

The Intersection of Culture and Education: Challenges of Tboli Learners in Predominantly Non- Indigenous Schools

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Abstract

This study explores the challenges faced by Tboli learners in predominantly non-indigenous schools, focusing on the cultural, social, and economic barriers they encounter. The research adopts a qualitative approach to understand the experiences of Tboli learners and their coping mechanisms. Findings indicate that these learners face social isolation due to language barriers and cultural differences, and economic disparities further hinder their academic success and social integration. Despite these challenges, Tboli learners draw strength from their families, supportive peers, and school programs that acknowledge indigenous cultures. The study highlights the resilience of Tboli learners, demonstrating how they preserve their cultural identity through practices such as traditional clothing, language, and music, while also adapting to the dominant school culture. Coping strategies such as biculturalism, mentorship, and emotional strength are key factors that enable Tboli learners to navigate their educational environment while maintaining a strong sense of self. This research underscores the importance of fostering inclusive educational practices that respect indigenous cultures and identities, offering valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers working with indigenous populations.

Keywords: Challenges of Tboli Learners; Non- Indigenous Schools

I. Introduction

All children, regardless of their race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, or social origin, have the fundamental right to an education. Children must be encouraged to develop their skills and abilities in a safe and encouraging learning

environment. The goal of basic education is to guarantee that all children, youth, and adults have access to high-quality basic education. As a result, the school needs to be a supportive learning environment for all kinds of students.

Globally, economic growth, development, tolerance, democracy, and peace are all accelerated by education (UNICEF, 2018). This

serves as a source of inspiration or light for indigenous people and gives them equal access to basic education. The indigenous population, which is estimated to number 370 million and spread across 90 countries, accounts for 15% of the world's poorest people but only 5% of the global population (UNDP, 2010).

The Department of Education (DepEd) modified the National Indigenous People (IP) Education Policy Framework in accordance with the Philippines' pledge to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Policy framework acknowledged education as an important tool for achieving fundamental freedoms and other human rights. In order to reinforce this policy framework, DepEd created an IP education program that adheres to the right-based approach, which prioritizes the concepts of empowerment, inclusion, and participation (DO 62, s. 2011). According to the Department of Education's Indigenous Peoples Education Office (2021), during the first ten years of the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program, 42,176 public schools in the Philippines served 2.529 million IP students.

The Tboli tribe, residing in the mountains of southern Mindanao, particularly around Lake Sebu in South Cotabato, embodies a traditional way of life passed down through centuries. The School of the Living Traditions (SLT) in the region serves as a testament to their commitment to preserving ancestral practices. In the Philippines, Indigenous Peoples (IP) face marginalization stemming from diverse ways of life, practices, and beliefs, perpetuating stereotypes of being uneducated and uncivilized (Galindo, 2018). Notably, the Tboli children's dedication to education is exemplified by the arduous journeys they undertake, often traversing mountains and rivers to reach schools, emphasizing the significant barriers they encounter (Rebollido, 2023).

In fact, the study conducted to determine the lived experiences of indigenous peoples (IP) learners in predominantly non-IP schools in Southern Palawan revealed that parents lived experiences in terms of socioeconomic situation, language and understanding, distance, location, and safety and bullying and discrimination was rated as occasionally. It is also revealed that socioeconomic situation, bullying and discrimination, language and understanding was rated as frequently by the IP learners. While the teachers' rated bullying and discrimination, school location, distance and safety as occasionally (Raballe et al., 2021).

While several studies have explored the lived experiences of IP students, particularly in areas of language, safety, bullying, discrimination, and educational outcomes there exists a notable gap in the literature regarding the challenges of Tboli students in non-indigenous people schools.

Thus, this study addressed this gap through an exploration focusing on the unique experiences of Tboli students in non-indigenous people public schools.

Theoretical Framework of the study

This study was based on a combination of core ideas. This research specifically incorporated three central theories: Ecological System Theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), Vygotsky's (1962) Sociocultural Theory, Existential-Phenomenological Psychology of Moustakas (1994).

First, Ecological System Theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) which described 4 systems in which children exist, all of which interact to influence how they grow and develop. He employs terms such as microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Microsystem it is the factors in the child's immediate environment that interact directly with

them and have the greatest influence on them, such as people and events at home. Mesosystem interconnections between microsystems, such as the relationship between the family and teachers or the child's peers and the family. Exosystem these factors exist outside of the child's immediate environment. A child's experience at home, for example, may be influenced by their parent's experience at work. Macrosystem larger societal factors such as cultural values and overall economic conditions are included in this category.

