

Post-Pandemic Language Instruction for Indigenous Learners: A Phenomenological Inquiry in Kalamansig District, Southern Philippines

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Abstract

The study explored the experiences of English Language Teachers (ELTs) teaching tribal learners in a non-tribal high school in Kalamansig Municipality, Sultan Kudarat Province. Using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, ten ELTs identified through the purposive sampling technique participated in an in-depth interview guided by a validated semi-structured questionnaire. Data analysis adhering to Colaizzi's (1978) process revealed that participants generally experienced Teachers' Enthusiasm and Learners' Politeness, Learners' Mismatch of Understanding Levels, and Adverse Teaching Environment. They faced challenges in Learners' Educational & Academic Skills, particularly limited vocabulary, low comprehension, and underdeveloped macro skills –speaking, reading, and writing, Learners' Participation, and Socio-economic and Cultural Factors such as Early Marriage & Pregnancy. They employed strategies such as Collaborative Learning, Use of Adaptive Teaching Strategies, and Anti-Discrimination Advocacy and Collaborations with the Community to address these. The study underscored that English Language Teachers' Patience and Flexibility are necessary qualities to be effective teachers to Tribal Learners.

1. INTRODUCTION

Access to basic education has been identified as one of the most important concerns among Indigenous Peoples (IP) or tribal communities. As for the public school system, many tribal communities, particularly those in far-flung or mountainous areas, struggle to access such government services. Most of these areas are deprived of schools, while other communities are blessed with learning facilities, which are usually limited only to primary education. With this, elementary graduates are forced either to stop schooling or to go to non-tribal communities

with secondary educational institutions to cater to them. They are, therefore, learning in an environment different from what they are accustomed to.

In the Philippines, the right of tribal learners is stipulated in some legal frameworks, such as the country's 1987 Constitution and the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997, as well as some international human rights instruments, especially the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). In response to these, the learning needs of IP communities are important in the DepEd's commitment to attain the country's Education for All (EFA) targets and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

As of 2019, the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) program is being implemented in 16 regions and 117 divisions, including the Sultan Kudarat (SK) Division from DepEd SOCKSARGEN. One of the municipalities that has successfully implemented the program is Kalamansig, with 12 IPEd implementing schools consisting of eight regular elementary schools and four Integrated Schools in Kalamansig District. Since the IPEd-implementing schools in the municipality that could cater to secondary learners are limited, there are still some tribal communities with no IPEd learning facilities or even just regular high schools. Hence, most of their tribal learners (TLs) must go to other areas when they graduate from elementary.

In contrast to schools in the tribal sitios from which they are from, the new schools are usually composed of non-tribal individuals. With this, both the TLs and the teachers are faced with challenges in adjusting to each other, considering that both have contrasts in social and cultural orientations. In particular, English language teachers (ELTs) are confronted by this dilemma.

English, one of the world's most widely spoken languages, is adopted as the second official language in the Philippines. It is now essential to be concerned with global mobility, including commerce, telecommunications, technology, and medicine. It is a way to communicate across global cultures of different nations and regions (Al-Mutairi, 2020). However, learning English can be extremely difficult for many students, with particular difficulties faced by Indigenous communities. Tayao's (2017) research highlights the challenges faced by Tribal Learners, such as linguistic and cultural limitations. In the Philippines, indigenous groups frequently have unique languages and customs that set them apart from the general populace, contributing to the challenges teachers and learners face in learning the English language.

This is especially true of Tribal Learners enrolled in Kalamansig National High School. Consisting of roughly seven percent of the school's student population, these learners strive to learn the language together with the non-tribal learners under the tutelage of purely non-tribal ELTs. Considering the huge difference between the two groups of learners with various cultural backgrounds, ELTs struggle to effectively ensure that inclusive learning still occurs within the classroom environment.

Lumontod and Pradia (2023) already conducted a related study in this local setting. Yet, it explored the attitudes and difficulties of elementary tribal learners towards the English language. So far, no study has been conducted yet that considers the teachers' insights. This study was conducted with the belief that teachers would also have sufficient knowledge about the phenomenon being explored.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Design

This study employed the qualitative research design. Qualitative research empowers participants to share their stories, especially those whose voices are infrequently heard (Creswell, 2016). It utilized a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to study the experiences of English Language Teachers Teaching Tribal Learners.

