

Illuminating IP Education through Parental Involvement in Last Mile Schools

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Abstract — This study examined the Parental involvement supports the educational success of Indigenous Peoples (IP) learners, especially in geographically isolated and underserved areas like Last Miles Schools. This study aimed to explore the experiences of teachers in engaging IP parents in the education of their children at Paraiso Elementary School in Paquibato District, Davao City. A qualitative research design utilizing phenomenology was employed. Ten teachers were purposively selected to participate in in-depth interviews. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, focusing on recurring patterns and themes across participants' narratives. The study highlighted six major challenges: language and communication barriers, low educational background of parents, cultural mismatch between school and home, limited parental availability due to livelihood demands, lack of access to transportation and facilities, and the perceived irrelevance of formal education. To cope with these challenges, teachers used strategies such as using local dialects and visual aids, simplifying communication, integrating Indigenous practices, adjusting schedules, organizing community-based meetings, and conducting awareness campaigns.

Keywords — *Indigenous education, parental involvement, Last Miles Schools, teacher experiences, culturally responsive education, Philippines*

I. Introduction

This study focuses on understanding the experiences of teachers in Last Miles Schools as they involve Indigenous Peoples (IP) parents in the education of their children. The researcher has chosen this topic due to the unique challenges faced by teachers in these remote schools, where cultural and socio-economic factors often hinder parental involvement. By exploring these experiences, the study aims to uncover effective strategies for enhancing parental involvement, which is crucial for improving the academic success of IP learners. The findings of this study will benefit educators, school administrators, and policymakers by providing insights that can inform more culturally responsive approaches to parental involvement. Ultimately, these efforts will contribute to better educational outcomes for IP students and foster stronger school-community relationships.

Parental involvement refers to the active participation and collaboration of parents in their children's education, both at home and in school. It encompasses a range of activities, such as supporting learning at home, attending school events, and engaging in communication with

teachers to foster the child's academic and social development (Bacani & Enkiwe-Abayao, 2019)). For Indigenous Peoples (IP) learners, who often come from culturally distinct and marginalized communities, parental involvement is particularly significant. It helps bridge the cultural gap between the home and the school, ensuring that the educational environment is supportive and relevant to the learners' cultural backgrounds (Kim & Hill, 2021)). Last Mile Schools, which are located in remote and underserved areas, present additional challenges for fostering parental involvement due to geographic isolation, limited resources, and socio-economic constraints. These schools serve some of the most marginalized communities, including IP learners, making parental involvement a critical yet often difficult component of the educational process (Delos Santos et al., 2019).

In various international settings, research has shown that Indigenous parents often face barriers to involvement in their children's schooling due to cultural differences, language barriers, and systemic discrimination. For instance, a study by Mallari and David (2020) highlighted that Indigenous parents in the United States often feel marginalized and disconnected from the mainstream educational system, which does not always respect or incorporate Indigenous knowledge and practices. This disconnect can lead to a lack of trust between parents and schools, making it difficult for parents to actively participate in their children's education.

In Australia, similar challenges are observed among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. According to Santoro, Howard, and Abdul-Raheem (2021), these families often encounter barriers such as socio-economic disadvantages, geographical isolation, and a historical mistrust of the educational system due to past policies of forced assimilation. These factors contribute to lower levels of parental engagement in schooling, which in turn affects students' academic outcomes. The education system's failure to adequately support and involve Indigenous parents perpetuates a cycle of educational disadvantage for Indigenous learners

In Canada, the issue of parental engagement among First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities is also prevalent. According to Villegas and Roxas, 2022, Indigenous parents often experience feelings of alienation from the educational system, which they perceive as being culturally irrelevant and unresponsive to their children's needs. This sense of alienation is compounded by historical traumas related to residential schools, where Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities. As a result, many Indigenous parents are hesitant to engage with a system that has historically been a source of harm to their communities.

In the Philippines, the involvement of IP parents in the education of their children is similarly fraught with challenges. The Department of Education (DepEd) has made strides in promoting inclusive education through the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program. However, despite these efforts, there remains a significant gap in parental involvement among IP communities. Many IP parents have limited formal education and are unfamiliar with the structure and expectations of the formal school system, making it difficult for them to support their children's learning effectively. According to a study by Harrell and Torres, 2022, this lack of

engagement is further exacerbated by socio-economic factors, such as poverty and the need for children to contribute to household income through labor, which often takes precedence over schooling.