In addition, Vygotsky's (1962) Sociocultural Theory is another theory that supports this study. This theory perceived human development as a socially central process in which children develop cultural values, beliefs, and problem-solving techniques in collaborative conversation with more skilled members of society. This means, that adults in society promote children's cognitive development by involving them in stimulating and meaningful activities. They clearly show children how their culture interprets and responds to the world. They demonstrate the significance they place on objects, events, and experiences. They teach the child what to think (the knowledge) and how to think (the processes, the tools to think with). Social interactions (for example, speaking) aid in learning and language development (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, the study adopts the viewpoint that social constructivism plays a role in shaping an individual's perspective and is strongly associated with learners' interactions with their peers, teachers, and others in society. He also added that culture gives its children with intellectual adaptive capacity tools that support them to use fundamental mental functions more effectively/adaptively. Culture, on the other hand, discover the type of memory technique we develop. As a result, Vygostky

considers cognitive functions, even those performed alone, to be influenced by the beliefs, values, and intellectual adaptation tools of the culture in which a person develops and thus socio-culturally determined, Saul (2023).

The Existential-Phenomenological Psychology of Moustakas (1994) is another theory that supports this study. It provides a unique lens through which to understand and explore the complexities of human existence. It encourages an in-depth examination of subjective experiences, emphasizing individual freedom, responsibility, and the quest for meaning in the face of existential challenges. Existential-Phenomenological Psychology, influenced by Moustakas' methodology, offers a valuable framework for understanding the lived experiences of indigenous learners in non-indigenous public schools. This approach facilitates a deep exploration of cultural identity, existential challenges, and the psychological dimensions of their educational journey. By applying imaginative methods and focusing on existential themes such as freedom and responsibility, the study can provide significant insights into the unique perspectives of indigenous learners, contributing to more culturally sensitive educational practices.

II. Methodology

The study utilized descriptive phenomenology. It is a qualitative research approach that aims to explore and describe how individuals experience phenomena (Christensen, 2019). This methodology emphasizes intentionality, which asserts that consciousness is always directed toward something, allowing researchers to delve into the relationship between individuals and their

experiences (Vagle, 2018). A critical aspect of this approach is phenomenological reduction, or bracketing, which involves setting aside preconceived notions to focus solely on the phenomenon itself (Giorgi, 2021). Data collection typically occurs through in-depth interviews, providing rich qualitative insights that are analyzed using structured methods to identify significant themes and meanings (Sundler et al., 2019). Descriptive phenomenology has been effectively applied in various fields, including healthcare and social sciences, to examine topics such as cultural identity and chronic illness experiences (Leigh-Osroosh & Hutchison, 2019; Murdoch et al., 2022).

Scope and Limitation of the Study

The study focuses on the challenges of Tboli learners in non-indigenous school. The study's participants was be Grade 6 indigenous learners in Lake Sebu District. The data was gathered from the indigenous learners through semi-structured interviews. The researcher's aim was to analyze the numerous message meanings that emerged from the in-person interviews, and then to identify common themes and challenges. The depends on the participants' ability to describe their experiences, especially their challenges, coping and insights.

Participants have varying degrees of knowledge, challenges, and insights which may be subjective. Since administrative permission is necessary to gain access to informants, the school head of the chosen school was informed about the study and its purpose. The study was based on data saturation and open-ended questions through one-on-one interviews.

Operational Definition of Terms

In order to help the readers, understand the study, the following operational definitions are provided:

Non-Indigenous School. refers to the public elementary school in Lake Sebu district dominated by non-indigenous learners where this study will be conducted.

Tboli learners refer to Grade 6 learners who are participants of this study.

Intersection- pertains to the experiences where indigenous cultural values, practices, and identities meet and interact with the norms, practices, and expectations of the non-Indigenous school, resulting in both opportunities and challenges for learners.

Participants of the Study

The study's participants was six (6) Grade 6 indigenous learners who are officially enrolled in predominantly non-indigenous public elementary school in Lake Sebu District. This stage of development is crucial as learners are forming their self-concept and are more insightful about the cultural dynamics in their educational environment (Alfonso & Lopez, 2018).