Using this type of phenomenology as a research methodology, one has to apply the skill of reading texts, such as the text of transcripts – spoken accounts of personal experience – and, as Van Manen (1997) put it, isolates them into themes. The themes can be viewed as written interpretations of lived experiences. So, in the application of hermeneutic phenomenology, the requirement is to examine the text, reflect on the content, and discover something "telling," something "meaningful," or something "thematic." Having isolated phenomenal themes, one rewrites the theme while interpreting the meaning of the phenomenon or lived experience (cited by Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

In short, hermeneutic phenomenology considers the "real meaning as explored through the experiences described by the individuals about a phenomenon, which in this case was the English language teaching to tribal learners at Kalamansig National High School, Kalamansig Municipality, Sultan Kudarat Province.

2.2. Research Locale

The research setting was at Kalamansig National High School, the main and the largest secondary institution in Kalamansig District, in Barangay Poblacion, Kalamansig Municipality, Sultan Kudarat Province, Southern Philippines. It is located in the heart of the municipality and has a mostly non-tribal populace. It caters to Junior and Senior High School students from the central barangay of Poblacion and a portion from neighboring barangays. It is one the nearest schools to the two tribal communities of Sitios Carta and Blanga of Barangays Sta. Maria and Nalilidan, respectively. These two areas have no IPED or even regular secondary schools. Hence, KNHS accommodates and provides most of its elementary graduates with learning opportunities.

As of the present school year, the school has a total workforce of 105 teachers. It has a total student population of 2851, seven percent or 202 of which are tribal learners from the different areas of the municipality and even from its nearby municipality of Palimbang. These tribal learners, Manobo in particular, are all distributed to various sections in every grade level and are, therefore, learning together with the non-tribal individuals.

2.3. Research Participants

The participants of the study were English Language Teachers with tribal students in both the Junior and Senior High School departments of Kalamansig National High School. The participant selection in this research study was a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where the researcher selected only those subjects that satisfy the objectives of the study based on the researcher's conviction. It is used in qualitative research to recruit participants who can provide in-depth and detailed information

about the research questions and enhance the understanding of the phenomenon under study (Obilor, 2023).

Particularly, the researchers employed inclusion, exclusion, and withdrawal criteria sampling. For the inclusion criterion, all ELTs with experience teaching tribal students for two years were identified as participants in the study. In terms of exclusion criterion, those who have less than two years of teaching the language to tribal learners, those who were not active in service (in study/vacation/maternity leave, etc.) during the conduct, and those who were not willing to participate in the study were excepted. Also, participants' circumstances, such as unwillingness to continue being part of the study, unavailability during the scheduled interview sessions, and/or inability to expressively and reflectively express experiences and opinions, arose; hence, the study also adhered to such withdrawal criterion.

With regards to the sample size for phenomenological studies, Domingo (2020) cited the studies of Creswell (1998), which recommends 5 – 25, and Morse (1994), which suggests at least six. Still, the required number of participants should depend on when saturation is reached. With this, the study identified that all fourteen ELTs with tribal learners in their classes were included as participants in the research study to capture adequate and rich data. However, out of the fourteen participants initially interviewed, only ten samples were included in the final analysis since no new themes or insights emerged from the other four samples. This was based on the principle of data saturation which refers to the point in data collection when no additional issues or insights are identified and data begin to repeat so that further data collection is redundant, signifying that an adequate sample size is reached (Hennink, Kaiser & Marconi, 2017).

2.4. Research Instrument

The research instrument utilized for the study was researchers-made interview questions. These were open-ended questions aimed to acquire as much information from the participants regarding the phenomenon of interest. The first question explored the experiences and challenges encountered by the research participants in English language teaching to tribal learners. The second question focused on the teachers' coping strategies and support system in the challenges they encountered. Lastly, the third question tried to elicit insights from the participants about the insights they gained on English Language Teaching to tribal learners.

They were oriented to the interview guide questions to ensure the participants would share and discuss their experiences. They were also free to use the language they were most comfortable with during the interview. The questions were formulated in English, but occasional translations and follow-up questions were done for a more comprehensible and meaningful discussion facilitation. Each one-on-one interview with the ten research participants lasted seven to fifteen minutes.