In Davao City, the challenges of involving IP parents in their children's education are particularly pronounced in the Last Miles Schools, which serve the most remote and marginalized communities. These schools are often located in areas where access to basic services, including education, is limited. Teachers in these schools frequently report difficulties in involving parents in school activities and decision-making processes. A study by Gascon (2020) revealed that many IP parents in Davao City feel disconnected from the formal education system, which they perceive as not being fully aligned with their cultural values and practices. This disconnect hampers the effective collaboration between parents and schools, which is vital for improving educational outcomes for IP learners.

Given these challenges, this study aims to explore the experiences of teachers in engaging IP parents in the education of their children in Last Miles Schools. By understanding the perspectives of teachers, who are on the front lines of this engagement, the study seeks to identify strategies that can enhance parental involvement and, ultimately, improve educational outcomes for IP learners. Addressing the barriers to parental engagement is essential for creating an inclusive and supportive educational environment that respects and incorporates Indigenous cultures and knowledge.

II. Methodology

This study is rooted in a qualitative approach, specifically employing phenomenology as the methodological framework. Phenomenology is particularly suited to exploring and understanding the lived experiences of individuals within their own context, focusing on their perceptions, feelings, and experiences as they relate to a particular phenomenon (Laverly, 2003). This approach is ideal for this study as it aims

to delve into the experiences of teachers in involving with Indigenous Peoples (IP) parents in the education of their children in Last Miles Schools. The study was framed by philosophical assumptions that shaped its approach: ontology recognized the subjective nature of reality; epistemology emphasized the co-construction of knowledge through meaningful interactions between the researcher and participants; axiology acknowledged the influence of values in the research process, with a strong commitment to reflexivity and ethical rigor; and methodology focused on phenomenology as a means to uncover the deeper meaning behind teachers' experiences with parents who remain in or near the classroom. The study employed a purposive sampling technique, which is particularly useful in qualitative research for selecting information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). This method allowed for

the selection of participants who have direct and rich experiences with the involvement of IP parents, ensuring that the data collected will be deeply relevant to the research questions.

The inclusion criteria for participants in this study are defined to ensure that all selected teachers have a substantial role and experience in the educational involving of IP parents. Thus, the participants should be currently teaching Grades 3 or 4 at Paraiso Elementary School; have at least one academic year of teaching experience at the school to ensure familiarity with the community and the unique challenges of involving IP parents; and willing to participate in the study and provide insights based on their experiences. for extended periods.

The primary research instrument for this study is an interview guide, designed to facilitate in-depth interviews with participants. The interview guide consists of open-ended questions aimed at exploring the experiences and perspectives of teachers in involving Indigenous Peoples (IP) parents in Last Mile Schools. This method is ideal for qualitative research as it allows participants to express their views in their own words and provides flexibility for the researcher to probe deeper into emerging themes (Kallio et al., 2016). The guide ensured that key topics relevant to the research objectives are covered while allowing for a conversational flow that encourages rich, detailed responses from participants.

Data collection was conducted in a safe, accessible, and comfortable environment. Interview locations will be arranged in quiet and private spaces within the school office or classroom to ensure participant convenience and confidentiality. The facilities were adequate for audio recording and secure data storage to support smooth research operations. Data was gathered through In-depth Interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussion using an Interview Guide with prepared questions. IDIs are a qualitative research method that involves conducting detailed, one-on-one interviews with participants to explore their personal perspectives and experiences in depth. The researcher took a meticulous step-by-step process to analyze the data gathered from in-depth interviews using a thematic analysis approach, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Initially, the researcher engaged in a thorough transcription of the audio-recorded interviews, ensuring every detail is accurately represented to preserve the authenticity of the participants' voices. This transcription phase is critical as it transforms spoken words into written text that can be methodically examined.

The interview guide was carefully developed based on the research questions and objectives. It included open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about the experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by teachers in involving IP parents. The guide also allowed for probing questions to explore particular areas in greater depth, ensuring flexibility to adapt to the flow of conversation and explore emerging themes.

