatagan struggled with lack of materials, language barriers, limited technology, distance, and cultural misunderstanding. The learner coped by focusing on dreams, maintaining a positive mindset, and receiving support from family, teachers, peers, and elders. The findings emphasize determination, self-belief, and cultural identity as sources of strength.

Table 4. Challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights learned in the journey of Kawayan

Clustered Themes	Emergent Themes
Challenges	
Lack of mother tongue books limits effective learning. Teachers need training on Indigenous culture and context. Creating resources helps preserve culture and support education.	Lack of Resources and Teacher Training



Lack of culturally relevant materials hinders inclusive learning. Distance and limited technology make schooling more difficult. Scarce support motivates greater personal effort and perseverance.	Hard Time in School
Coping Strategies	
Group study with peers strengthens learning and understanding. Teacher support reinforces focus and goal-setting. Collaborative efforts help manage academic challenges.	Strength through Guidance
Financial struggles and distance challenge school attendance. Personal goals drive persistence in education. Helping family serves as a strong source of motivation.	Pushing through Hardship
Insights	
Education is essential for community growth and development. Support from NGOs, teachers, and leaders enhances learning opportunities. Collaborative efforts can improve challenging educational conditions.	Education Lifts the Community
Perseverance is essential for Indigenous learners to succeed. Support from teachers, family, and peers provides strength. Self-belief and help-seeking are key to overcoming challenges.	Never Give Up with Support
Pride in IP identity and culture strengthens self-worth. Support from teachers and peers encourages persistence. Education is viewed as a path to a better future.	Culture Builds Strength

Table 4 presents Kawayan's challenges, including lack of mother tongue books, culturally relevant materials, technology, and financial support. Kawayan coped through group study, teacher support,



collaboration, and personal motivation to help the family. This shows that education is viewed not only as personal success but also as a way to uplift the community.

Table 5. Challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights learned in the journey of Luntian

Clustered Themes	Emergent Themes
Challenges	
Curriculum challenges arise from lack of cultural relevance. Insufficient language support hinders learner comprehension. Academic difficulties impact learner confidence and engagement.	Cultural Barriers
Curriculum lacks alignment with Indigenous culture and language. Absence of culturally relevant books limits learning resources. Mismatched curriculum negatively impacts learner confidence.	Hard Time in School
Coping Strategies	
Joining peer groups provides emotional support. Group membership builds strength and resilience. Belonging to a community inspires hope for the future.	Support through Peer Collaboration
Family support reinforces Indigenous identity. Teacher encouragement contributes to cultural pride. Organizational backing strengthens connection to heritage.	Support from Family and Teachers
Insights	
Perseverance is essential for Indigenous learners' success. Self-belief empowers learners to overcome challenges. Seeking help from teachers and family supports learning.	Never Give Up with Support
Flexibility and determination sustain learning despite challenges. Participation in cultural programs strengthens Indigenous identity.	Staying Strong with Culture



Engagement with peer support enhances educational experience.	
Pride in Indigenous identity fosters resilience. Support from teachers and peers motivates continued learning. Representing the community strengthens sense of purpose.	Culture Builds Strength

Table 5 shows that Luntian faced challenges caused by a curriculum that lacked cultural relevance, language support, and appropriate learning materials. The learner coped through peer collaboration, family support, teacher encouragement, and cultural participation. The findings highlight the importance of culturally responsive education for IP learners.

Table 6. Similarities and differences in various cases on the Challenges, Coping Mechanisms, and Insights of the Indigenous People (IP) Learners from the Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDA)

Category	Emergent Themes	Indication/ Case	Indication/ Case
Category	Emergent Themes	Similarities	Differences
Challenges	Lack of Resources and Teacher Training	1, 2, 4	
Challenges	Cultural Barriers	1, 5	
Challenges	Hard Time in School	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
Challenges	Discrimination and Cultural Challenges		2
Challenges			
Coping Mechanisms	Strength through Guidance	1, 3, 4, 5	
Coping Mechanisms	Support from Family and Teachers	1, 2, 3, 5	
Coping Mechanisms	Pushing through Hardship	1, 2, 3, 4	
Coping Mechanisms	Coping through Focus and Teachers		2
Insights			
Insights	Never Give Up with Support	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
Insights	Staying Strong with Culture	1, 2, 5	
Insights	Culture Builds Strength	1, 2, 3, 4	
Insights	Education Lifts the Community		4



Table 6 shows that all participants experienced hardships in school, but their specific challenges varied. Common coping strategies included support from family, teachers, peers, and elders, as well as perseverance. The strongest shared insight was to never give up, especially when supported by others. Overall, the cases show that IP learners rely on resilience, cultural pride, and support systems to continue their education.