To ensure the validity of the research instrument, all questions were carefully crafted to provide an understanding of the phenomenon explored. It featured open-ended questions, allowing participants to share their experiences without biases or preconceived notions. All the questions were subjected to validation by a panel of three experts.

2.5. Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection approach used in this hermeneutic phenomenological study was an in-depth interview with the participants. The research started by identifying the problematic

issue or the phenomenon of interest. The research questions and the interview guide were crafted. Consequently, the research participants who have encountered the phenomenon were identified. Once identified, they were informally asked through personal talk or online messages for their willingness to participate in the study. When they confirmed, they gave them a formal letter with a copy of the interview questions. They were oriented about its purpose and were assured of its confidentiality. After this, the time and place for the interview were set. A digital audio recording is utilized during the interview to capture all the details during the discussion. After this, the audio was transcribed verbatim using Microsoft Word for the Web. However, since this application is limited to English and some of the discussions were in the local tongue, most of the interview data were transcribed manually. The transcribed data were then examined, and the significant statements were pinpointed and clustered into themes or categories, followed by the subsequent formulation of meanings. After these, the phenomenon's essence was captured by crafting a discussion about its significance. Later, the findings were confirmed and validated by sharing them with the research participants.

Before any engagement with the participants, permissions of the Schools Division Superintendent and the School Head were sought through a written letter request.

2.6. Data Analysis

The research study employed a method of analyzing the data that adheres to the steps of Colaizzi's (1978) distinctive seven-step process to provide rigorous analysis, with each step staying close to the data: a) Familiarization, b) Identifying Significant Statements, c) Formulating Meanings, d) Clustering Themes, e) Developing an Exhaustive Description, f) Producing the Fundamental Structure, and g) Seeking Verification of the Fundamental Structure.

In particular, the following activities were based on the studies of Morrow, Rodriguez, and King (2015) and Primi and Thokchom (2023). First, the data from all the participant accounts were read through several times for familiarization to obtain a general sense of the whole content. After this, all statements in the accounts that were of direct relevance and significant to the phenomenon under investigation were identified. Next, meanings were formulated from the significant statements identified. Then, similar formulated meanings were clustered to form theme clusters, and related clusters were grouped to form themes.

Consequently, a full and inclusive description of the phenomenon was made, incorporating all the themes produced in the previous step. These descriptions were condensed down to a short and solid statement that captures just those aspects deemed essential to the phenomenon's structure. Lastly, the research participants were asked to validate the findings to compare the researcher's descriptive results with their experiences.

2.7. Role of the Researchers

In this study, the researchers were purely interviewers and listeners. They deeply engaged in the discussions about the participants' experiences and strived to understand the essence of the talks from their perspectives. The dynamic interaction between the researchers and the participants' narratives ensures that the findings are not simply recounting the experiences but a deep understanding of their underlying meanings. Hence, the researchers also acted as both interpreters and co-creators of meaning.

2.8. Trustworthiness of the Study

Lincoln and Guba's Evaluative Criteria guided the study. This study posits that the trustworthiness of a research study is important to evaluating its worth. Such trustworthiness involves establishing four factors, particularly the following: a). Credibility or confidence in the "truth" of the findings, b). Transferability or the applicability of the findings in other contexts, c). Dependability or the consistency or replicability of the findings, and d). Confirmability is the extent to which the respondents shape the conclusions, not the researcher's bias, motivation, or interest (Nasrabadi, 2020).

The data from the interview were thoroughly analyzed and reviewed to establish credibility. Follow-up questioning was conducted when there were instances that required clarification. Transferability was also considered by ensuring data collection was as detailed as possible and comparing them to the existing literature about the phenomenon explored. Regarding dependability, the details of the research methodology were presented and discussed, including the design, sampling process, and procedures. Coding and recoding were done to improve the reliability of the data acquired. Lastly, the study's findings were confirmed through a data triangulation with the participants to ensure that the interpretations were objectively presented.

2.9. Ethical Consideration of the Study

The researchers adhered to the research protocols followed by the research locale, Kalamansig National High School. Formal correspondence was observed to uphold the ethical standards before any data collection. With this, the Superintendent, the School Head, and the selected participants were given letters to seek their permission.

