

Original Article

Indigenous Education in Davao del Sur: An Analysis of Implementation, Practices, Challenges, and Opportunities

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Abstract. This study employed a convergent parallel research design (Creswell & Pablo-Clark, 2011) to examine the implementation of Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) in selected IP public schools in Davao del Sur. Quantitative data were collected from 172 public school teachers using a validated survey, while qualitative insights were gathered through in-depth interviews with eight teachers directly involved in IPEd implementation. Results indicate that overall implementation is at a "Good" level (grand mean = 4.12; SD = 0.04), with the highest scores in teacher training (M = 4.16; SD = 0.06) and learning materials (M = 4.17; SD = 0.11), reflecting sufficient professional development and access to contextualized resources. Curriculum implementation and integration of indigenous knowledge also scored highly, demonstrating active embedding of cultural practices and community-validated content. Challenges identified include limited resources, weak community-school collaboration, and logistical barriers in remote areas. Nevertheless, IPEd offers opportunities to strengthen cultural identity, enhance teacher competence in culture-responsive pedagogy, and foster inclusive, contextually grounded learning environments. These findings provide insights for improving program implementation and educational outcomes for IP learners.

Keywords: Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd); Program implementation; Descriptive research; Educational practices; Culture-Responsive Pedagogy.

Quality education is widely recognized as a fundamental human right under international frameworks such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN, 2007). Beyond being a legal entitlement, education plays a crucial role in sustaining cultural identity and empowering communities. However, access to education that is culturally responsive remains uneven, particularly among marginalized and Indigenous populations (Bermudez & Babaran, 2025). Globally, Indigenous Peoples number approximately 476 million, representing about six percent of the world's population, yet they account for a disproportionately high share of those living in poverty, with nearly 19 percent experiencing economic deprivation (Bermudez & Babaran, 2025). The United Nations further estimates that while Indigenous Peoples comprise only around five percent of the global population, they represent roughly fifteen percent of those living in extreme poverty. Compared to other population groups, Indigenous communities generally have more limited access to education and lower levels of educational attainment (Gulam & Hordista,

2024).

One contributing factor to these disparities is the limited cultural relevance of formal education systems. The World Bank (2019) reported that educational programs for Indigenous learners frequently fail to integrate Indigenous histories, cultural practices, local languages, and traditional knowledge systems as elements essential for meaningful participation, identity affirmation, and academic success. These gaps contribute to learning poverty and signal broader weaknesses in education systems. To highlight this global learning crisis, the World Bank and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics introduced the Learning Poverty Index in 2019. As noted by Gulam and Hordista (2024), the Sustainable Development Goal 4 target to ensure inclusive and quality education for all by 2030 remains far from being achieved, with many countries not on track to meet it.

In the Philippine context, Indigenous Peoples are estimated to number between 14 and 17 million, belonging to approximately 110 ethno-linguistic groups and comprising about 10 to 20 percent of the national population (Hirai, 2015). Despite their significant presence, Indigenous communities continue to experience systemic marginalization. Former Secretary of Education Armin Luistro (2011) highlighted that limited access to basic social services and sustainable livelihood opportunities has reinforced long-standing social, economic, and political exclusion. He further emphasized that culturally responsive education is vital in enabling Indigenous Peoples to assert their rights, strengthen self-determination, and expand life opportunities. In addition, the misalignment between formal education and Indigenous cultures often threatens cultural identity, as Indigenous communities are excluded from learning that reflects their heritage. In the Philippines, the mainstream educational system has historically emphasized assimilation over the preservation of Indigenous knowledge, leaving the unique needs of Indigenous learners largely unaddressed (Bermudez & Babaran, 2025).

Ensuring equitable access to quality education for Indigenous Peoples is therefore not only a matter of rights but also of social justice and cultural preservation. Indigenous learners should be afforded educational opportunities comparable in quality to those available to urban populations, not only to develop essential knowledge and skills, but also to honor their cultural heritage, historical experiences, and close relationship with the natural environment (Villaplaza, 2021). Additionally, the Philippine Constitution guarantees all citizens the right to access and exercise benefits provided by law, which must be implemented in accordance with existing statutes, such as Republic Act No. 9155. Consistent with the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA), Indigenous Peoples are entitled to equitable, high-quality education. Moreover, the Implementing Rules and Regulations of Republic Act No. 10533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, particularly Rule I, Section 8 on Inclusiveness, mandate the development and implementation of educational programs that address the physical, intellectual, psychosocial, and cultural needs of learners, in line with Section 3 of the Act.