Discussion

This chapter explores the heart of my research, unraveling the rich complex of experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and insights gained by these five Indigenous People (IP) in GIDA schools.

Challenges Faced by Indigenous People (IP) Learners from Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDA)

The findings revealed that Indigenous People (IP) learners from GIDA face educational challenges but remain resilient. The study emphasizes the need for adequate resources, culturally responsive teaching, and inclusive practices to promote equitable learning opportunities.

Coping Strategies of Indigenous People (IP) Learners from Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDA)

The findings revealed that Indigenous People (IP) learners from GIDA cope with educational challenges through resilience, goal orientation, and support from family, teachers, peers, and the community. These strategies strengthen their motivation, confidence, and perseverance despite various hardships.

Insights Gained by Indigenous People (IP) Learners from Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDA)

The findings revealed that Indigenous People (IP) learners from Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDA) gained valuable insights on the importance of perseverance, cultural identity, community support, and education. They recognized that resilience, guidance from family, teachers, and peers, and pride in their cultural heritage helped them overcome challenges and achieve their goals. The findings further emphasize that education not only promotes personal growth but also empowers Indigenous learners to contribute to the development and well-being of their communities.

References

1. Aron, L., & Ferrara, L. (2024). Centering Native perspectives and wisdom: Reframing non-Indigenous research on American Indian health. Urban Institute. <https://www.nihb.org/resources/IDH%20UNPFII%20Report%20-%202023.pdf>
2. Banes, G. G., & Cruz, K. B. D. (2021). The integration of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) in the tertiary level curriculum of Benguet State University La Trinidad Campus. *Mountain Journal of Science and Interdisciplinary Research*, 81(1), 19–36. <https://doi.org/10.70884/mjsir.v81i1.279>
3. Barry, J., Allan, E., Chandran, D., Cook, J., Curtis, B., Kostyniuk, A., & Yau, D. (2023). Unsettling notions of planning competence: Lessons from studio-based learning with indigenous peoples.



- Journal of Planning Education and Research, 43(1), 35–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X19844571>
4. Bennett, J. (2024). Indigenous pedagogies in digital learning. In ASCILITE (pp. 136–138). <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.70050>
 5. Colicol, F. L. (2024). Pragmatism as basis of the integration of indigenous knowledge systems and practices in the Philippine K–12 indigenous peoples education program: Problematising and ways forward. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 56(10), 1021–1033. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2024.2348807>
 6. Hipolito, M. F. G. (2024). A systematic literature review of the significance of the school of living tradition in the preservation of cultural heritage of the indigenous peoples. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*, 5(2), 605–614. <http://dx.doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.05.02.21>
 7. Magdadaro, J. M. D., & Sacramento, N. J. J. E. (2022). Community engagement in the Indigenous education discourse: Unravelling policy lessons from Lumad's alternative school in Mindanao, Philippines. *Thammasat Review*, 25(1), 57–81. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13394-025-00548-x>
 8. Maniego, M. L. V., Duante, C. A., Velasquez, M. B. M., & Tordecilla, R. L. (2024). Predictors of undernutrition among under-five children in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas in the Philippines. *Malaysian Journal of Nutrition*, 30(3). <https://doi.org/10.31246/mjn-2024-0017>
 9. Ocampo, D. J., Rufino, R., & Gonzales, J. F. (2021). Participatory policy formulation on indigenous peoples education in the K to 12 basic education program in the Philippines. In *Minding the marginalized students through inclusion, justice, and hope* (Vol. 16, pp. 211–242). Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-363620210000016012>
 10. Quimbo, M. A., Curuz, R. O. D., Serrano, E., Paunlagui, M., & Centeno, E. (2023). Towards liberating education: A proposed rights-based instructional planning approach for teaching Higaonon learners in the Philippines. *International Journal of Asian Education*, 4(3), 132–149. <https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2024.0193>
 11. Quines, L. A., & Albutra, D. A. (2023). The mediating effect of normative commitment on the relationship between instructional coaching skills and teamwork of teachers. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 10(3). <https://doi.org/10.46827/ejes.v10i3.4713>
 12. Quines, L. A., & Monteza, M. T. (2023). The mediating effect of teacher collegiality on the relationship between instructional leadership and professional development of teachers. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 10(3). <https://doi.org/10.46827/ejes.v10i3.4716>
 13. Sy, P. A. (2021). Open educational resources for geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas. *Higher Education Interventions During and Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic*, 1. <https://doi.org/10.63498/etcor397>
 14. Villaplaza, L. B. (2021). Level of implementation of indigenous peoples education program in Agusan Del Sur, Philippines. *Asia Pacific Journal of Contemporary Education and Educational Technology*, 7(1), 20–33. <https://doi.org/10.55197/qjssh.v6i3.678>