Interviews were conducted in a quiet and private setting to ensure confidentiality and reduce distractions. Each interview is lasted between 20-30 minutes. The researcher established a rapport with participants, explained the purpose of the interview, and confirmed their consent to

participate and to record the session. The interviewer followed the guide but remained flexible to follow relevant topics as they arise naturally during the conversation. With the participants' permission, all interviews were audio-recorded. This recording ensures that verbatim data is captured for accuracy. Subsequently, the audio recordings were transcribed to facilitate detailed analysis. Transcripts were anonymized to maintain the confidentiality of participants.

The final phase of analysis involves defining and naming themes, during which the researcher developed a detailed and specific descriptions of each theme and determines what aspect of the data each theme captures. This involved interpreting and articulating the significance of the themes in relation to the research questions and the broader literature, ensuring a rich, insightful, and substantial analytical narrative.

III. Results and Discussion

Presented in this chapter is the results generate from the thematic analysis as well as the discussions to expound on the results. This section presents the challenges that teachers in Last Mile Schools encounter when attempting to involve Indigenous Peoples (IP) parents in their children's education. Through thematic analysis of the interview data, six major themes emerged: *Language and Communication Barriers, Low Educational Background of Parents, Cultural Mismatch Between School and Home, Limited Parental Availability Due to Livelihood Demands, Lack of Access to Transportation and School Facilities, and Perceived Irrelevance of Formal Education*. These themes highlight the factors that hinder effective school-home collaboration in marginalized and geographically isolated communities.

Language remains a critical barrier in building strong partnerships between teachers and IP parents in Last Miles Schools. Effective communication is essential for promoting parental involvement, but when teachers and parents do not share a common language, misunderstandings and disengagement may occur. McCarty and Lee (2024) emphasized that language barriers hinder parents' full participation in the education process, especially when Indigenous languages are not recognized or used within schools. Similarly, Castillo et al. (2020) noted that in remote communities, the lack of shared language between schools and Indigenous communities often results in weak collaboration and misinterpretation of educational goals.

The limited educational background of many IP parents in Last Miles Schools presents a major challenge for teachers aiming to strengthen home-school partnerships. When parents have little or no formal education, it can hinder their ability to support their children's academic work or even understand basic school requirements. McCarty and Lee (2024) highlighted that Indigenous communities often experience educational marginalization, making it harder for schools to fully involve parents in the learning process. Similarly, Ocampo et al. (2021) pointed out that in remote communities, many parents feel intimidated by formal education settings, which discourages their active participation.

The difference between Indigenous cultural practices and formal school expectations often creates misunderstandings that make parental involvement difficult. Many IP parents prioritize traditional knowledge and community values, which sometimes clash with the school's emphasis on formal education and standardized measures of success. Santoro et al. (2021) pointed out that when schools fail to respect Indigenous knowledge systems, it weakens trust and reduces the meaningful participation of Indigenous families. Delos Santos et al. (2019) similarly observed that in remote schools, cultural misalignment between home and school is a persistent barrier to strong community-school collaboration.

Economic realities in Indigenous communities often demand that parents prioritize livelihood activities over school-related responsibilities, limiting their availability to engage with teachers or attend school activities. In Last Miles Schools, where farming, hunting, or manual labor are essential for daily survival, education can sometimes become a secondary concern. Delos Santos et al. (2019) emphasized that livelihood pressures heavily influence school participation rates in remote communities, making consistent parental involvement difficult to achieve.

Physical distance and poor infrastructure are major barriers preventing IP parents from participating actively in school-related activities. In many Last Miles Schools, like those in Paquibato District, limited transportation options and inadequate school facilities discourage regular parent engagement. Preston et al. (2022) highlighted that geographical isolation and lack of school resources are critical factors that reduce parent-school collaboration in remote educational settings.

In some Indigenous communities, formal education is not always seen as essential compared to traditional skills and livelihoods, affecting how parents engage with schools. Many IP parents prioritize practical knowledge needed for daily survival over academic achievements. McCarty and Lee (2022), McCalman, Benveniste and Clarke (2020) noted that when formal education systems do not reflect Indigenous worldviews, communities may view schooling as disconnected from their real-life needs. Last Miles Schools often struggle to align educational goals with community values, leading to low parental involvement.

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