In response to these challenges, the Department of Education implemented the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Curriculum Framework through DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2015. This framework guides the development of culturally sensitive curricula, instructional materials, teaching methodologies, and assessment strategies tailored to the needs of Indigenous learners. While the policy offers a comprehensive framework for delivering inclusive, culturally grounded education, its effectiveness ultimately depends on the extent and quality of its implementation at the school level. The implementation of Indigenous Peoples' Education (IPEd) in Davao del Sur through teacher professional development, trainings, and workshops has often focused on issues of contextualization, localization, and indigenization. However, despite these efforts, many Indigenous schools continue to face challenges in implementing the program effectively. Evidence shows that several schools report low performance on key performance indicators (KPIs), with most lacking any School-Based Management (SBM) practices and only a few achieving SBM Level 1, mainly due to declining KPI scores.

While the IPEd framework exists, a notable research gap persists. Previous studies have primarily examined policy, cultural preservation, or community engagement. However, there is limited empirical evidence on the implementation of IPEd at the school level, particularly in areas such as Davao del Sur. Little is known about how teachers apply the framework in classrooms, how curricula integrate Indigenous knowledge, the challenges and resource constraints faced, and the opportunities for program improvement. Furthermore, documentation on pedagogy, instructional materials, teacher training, language use, and assessment within Indigenous contexts remains insufficient. This study aims to address these gaps by investigating the extent of IPEd implementation in Davao del Sur and by exploring teachers' experiences as they navigate its challenges and opportunities.

Several studies on the implementation of Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) in Philippine public schools reveal varied outcomes across different localities. In Sarangani Province, Gulam and Hordista (2024) reported high levels of implementation across pedagogy, curriculum, language, teacher training, materials, and assessment. However, they noted limited community involvement in the development of teaching materials in Indigenous languages. Similarly, Bermudez and Babaran (2025) found satisfactory implementation in Alfonso Lista, Isabela, highlighting the positive impact of teacher experience and IPEd-related training, and recommending expanded professional development for culturally responsive instruction. In contrast, Villaplaza (2021) observed mixed results in Agusan del Sur, with pedagogy and indigenous knowledge practices rated satisfactory, while curriculum content, language of instruction, teacher training, materials, and assessment were rated poor. These findings suggest that while some aspects of IPEd are effectively implemented, significant gaps remain, particularly in curriculum development, teacher preparedness, materials, and community engagement. Despite existing policies and frameworks, there is limited empirical evidence on how these components are operationalized in schools, underscoring the need for further research on the extent and quality of IPEd implementation across diverse local contexts.

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a convergent parallel research design, following the model outlined by Creswell & Pablo-Clark (2011). This framework provided a systematic approach that involves collecting both qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously, analyzing them separately, and then merging or relating the results to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The design will describe the level of implementation of Indigenous Education (IPED) in the selected public schools in Davao del Sur. Further, the study will explore the challenges teachers face in implementing IP education, examine the practices they use to implement it, and identify opportunities to enhance its implementation.

Research Participants

The study involved 172 randomly selected public schools implementing the IPED. For the qualitative phase, 8 randomly selected public school teachers were considered as participants. This includes teachers who are currently assigned to schools implementing the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program, have at least 1 year of experience working with IP learners or participating in IPEd-related activities, and are directly involved in key components such as curriculum contextualization, culture-responsive teaching, or community engagement. Participants must be willing to join the study voluntarily and be able to provide rich, firsthand insights based on their experience and role in IPEd implementation.

Research Instrument

The study utilized two sets of instruments: 1) a survey questionnaire on the evaluation of the level of implementation of the IPED, and 2) a researcher-made semi-structured questionnaire for an in-depth interview with the participants. To ensure the appropriateness and clarity of the modified instrument, a panel of three experts reviewed and validated its content. This content validation process helped identify and revise any ambiguous or unclear items, ensuring alignment with the study objectives.