Additionally, educational policies targeted toward this age group are vital for supporting Indigenous learners in their significant life transitions. As such, selecting Grade 6 learners provides a scientific avenue to explore the intersection of academic pressures and cultural identity negotiation, thereby yielding insights that are both reflective of their personal growth and indicative of the efficacy of the current educational system in accommodating cultural diversity.

Locale of the Study

This study was conducted in the Lake Sebu District, which falls under the Schools Division of South Cotabato. Majority of the learners in this

district are from the Tboli community, with unique cultural background. Interestingly, despite the prominence of the Tboli population among the learners, most schools in the district are predominantly staffed by non-indigenous teachers. Moreover, there is also a notable presence of non-indigenous learners in these schools, contributing to a multicultural educational environment (EBEIS, 2023). This dynamic presents both challenges and opportunities for promoting inclusive and culturally responsive teaching practices in the district which makes the researcher choose Lake Sebu District as locale of this study.

Sampling Technique

This study utilized purposive sampling as techniques in selecting the participants. Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental or selective sampling, is a non-probability sampling technique where researchers intentionally select participants based on specific characteristics relevant to the study's objectives (Alchemer, 2024). This method is particularly useful in qualitative research, allowing for the collection of rich, detailed data from individuals who can provide valuable insights into the research questions (Scribbr, 2022). Researchers utilize purposive sampling when they aim to focus on a particular subset of the population that possesses unique attributes or experiences (Palinkas et al., 2015). While this approach can enhance the depth of understanding regarding the phenomenon under investigation, it is also susceptible to biases due to the subjective nature of participant selection (Tuckett et al., 2020). Various techniques within purposive sampling include maximum variation sampling, homogeneous sampling, and extreme case sampling, each serving different research purposes and enhancing the overall rigor of qualitative studies (Murdoch et al., 2022).

Research Instrument

The main instrument to gather data was a semi-structured interview. The overall purpose of using semi-structured interviews for data collection is to gather information from key informants with personal experiences, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs related to the topic of interest (DeJonckheere et al., 2019).

The interview questions was generated by the researcher and was validated through content validity. The draft was done by the researcher, which the adviser checked. Then, it was given to the validators 4 validators a graduate of at least master's degree whose thesis are qualitative.

Data Collection

In this descriptive phenomenological study, data collection follows a systematic and rigorous process to explore the essence and meaning of participants' lived experiences.

First, the permission from the graduate school of Sultan Kudarat State University which was followed by the permission from the Department of Education. Once, done, the researcher purposefully selected participants who have experienced the phenomenon of interest. Participants are chosen for their ability to provide rich and insightful descriptions of their experiences related to the research question (Moustakas, 1994).

Before data collection, participants are provided with clear and comprehensive information about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks. They are given the opportunity to give voluntary and informed consent to participate (Creswell, 2013).

The primary data collection method in this phenomenological study was in-depth interviews. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with

each participant, using open-ended questions to encourage participants to share their experiences in their own words (Moustakas, 1994).

After the interviews the audio recordings was transcribed verbatim, ensuring the preservation of participants' original expressions and nuances (Creswell, 2013). The researcher then engaged in a systematic analysis of the interview transcripts to identify common themes and patterns in participants' experiences. Phenomenological reduction, a method of analysis, involves a thorough examination of each interview to uncover the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

To ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings, the researcher engages in member checking, where participants are given the opportunity to review and validate the researcher's interpretations of their experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Rigors/Trustworthiness

Credibility refers to the extent to which the study's findings and interpretations are trustworthy and believable. It ensures that the study accurately represents the experiences of the participants. To establish credibility in this research, the researcher employed member checking, wherein participants reviewed and validated the researcher's interpretations of their experiences (Birt et al., 2016). Furthermore, utilizing a transparent and systematic approach to data analysis and providing detailed descriptions of the research process enhances the credibility of the findings.

Dependability pertains to the consistency and stability of research findings over time and across various researchers or contexts. It focuses on the reliability of the study's procedures and data analysis. To ensure dependability, the researcher will document and make transparent all research

decisions and processes. This includes providing a thorough account of the research design, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures, as recommended by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014).