The anonymity of the research participants was also ensured, and they were assured of the confidentiality of all the data collected and that its usage would be purely for the research study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Experiences of English Language Teachers (ELTs)

Results of the study showed three emergent themes in the experiences of ELTs teaching tribal learners – Mismatch of Understanding Levels of TLs and Non-TLs, Teachers' Enthusiasm and Learners' Politeness, and Adverse Teaching Environment.

Table 1. Experiences of English Language Teachers (Theme 1)

| Code | Significant Response | Formulated Meanings | Clustered Theme |
|------|--|---------------------------------|---|
| P5 | So, handling those tribal learners, we call them, most of them are really slow learners, so very exciting for me and with... difficult to handle those kinds of learners. So, I need to use my bodily language for them to understand. | Teachers experience excitement. | Teachers' Enthusiasm and Learners' Politeness |
| P3 | Actually, tribal learners are respectful. They always listen when you are teaching them in class. | Teachers feel respected. | |

Teachers' Enthusiasm and Learners' Politeness

Table 2 above shows that ELTs also have positive experiences in teaching TLs, particularly regarding teachers' enthusiasm and learners' politeness. One among the 10 ELTs interviewed,

Participant 5 in particular, shared that though teaching TLs is challenging, she still feels excitement when she deals with them. This teacher's excitement reflects that P5 maintains her enthusiasm for teaching even if her students are hard to handle. Another participant, P3, also expressed that she experienced the quality of TLs as being respectful. This feeling of being respected is seen as a good light despite the challenges P3 encounters while teaching since TLs always listen when she is teaching them in class.

This implies that some ELTs view teaching to tribal learners as a positive experience contributing to the environment they would eventually create for their learners. In the study of Robiños, Dasig, and Mendoza (2020), teachers' reflections on the profession indicated that their understanding creates good sources of learning, influence, and opportunities. Generally, teachers posited their common purpose and expectation: to transfer knowledge and make their students' (Mangyan and Tagalog) lives meaningful. Their shared expectation of helping, encouraging, and guiding their learners to dream and live better lives showcased their genuine concern, love, and care for their learners.

Table 2. Experiences of English Language Teachers (Theme 2)

| Code | Significant Response | Formulated Meanings | Clustered Theme |
|------|--|--|--|
| P1 | How will I be able to cater to that heterogeneous class? You know, they have different levels of learning. | TLs and non-TLs have different levels of learning. | Mismatch of understanding levels of TLs and non-TLs. |
| P2 | Since in the classrooms, they are hetero, and these tribal learners, should I say, are somewhat left behind in terms of instruction. | TL learners are behind in terms of instructions. | |

Mismatch of Understanding Levels of TLs and non-TLs

As revealed in Table 2, ELTs encountered a mismatch in the understanding level of TLs and non-TLs. Participants 1 and 2 shared that the two groups of learners have varying capacities to understand the language. In the description given by P2, TL learners are somewhat behind in comprehending instructions. The following responses from P6 and P7 corroborate this issue:

“Napansin ko na talagang hindi sila nakaka-cope talaga ng same level dun sa mga non-tribal. “(I notice that they cannot cope up with the level of the non-tribal ones.) – P6

“Masasabi kong ang pagtuturo ng English sa tribal learners challenging at the same time mahirap kasi nagde-deal tayo sa iba’t ibang uri ng estudyante na mayroong iba’t ibang level ng kaalaman.” (I can say that teaching tribal learners is challenging and difficult at the same time because we deal with students that have different levels of learning.) – P7

Since these TLs could not understand English well, which is in contrast to their non-TL counterparts, P1 even expressed his struggle catering to a heterogeneous class of learners with different levels of understanding.

Such experience is not exclusive to this research setting alone. When Mohakud (2013) conducted a comparative study on achievement in the English Language between the non-tribal & tribal secondary school students in West Bengal, India, it was found that non-tribal and tribal

students generally have significant differences. Specifically, non-tribal students' achievement in English is higher than that of tribal at the secondary level. Similarly, the study of Singh (2023) showed the same findings when comparing the academic achievement of tribal and non-tribal students.