Data Gathering Procedure

In accordance with Department of Education protocols, the researchers ensured that all necessary permits were obtained before conducting the study. The respondents and participants were given a brief orientation on the objectives of the study, their rights and privileges, and the assurance that no fees would be collected from them. In addition, informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. After securing all required permissions, the data-gathering process commenced. Survey questionnaires were administered according to the schedules approved by the school administrators, while in-depth interviews were conducted based on participants' availability. The quantitative data from the surveys were statistically analyzed with the assistance of a statistician, whereas the qualitative data were encoded, transcribed, and analyzed by a data analyst. All results and findings were consolidated, and recommendations were formulated based on these findings.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and means) were used to assess the level of implementation of the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED). Moreover, qualitative data were analyzed following the model of Braun & Clarke (2012). In this qualitative inquiry, the data were examined following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-step

thematic analysis process. This involved familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and noting initial observations, systematic coding of significant features across the dataset, grouping related codes into preliminary themes, and refining these themes to ensure internal consistency and alignment with the data. The themes were then clearly defined and labeled before being finalized and incorporated into analytic narratives supported by participant excerpts. Thematic analysis was an appropriate method for this study as it facilitated the identification and interpretation of recurring patterns within the data. It was particularly effective in exploring Indigenous teachers' perspectives, enabling rich, in-depth analysis while foregrounding participants' voices in the construction of meaning.

Ethical Considerations

Before data collection, participants were provided with informed consent forms. They signed them voluntarily after being informed of the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any time without negative consequences. The researchers ensured the recruitment process was appropriate and carefully examined potential physical, psychological, and socio-economic risks to minimize them. Measures to safeguard confidentiality were strictly observed; all responses were coded to remove identifying details, and personal information was securely stored to protect participant privacy. Throughout the research process, the study adhered to ethical standards by upholding data integrity and prioritizing the rights and welfare of all participants.

Results and Discussion

Extent of Implementation of IP Education Among IP Schools in Davao del Sur 2024-2025

The extent of IP Education implementation among IP schools in Davao del Sur was assessed across the following areas: Participation and Decision Making; Pedagogy and Methodology; Indigenous Knowledge; Curriculum; Languages of Instruction; Teacher Training; Materials; and Assessment and Evaluation. Result shown in Table 1. Among the components of the implementation of IP Education, Assessment, and Evaluation has the lowest mean of 4.03 (SD=0.07). This means that although Assessment and Evaluation emerged as the lowest-rated component in the implementation of Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd), it still falls within the descriptive rating of Good, suggesting that, based on the low standard deviation, the teachers are consistent with their perceptions that the assessment and evaluation practices are less likely implemented than other IPEd components. Teachers may be struggling to align assessment practices with culturally responsive and indigenous-centered pedagogies. The conventional assessment methods, which are often standardized, language-dependent, and content-driven, may not fully capture Indigenous learners' cultural knowledge, skills, and ways of knowing. As a result, assessment practices may remain anchored in mainstream frameworks rather than being adapted to indigenous contexts, community values, and culturally relevant indicators of learning. This implies that teachers require targeted professional development on culturally appropriate assessment strategies, including performance-based, community-validated, and formative assessment approaches.

Table 1. Extent of Implementation of IP Education Among IP Schools in Davao del Sur 2024-2025

Particulars	Mean	SD	Description of Implementation
Participation and Decision Making	4.11	0.11	Good
Pedagogy and Methodology	4.11	0.06	Good
Indigenous Knowledge	4.12	0.16	Good
Curriculum	4.13	0.08	Good
Languages of Instruction	4.14	0.02	Good
Teacher Training	4.16	0.06	Good
Materials	4.17	0.11	Good
Assessment and Evaluation	4.03	0.07	Good
Grand Mean	4.12	0.04	Good

The result supports the study conducted by Villaplaza (2021) in Agusan del Sur, which found that assessment and evaluation were good and satisfactory, highlighting the need to develop a curriculum and evaluation that accommodates the experiences and capacities of Indigenous pupils. In addition, the study of Bermudez and Babaran (2025) revealed that the level of implementation of IPED in terms of evaluation and assessment was satisfactory, an indication that respondents are imparting indigenous knowledge to their students; however, there remains a need to enhance instructional strategies and offer diverse learning opportunities through practical assessment and evaluation. On the other hand, the component with the highest mean was Materials, with a mean of 4.17 (SD=0.11), indicating that the instructional materials used in IP schools are generally perceived as well-developed, culturally appropriate, and supportive of Indigenous learners. The standard deviation, although

higher, shows some variation compared to other components; the scores are still close to one another, indicating generally consistent responses from the participants. The result implies that Schools and education leaders may build on this strength by scaling up best practices in community-based materials development and ensuring equitable distribution of quality learning resources across IP schools. The result suggests that educators receive sufficient professional development and access to contextualized instructional resources. This aligns with DepEd's mandate on contextualization and culture-responsive teaching as outlined in DepEd Order No. 62 (2011).