Transferability is the extent to which the study's findings can be applied or generalized to other contexts or populations. It involves equipping readers with sufficient information to judge the relevance of findings in their own settings. To achieve this, the study will include rich and detailed descriptions of participants, the context, and the phenomena under investigation. Additionally, limitations of the study will be explicitly discussed, highlighting factors that may influence the transferability of findings to other contexts (Nowell et al., 2017).

Confirmability involves ensuring that the study's findings are grounded in the data and not influenced by the researcher's preconceptions or values. It establishes objectivity and neutrality in the research process. To enhance confirmability, the researcher will engage in reflexivity, reflecting on their biases and values throughout the research process (Berger, 2015). Maintaining an audit trail, which documents the researcher's decisions, data collection, and analysis processes, further supports confirmability.

Data Analysis Method

In doing data analysis, the researcher used thematic analysis for this study. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis emphasizes identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. It organizes and describes all data in detail. There are six steps which covered in thematic analysis: First, familiarizing with the data; in this step, the researcher needs to read and re-read data in order to become familiar with what the data needs and

pay attention to the patterns that occur. It is necessary for researcher to complete data collection by transcribing data into written form.

Second, generating initial codes; researcher generate the initial codes by documenting where and how patterns occur. This happens through data reduction where the researcher collapses data into labels in order to create categories for more efficient analysis. Data complication is also completed here. This involves the researcher making inferences about what the codes mean.

The third will be searching for themes; the researcher combines codes into overreaching themes that accurately depict the data. It is important to develop themes that describe exactly what the themes mean, even if the theme does not seem to fit. The researcher also describes what is missing from the analysis.

Fourth, reviewing themes; in this step, the researcher looks at how the themes support the data and the overreaching theoretical perspective. If the analysis seems incomplete, the researcher needs to go back and find what is missing.

Fifth, defining and naming themes; researcher needs to define each theme, which aspects of data are being captured, and what is interesting about the themes.

Lastly, producing the report; in the last step, when the researcher writes the report, the researcher decides which themes make meaningful contributions to understanding what is going on within the data. The researcher also conducts member checking. This is where the researcher returns to the sample at hand to see if their description accurately represents it.

Ethical Considerations

A permission letter from the head of the school or the principal was obtained before beginning the study. Participants was prompted to

submit consent/waiver before data collection begins. Participants used aliases to ensure privacy.

Researcher's Positionality

As a Tboli teacher belonging to the Tboli community, the researcher brings a unique dual positionality to the study, integrating both emic and etic perspectives. From an emic standpoint, the researcher provides an insider's understanding of the cultural values, lived experiences, and challenges faced by Tboli learners. This deep connection to the community will promote trust and allows for the exploration of culturally embedded meanings that might otherwise remain inaccessible.

On the other hand, as a teacher in the broader educational system dominated by non-indigenous teachers and learners, the researcher adopts an etic perspective. This outsider view enables a critical examination of the intersection between Tboli culture and the predominantly non-indigenous school environment, highlighting systemic issues and cultural mismatch. The dual positionality allows the researcher to act as both a cultural advocate for Tboli learners and an objective observer of institutional challenges. Hence, through reflexivity, the researcher managed the complexities of this positionality, ensuring a balanced and comprehensive representation of Tboli learners' voices while critically analyzing the broader educational context. This dual perspective enriches the study by bridging the gap between indigenous experiences and mainstream educational practices.

III. Results and Discussions

Emerging Themes Challenges Encountered by Tboli Learners in Predominantly Non-Indigenous Schools

Emerging Theme 1: Social Isolation & Withdrawal

Social isolation and withdrawal among learners manifest through reduced engagement with peers and a tendency to avoid social interactions, often due to factors such as shyness, fear of negative evaluation, or past experiences of ridicule (Rubin et al., 2019). Social withdrawal in children is characterized by consistent avoidance of social activities, which can stem from social anxiety, fear, or a preference for solitude. Research indicates that socially withdrawn children are at risk for socio-emotional difficulties such as anxiety, low self-esteem, depressive symptoms, and academic struggles (Spangler & Gazelle, 2020). Moreover, these children experience peer-related challenges, including rejection, victimization, and poor-quality friendships, which can perpetuate a cycle of isolation (Bohlin et al., 2021).