Moreover, the results align with Gulam and Hordista (2024), who found high levels of implementation of IPED materials in Sarangani Province, driven by localized, community-based resource development. Bermudez and Babaran (2025) likewise reported that culturally responsive materials improved teachers' effectiveness in implementing IPED. In contrast, Villaplaza (2021) noted weaker implementation of materials in Agusan del Sur, highlighting the need for sustained support and stakeholder involvement. Generally, these studies emphasize the importance of culturally grounded and collaboratively developed instructional materials in strengthening IPED implementation. The overall implementation of Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) was rated Good ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.04$), indicating generally positive and consistent perceptions among respondents. Key components, including participation and decision-making, pedagogy, indigenous knowledge, curriculum, and language of instruction, also received Good ratings, suggesting balanced implementation of the IPED framework across schools.

These results indicate progress in integrating culturally responsive practices into instruction, curriculum, and language use, reflecting the translation of IPED policies into school-level practice. However, the relatively higher variability in indigenous knowledge integration ($SD = 0.16$) highlights the need for stronger community engagement and more consistent application across schools. These findings align with Gulam and Hordista (2024) and Bermudez and Babaran (2025), who emphasized the roles of teacher training, policy support, and community participation in strengthening IPED implementation. Furthermore, Alday (2025) cited that teachers implement pedagogy, indigenous knowledge systems, training, and assessment to a substantial degree. The positive results in participation and decision-making imply active collaboration with elders and local cultural authorities, supporting studies emphasizing the critical role of community engagement in sustaining indigenous education programs (Ponce & Lucas, 2024).

Challenges in the Implementation of IPED

On the challenges on the implementation of IPED based on the responses of the participants in the in-depth interview, 3 major themes emerged: 1) Insufficient Resources and Teacher Preparation, including the lack of contextualized learning materials, limited training on culture-responsive pedagogy, and difficulties using the mother tongue, especially for non-IP teachers; 2) Weak Community-School Collaboration, arising from inconsistent involvement of elders and cultural bearers, limited cultural validation of lessons, and irregular coordination with community partners; and 3) Logistical and Contextual Barriers in Remote IP Areas such that remote locations, inadequate facilities, and cultural sensitivity issues make it difficult for teachers to implement activities, access support, and align instruction with local traditions.

The theme *Insufficient Resources and Teacher Preparation* highlights limited contextualized materials, inadequate training in culture-responsive pedagogy, and difficulties with the use of the mother tongue, particularly among non-IP teachers. One participant explained, *"We are encouraged to contextualize lessons, but there are very few materials that truly reflect our learners' culture."* Another shared, *"Using the mother tongue is challenging because I was not trained in the language."* This patterned meaning highlights gaps between policy expectations and classroom practice, consistent with studies emphasizing the need for sustained teacher capacity-building and culturally grounded resources (World Bank, 2019; Villaplaza, 2021).

The theme *Weak Community-School Collaboration* reflects irregular involvement of elders and cultural bearers and limited cultural validation of lessons. Participants described consultation as occasional rather than sustained, as illustrated by one teacher who shared, *"Elders are consulted only during special activities."* Another participant shared, *"It is difficult to always seek IP elders' wisdom on every lesson we have due to time and accessibility."* This finding aligns with prior research underscoring the essential role of community engagement in culturally authentic IPED implementation (Gulam & Hordista, 2024).

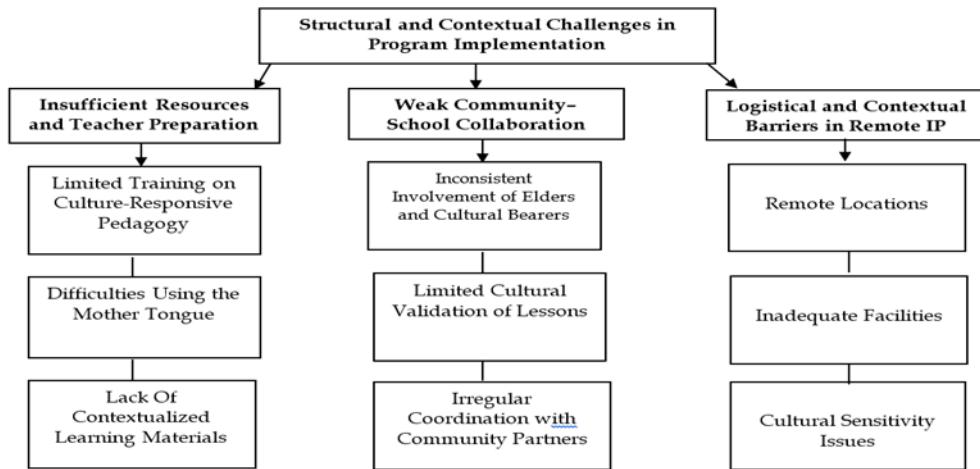


Figure 1. Thematic Framework of the Challenges to the Implementation of IPED

Moreover, the theme *Logistical and Contextual Barriers in Remote IP Areas* addresses challenges related to geographic isolation, inadequate facilities, and cultural sensitivity considerations. One participant noted, *“Because our school is far, support and materials do not arrive on time.”* Another shared, *“Some activities require careful consideration to avoid violating cultural practices.”* Participants emphasized how remoteness constrains access to support and complicates instructional planning, echoing earlier findings on contextual barriers in Indigenous education settings (Bermudez & Babaran, 2025). Overall, these themes illustrate how teachers navigate IPED implementation within intersecting institutional, relational, and contextual constraints, indicating the need for integrated support systems that strengthen teacher preparation, community partnerships, and context-responsive strategies.

Key Opportunities for the IPED Implementation

On the key opportunities for the IPED implementation, 3 major themes emerged: 1) Strengthening Cultural Identity and Community Involvement with a sub-theme “Fostering closer collaboration with elders and cultural bearers; 2) Improving Teacher Competence in Culture-Responsive Teaching with a sub-theme “Relevant trainings and exposure to indigenous practices” and 3) Creating More Contextualized and Inclusive Learning with sub-theme “Developing culturally grounded materials and activities”.

The first theme, *Strengthening Cultural Identity and Community Involvement*, emerged as a significant opportunity, particularly through fostering closer collaboration with elders and cultural bearers. Participants emphasized the value of learning directly from community knowledge holders. One teacher noted, *“When the elders come to school during activities, we are happy as the learners see their culture alive”*. Other participant shared that *“We make sure community activities are actively participated so that the learners learn not just facts, but the stories, songs, and practices that IP community is celebrating.”* This aligns with research highlighting that collaboration with elders promotes intergenerational knowledge transmission and reinforces students’ cultural identity (Mercado, 2021; Villaluz, Tagalog, & Saway Bai, 2023). Similarly, an IPED coordinator shared, *“Involving the community in school programs helps children connect their studies with their roots, and they feel proud of who they are.”* Such statements demonstrate how community engagement strengthens cultural continuity and enhances learners’ sense of belonging (Dela Cruz et al., 2025).

The second theme, *Improving Teacher Competence in Culture-Responsive Teaching*, was recognized as essential, particularly through relevant training and exposure to Indigenous practices. Teachers expressed a strong need for professional development tailored to Indigenous contexts. One participant stated, *“I attended a workshop where we visited ancestral lands and learned traditional practices; it completely changed how I plan my lessons.”* This aligns with the literature, which emphasizes that culturally responsive professional development, especially when guided by Indigenous mentors, improves teacher confidence and instructional effectiveness (Ali, Kadir, & Kusdianto, 2025). Another teacher noted, *“Without proper training, it is easy to teach something about culture, but it will not be meaningful for the students.”* These statements underscore the critical role of experiential training in enabling teachers to deliver culturally authentic and academically rigorous lessons.