Children who display anxious-solitary behavior face significant difficulties in peer relationships, often experiencing heightened emotional sensitivity and exclusion (Coplan & Rose-Krasnor, 2022). The fear associated with social withdrawal impairs their ability to form and maintain friendships, increasing their vulnerability to victimization. Over time, the lack of social engagement can result in negative adjustment outcomes, including academic difficulties and poor relationships with teachers (Rubin et al., 2019). It is important to distinguish between different subtypes of social withdrawal, as unsociable children, who have a low desire for peer interaction but no anxiety, may not face the same internalizing problems as socially avoidant children, who experience both shyness and a preference for solitude (Spangler & Gazelle, 2020).

Given these challenges, targeted interventions are necessary to help socially withdrawn children develop positive peer relationships and improve their socio-emotional well-being. For anxious-solitary children, interventions that reduce anxiety and promote structured peer interactions can be beneficial (Coplan & Rose-Krasnor, 2022). Encouraging participation in structured social activities, such as group projects or team sports, can create a supportive environment for withdrawn students to engage with their peers, ultimately reducing their feelings of isolation (Bohlin et al., 2021).

Emerging Theme 2: Economic Hardship & Material Constraints

This theme refers to situations where individuals, families, or communities face significant financial or resource-based difficulties, often affecting their quality of life and overall well-being. Economic hardship and material constraints significantly impact individuals, families, and communities by limiting access to basic needs, reducing quality of life, and increasing financial stress. Recent studies highlight that financial difficulties force individuals to make tough choices between essentials such as housing, food, and healthcare. In Australia, nearly half of adults have struggled with rent or mortgage payments, leading to skipped meals and medical care, particularly among renters and young adults (Scanlon Mapping Social Cohesion Report, 2024). Economic hardship also influences mental health and behavioral outcomes, especially among adolescents. Research indicates that material deprivation and financial stress are linked to increased internalizing and externalizing behavior problems in youth, emphasizing the importance of understanding both caregiver and

adolescent perceptions of financial difficulties (Cambridge University Press, 2024).

Beyond individual impacts, economic hardship affects family life satisfaction, as those experiencing or anticipating financial struggles report increased stress, frustration, and difficulty making future plans. These effects are particularly pronounced in larger families, where financial responsibilities weigh more heavily (SAGE Journals, 2019). On a broader societal level, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities, highlighting systemic issues in employment, healthcare, and education. In the UK, the pandemic led to worsening mental health conditions among children and widened the academic achievement gap between wealthy and disadvantaged students (The Guardian, 2025). Addressing economic hardship requires both immediate support and long-term systemic changes to prevent worsening disparities and improve overall well-being.

Emerging Theme 3: Cultural & Linguistic Discrimination

This emerging theme refers to unfair treatment, marginalization, or prejudice directed at individuals or groups based on their cultural backgrounds or language differences. Cultural and linguistic discrimination involves the unfair treatment, marginalization, or prejudice directed at individuals or groups based on their cultural backgrounds or language differences. This form of discrimination is prevalent in educational settings, workplaces, and broader society, leading to significant negative consequences for affected individuals. In education, linguistic and cultural discrimination can hinder students' academic performance and psychological well-being. A study in South Africa found that teachers often struggle to engage culturally and linguistically

diverse (CLD) learners due to a lack of culturally responsive teaching practices and insufficient professional development (Ngubane & Makhasane, 2023). Similarly, research in Bosnia and Herzegovina highlighted that linguistic discrimination significantly increases language learning anxiety among students, affecting their willingness to communicate and impeding their language acquisition (Alić et al., 2024).

Beyond education, cultural and linguistic discrimination persists in workplaces and society at large. The Australian Human Rights Commission (2024) proposed a national anti-racism framework to address systemic discrimination through mandatory training, legislative amendments, and improved representation of diverse communities. Additionally, Indigenous populations face heightened discrimination. A report by the University of Technology Sydney's Jumbunna Institute and the National Justice Project (2025) found that following Australia's 2023 voice to parliament referendum, racism toward Indigenous Australians intensified, leading to increased stereotyping and hate speech (Dunstan et al., 2025).