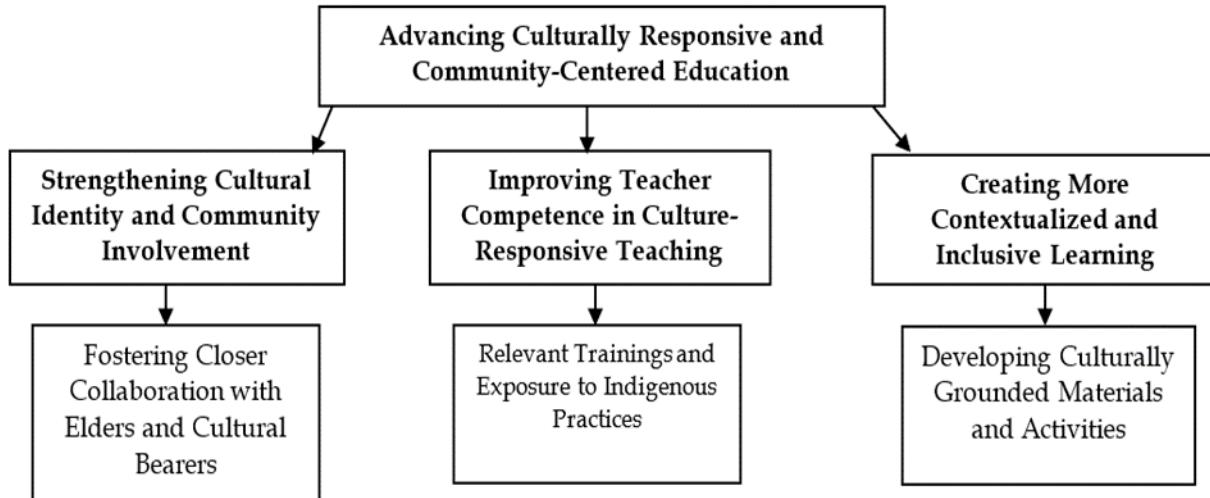


Figure 2. Thematic Framework of the Key Opportunities in the Implementation of IPED

The third theme highlighted the importance of **Creating More Contextualized and Inclusive Learning** through the development of culturally grounded materials and activities. Participants emphasized that materials and activities must reflect students' cultural and environmental realities. One teacher observed, *"When we use local stories, songs, and traditions in our lessons, students are more engaged, and they understand better because it comes from their community."* Another added, *"Developing our own teaching materials with community input makes the lessons more inclusive; the children see themselves in what they are learning."* These insights align with research demonstrating that co-created and localized instructional materials enhance both academic achievement and cultural resilience (Mercado, 2021; Villaluz et al., 2023).

Generally, the findings indicate that IPED implementation is most effective when schools foster strong community partnerships, invest in teacher capacity for culturally responsive pedagogy, and develop curricula that are both inclusive and contextually relevant. Participant statements consistently affirm that collaboration with elders strengthens cultural content, teacher competence ensures effective delivery, and culturally grounded materials provide a practical framework for meaningful learning (Dela Cruz et al., 2025; Ali et al., 2025; Mercado, 2021). These findings underscore the importance of systemic support, sustained professional development, and active community involvement in promoting both educational outcomes and cultural sustainability for Indigenous learners.

Conclusion

This study examined the extent of implementation of Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) among IP schools in Davao del Sur for School Year 2024–2025. Quantitative results showed that the overall implementation of IPED was rated Good ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.04$), indicating positive and consistent perceptions among teachers. All core components, including participation and decision-making, pedagogy, indigenous knowledge, curriculum, and language of instruction, also received Good ratings, suggesting balanced implementation of the IPED framework across schools. Among the components, Assessment and Evaluation obtained the lowest mean ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.07$), indicating challenges in aligning assessment practices with culturally responsive and indigenous-centered approaches. This suggests that assessment remains anchored mainly in conventional frameworks and requires further adaptation to reflect Indigenous learners' knowledge systems and community-based indicators of learning. In contrast, Materials received the highest rating ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.11$), reflecting the strength of culturally grounded and contextualized instructional resources in supporting IPED implementation. On the qualitative phase, findings revealed persistent challenges related to insufficient resources and teacher preparation, weak community–school collaboration, and logistical constraints in remote IP areas. Despite these challenges, the study also identified key opportunities centered on strengthening cultural identity through elder involvement, enhancing teacher competence through relevant trainings and immersion, and developing localized and inclusive learning materials. These opportunities align closely with the goals of RA 10533 and the DepEd IPED Framework, which emphasize inclusiveness, contextualization, and community participation.

The findings suggest that while Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) in Davao del Sur is generally implemented effectively, targeted efforts are needed to enhance culturally responsive assessment practices and address persistent challenges, including limited resources, inadequate teacher preparation, and weak community-school collaboration. The high rating of instructional materials and positive engagement with Indigenous knowledge suggest a strong foundation for culturally grounded teaching. Therefore, policymakers and school leaders should prioritize professional development focused on culturally relevant pedagogy, strengthen partnerships with IP communities, and support the creation of localized assessments and learning resources. Doing so will not only align practice with the goals of RA 10533 and the DepEd IPEd Framework but also promote more inclusive, contextually meaningful, and community-centered education for Indigenous learners.

Contributions of Authors

The researchers developed the study's conceptual framework, designed the methodology, gathered and analyzed the data, and prepared the initial manuscript. The editor, who is the researcher's professor, serves as both a content and grammar specialist and reviewed the entire paper to ensure accuracy, clarity, and coherence. The statistician provided support in selecting suitable statistical methods, analyzing quantitative data, and validating the interpretations. Meanwhile, the data analyst conducted the thematic analysis and verified the accuracy and consistency of the qualitative interpretations and discussions.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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