To combat these issues, systemic changes are needed across multiple sectors. In education, culturally responsive teaching and inclusive learning environments can help mitigate discrimination (Ngubane & Makhasane, 2023). In workplaces and broader society, implementing anti-racism training, ensuring diverse representation, and enacting supportive policies are critical steps toward fostering inclusivity and equity (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2024). Addressing cultural and linguistic discrimination requires a collective effort to implement these measures and create more inclusive environments.

Emerging Theme 4: Transportation Challenges

This theme refers to difficulties that individuals or communities face when trying to access, use, or afford transportation. These challenges can arise from various factors, including limited public transportation options, high costs, poor infrastructure, or geographical barriers. Transportation challenges refer to the difficulties individuals or communities face in accessing, utilizing, or affording transportation services due to factors such as limited public transit options, high costs, inadequate infrastructure, and geographical barriers. In urban areas, insufficient public transportation significantly affects low-income populations. The high transportation costs pose a major burden, particularly in developing countries. Inadequate infrastructure and public awareness have slowed its adoption (Associated Press, 2024).

Relatively, inadequate transportation infrastructure further exacerbates these challenges, leading to safety concerns and mobility restrictions. Geographical barriers also contribute to transportation inequalities, particularly in rural areas. In the Philippines, urban centers like Metro Manila benefit from diverse transport options, whereas rural regions suffer from poor road conditions and limited public transit, restricting access to essential services (RichestPH, 2024).

Emerging Themes on Coping Strategies of Tboli Learners in Predominantly Non-Indigenous Schools.

Emerging Theme 1: Self-Motivation and Personal Reminders

These themes are both crucial aspects of personal development that help individuals stay focused, productive, and driven toward achieving their goals. Learners remind themselves to stay

focused on their studies and personal goals. Self-motivation and personal reminders play a vital role in personal development, helping individuals remain focused, productive, and committed to their goals. In education, fostering self-motivation among learners is essential for academic success. Research suggests that involving students in decision-making; such as allowing them to choose electives or contribute to classroom rules enhances their intrinsic motivation by giving them a sense of control over their learning process, leading to increased engagement and responsibility (Connections Academy, 2024). Similarly, creating a structured yet flexible learning environment that balances guidance with autonomy helps students develop ownership of their learning, further boosting motivation (Edutopia, 2024).

Personal reminders also serve as effective tools for reinforcing self-motivation and goal attainment. Studies indicate that setting specific implementation intentions; detailed plans that outline when, where, and how to act significantly increases the likelihood of achieving goals. Additionally, research has shown that self-generated reminders are more effective in enhancing memory and task completion compared to externally generated prompts, allowing individuals to better prioritize tasks and manage their time efficiently (Springer, 2024).

Emerging Theme 2: Seeking Social and Family Support

This theme captures reaching out to others whether friends, family members, or social networks for emotional, practical, or informational assistance during times of need. Seeking social and family support is essential for emotional, practical, and informational assistance, particularly during challenging times. A strong support system is linked to improved well-being, better coping

strategies, and increased longevity. Research indicates that individuals with robust social networks experience lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, contributing to enhanced mental health and resilience (Highland Springs Clinic, 2024).

Additionally, social support plays a crucial role in reducing perceived stress and promoting positive emotional states. Studies have shown that family and significant others' support can decrease symptoms of anxiety and depression, whereas a lack of social connection often leads to feelings of loneliness and mental health challenges (Frontiers in Psychology, 2024). To encourage help-seeking behaviors, fostering a supportive and non-judgmental environment is crucial. Community engagement and the development of meaningful relationships can enhance an individual's support network, providing both emotional comfort and practical benefits while reducing social isolation (Vox, 2024). This is supported by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory explains how an individual's development is influenced by different environmental systems, including family, peers, school, and broader societal structures. The study's findings suggest that interpersonal kindness is shaped by interactions across these systems, with family and community playing crucial roles in reinforcing compassionate behaviors. For example, educational interventions and mindfulness programs that enhance empathy and altruism can be linked to the microsystem, where direct social interactions occur (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Similarly, broader societal influences, such as cultural values and social norms that encourage kindness, align with the macrosystem in shaping an individual's compassionate behaviors.

Emerging Theme 3: Engaging in Extracurricular and School Activities

This theme focuses on participating in activities outside of regular academic coursework. These activities can take place in school or as part of a broader community program. Engaging in extracurricular and school activities allows students to participate in pursuits beyond regular academic coursework, whether within the school setting or as part of broader community programs. Research suggests that involvement in these activities enhances academic performance, as they reinforce classroom lessons and contribute to a well-rounded learning experience (International School Ho Chi Minh City, 2024). Moreover, extracurricular participation enables students to explore personal interests, develop critical life skills such as leadership, teamwork, and time management, and gain broader perspectives (Crimson Education, 2024).

Emerging Theme 4: Seeking Adult/Authority Intervention

This theme refers to asking for help or involvement from a trusted adult, authority figure, or professional when facing a difficult situation or problem. Seeking help from trusted adults, authority figures, or professionals is essential for effective problem-solving and personal development. Consulting experienced individuals provides valuable guidance and support, helping individuals navigate complex issues and build resilience. However, it is important to balance seeking assistance with maintaining personal autonomy. Over-reliance on authority figures can lead to diminished self-trust, causing individuals to undervalue their own judgment and decision-making abilities (Russell, 2024). While external support is beneficial, fostering self-confidence and critical thinking skills ensures that individuals

integrate advice from authority figures with their personal insights, leading to more independent and empowered decision-making.

Emerging Theme 5: Practical Adaptations and Resourcefulness

This theme highlights the ability to adjust to new or challenging situations and make the best use of available resources in a creative and effective way. Practical adaptations and resourcefulness refer to an individual's ability to adjust to new or challenging situations by creatively and effectively utilizing available resources. This skill involves key traits such as adaptability, creative problem-solving, proactivity, and resilience. Adaptability allows individuals to remain flexible and adjust their approaches when facing unexpected circumstances, while creative problem-solving enables them to find innovative solutions by using existing resources in new ways. Proactivity reflects a willingness to take initiative and seek opportunities, whereas resilience fosters perseverance in overcoming setbacks and viewing challenges as learning experiences (Forecast, 2024). Developing resourcefulness is essential in both personal and professional settings, as it enhances one's ability to navigate difficulties, maximize opportunities, and achieve goals even in the face of limited resources (Forecast, 2024).

Emerging Themes on Insights and Transformations of Indigenous Learners in Predominantly Non-Indigenous Schools

Emerging Theme 1: Commitment to Academic Excellence

This emerging theme expresses a dedicated and continuous effort to achieve high standards of performance and success in academic endeavors. It involves setting goals for personal and intellectual growth, staying disciplined, and consistently

striving to improve one's knowledge, skills, and academic achievements. Commitment to academic excellence involves a continuous and dedicated effort to achieve high standards in educational pursuits. This dedication requires setting personal and intellectual goals, maintaining discipline, and consistently striving to enhance knowledge and skills. Academic excellence encompasses key attributes such as intellectual ability, critical thinking, perseverance, and a passion for learning, all of which contribute to outstanding academic performance recognized by peers and institutions (Medium, 2024). Furthermore, fostering academic excellence requires a commitment to continuous improvement and quality assurance, with educational institutions prioritizing academic outcomes and implementing robust evaluation mechanisms to support student success (Ready Education, 2024). By embracing this commitment, individuals unlock their full potential, leading to both personal and professional growth.

Emerging Theme 2: Cultural Pride and Identity Affirmation

This theme focuses on concepts that relate to the recognition, appreciation, and celebration of one's cultural heritage, values, and personal identity. Cultural pride and identity affirmation involve recognizing, appreciating, and celebrating one's cultural heritage, values, and personal identity. This process includes understanding and embracing cultural traditions, language, and beliefs, which play a crucial role in shaping an individual's values, behaviors, and social relationships (Mindful Center, 2024). Affirming one's cultural identity fosters a strong sense of belonging and self-respect, helping individuals develop a positive connection to their heritage (Hilltop Children's Center, 2024).

Emerging Theme 3: Developing Interpersonal Kindness

This emerging theme emphasizes the process of cultivating behaviors, attitudes, and habits that promote compassion, empathy, and understanding in our interactions with others. Developing interpersonal kindness involves fostering behaviors, attitudes, and habits that encourage compassion, empathy, and understanding in social interactions. Research suggests that practicing kindness strengthens social bonds and enhances personal well-being by reducing stress and fostering resilience (Martínez & García, 2024). This aligns with Vygotsky's argument that learning occurs through guided participation in social and cultural experiences. Furthermore, the development of interpersonal kindness through mindfulness and educational interventions supports the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), where individuals refine their emotional and social skills with the support of more knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1962).

Moreover, a study conducted in Buenos Aires implemented a program aimed at enhancing affective empathy, compassion, and altruism among nine-year-old children, resulting in significant improvements in altruistic behaviors and social integration (Richaud et al., 2024). Additionally, mindfulness practices have been linked to increased empathy and self-compassion. Research on Filipino college students found that a mindfulness-based cognitive therapy program significantly enhanced empathy and self-compassion, demonstrating that mindfulness can be a valuable tool for promoting interpersonal kindness (Lim & Guevara, 2024). Overall, integrating empathy, compassion, and mindfulness into educational and personal development

programs can contribute to healthier relationships and stronger communities.

Emerging Theme 4: Emotional Coping and Self-Acceptance

This theme is characterized by two crucial aspects of emotional well-being that help individuals navigate challenges and maintain a healthy mental state. Emotional coping and self-acceptance are essential components of emotional well-being that help individuals navigate challenges and maintain a healthy mental state. Emotional coping involves strategies aimed at managing and reducing negative emotional responses to stressors, including mindfulness meditation, journaling, positive thinking, and seeking social support. These techniques have been shown to help individuals process emotions and alleviate distress, with practices like journaling and verbal expression preventing the negative effects of emotional suppression (Healthline, 2024). Meanwhile, self-acceptance refers to embracing both one's strengths and personal flaws without judgment, which is associated with improved mental health and emotional resilience. Research suggests that individuals with higher levels of self-acceptance experience better psychological well-being, whereas those with low self-acceptance are more vulnerable to mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression (Harvard Health, 2024). By integrating effective emotional coping strategies with a strong sense of self-acceptance, individuals can enhance their resilience, manage stress more effectively, and achieve a balanced and fulfilling life.

Emerging Theme 5: Education for Family and Community Welfare

This theme emphasizes programs, initiatives, and practices designed to enhance the well-being of families and communities through the development of knowledge, skills, and support systems. Education for family and community welfare includes programs and initiatives designed to enhance well-being by developing knowledge, skills, and support systems. These efforts empower individuals to effectively manage family dynamics and contribute positively to their communities. For example, family and community services programs prepare professionals with the skills needed to manage support initiatives and improve family welfare (IDEA, 2024). Additionally, organizations such as Head Start provide comprehensive services focused on early learning, health, and family well-being to support children's development from birth to age five (ACF, 2024). Similarly, the Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) offers programs that emphasize personal growth, leadership development, and career preparation, further strengthening family and community ties (FCCLA, 2024). By participating in such educational programs, individuals gain essential knowledge and skills that promote family cohesion, address community challenges, and foster environments conducive to overall well-being.

IV. Conclusions

The conclusions are drawn from the synthesized emerging themes and insights gained from the participants' responses.

The study concludes that learners encounter various challenges that hinder their academic and personal development, including social isolation and withdrawal, economic hardship, material constraints, and transportation challenges.

Despite these obstacles, students adopt diverse coping strategies such as self-motivation and personal reminders, seeking social and family support, engaging in extracurricular activities, requesting adult or authority intervention, and demonstrating practical adaptations and resourcefulness. These approaches reflect their resilience and ability to adjust, emphasizing the importance of fostering supportive environments that encourage these adaptive behaviors.

Additionally, learners develop valuable insights that shape their personal growth and social development, including commitment to academic excellence, cultural pride and identity affirmation, interpersonal kindness, emotional coping and self-acceptance, and education for family and community welfare. These reflections suggest that, despite adversities, students cultivate values and perspectives that contribute to their long-term academic success, emotional well-being, and social responsibility, reinforcing the significance of holistic education and community support systems.

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Schools and local government units may implement targeted interventions such as peer mentoring, financial assistance, and accessible transportation to address learners' challenges.
2. The schools may integrate resilience-building programs, extracurricular activities, and mental health initiatives can help students develop coping strategies, personal growth, and academic success.
3. Schools may promote an environment that encourages academic excellence, cultural pride, interpersonal kindness, emotional coping, and community engagement.

4. For future researchers, a longitudinal study examining the long-term effects of these challenges and coping mechanisms, including perspectives from teachers and parents, is recommended to provide a more comprehensive understanding of student development.

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