Table 3. Experiences of English Language Teachers (Theme 3)

| Code | Significant Response | Formulated Meanings | Clustered Theme |
|------|--|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| P1 | There are a lot of challenges daily. Uhm ah... As per my experience, I cannot meet my objectives of the day in my lesson plan... My lesson plan's time frame is unclear because my tribal learners cannot understand simple English. | Teaching to TLs is a daily challenge. | Adverse Teaching Environment |
| P2 | It is somewhat challenging. I guess most of the tribal learners I have handled have difficulties understanding words or text in English. | Teaching to TLs is challenging. | |

Adverse Teaching Environment

As shown in Table 3, the participants generally encountered an adverse teaching environment. Participants 1 and 2 expressed that their teaching environment is full of struggle. They associated this adversity with the learners' understanding of the English Language. Hence, this result suggests that the ELTs consider this to be the main factor hindering their goal of effective teaching. This inability to understand even basic English words challenges the teachers. The paces of the teaching-learning processes are somehow compromised since extra efforts and time should be exerted to ensure they can cope with the lessons. This is affirmed by the description of Participant 1 about his experiences, which shows that he cannot meet his objectives of the day based on his lesson plan. Participant 9 even described the severity of the issue in the following statement:

“Maski sa senior high, kay may ara man ko mga senior high na mga students. Tapos kwan, may Manobo didto. Amo to, ang struggle gid nila sa akon na subject kay ang medium of instruction, English man, ang pag-comprehend.” (Even in Senior High School (SHS), since I have Manobos there, they struggle in my subject since English is the medium of instruction.) – P9

These results conform to the study of Cabal (2017) about teachers' experiences in teaching Manobo students in Davao del Sur. His study claimed that the ELTs described a Challenging Classroom Environment due to students' poor grammar, limited vocabulary, poor comprehension, and others. Language maintenance also becomes difficult as students are not using the language at home, and cultural incompetence is present, as teachers do not know their dialect and culture.

3.2.Challenges Encountered by ELTs

The ELTs encounter different challenges in teaching TLs. Three emergent themes emerged from the study's results: Learners' Educational and Academic Skills, Learners' Participation, and Socio-economic and Cultural Factors.

Table 4. Challenges Encountered by ELTs (Theme 1 – Subtheme 1)

| <i>Code</i> | <i>Significant Response</i> | <i>Formulated Meanings</i> | <i>Clustered Theme</i> |
|-------------|--|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| P4 | As I've said, most of them are slow learners, so I need to use my bodily language for them to understand and... The problem is the vocabulary. | TLs have problems with vocabulary. | Educational and Academic Skills – |
| P10 | So, one of the challenges is understanding or familiarizing oneself with words. <i>Yung vocabulary, I think, is very limited yung kanilang vocabulary.</i> (The vocabulary, I believe, is very limited.) | TL's vocabulary is very limited. | Limited Vocabulary |

Educational and Academic Skills – Limited Vocabulary

As shown in Table 4, ELTs encounter different challenges in teaching TLs. These challenges are related to the learners' educational and academic skills. Among the particular difficulties highlighted by Participants 4 and 10 is the Limited Vocabulary. It is important to note, though, that Participant 6 highlighted that such is a circumstance observed not just in the TLs but also in the non-TLs, as shown by her statement:

"They struggle with vocabulary. Yung pagturo ng vocabulary sa kanila, kahit hindi naman,, kahit non-tribal naman, may problem naman talaga sa vocabulary. Pati yung the way they pronounce the word, iba din. Kailangan mo pa siya ipaulit-ulit.." (Teaching vocabulary to them, though even non-tribal, they have vocabulary problems. And also, how they pronounce words. It's different. You need to repeat again and again.)" – P6

However, the statements given by the P4 & P10 imply that vocabulary issues are more problematic in the TLs. P4 shared that she even uses her bodily language to aid in their understanding.

This issue in the limited vocabulary of learners poses a challenge for ELTs. Harmon, Wood, and Keser (2009) state that learners' vocabulary development is an important aspect of their language development as cited in the study of Alqahtani (2015). Hence, the development of students' language skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking would be affected once their vocabulary knowledge is limited or insufficient.

Table 5. Challenges Encountered by ELTs (Theme 1 – Subtheme 2)

| <i>Cod e</i> | <i>Significant Response</i> | <i>Formulated Meanings</i> | <i>Clustered Theme</i> |
|--------------|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| P2 | I guess most of the tribal learners I have handled have difficulties understanding English... understanding words or text in English. | TLs have difficulties understanding English words or texts. | Educational and Academic Skills – Low |
| P3 | But the problem is their comprehension of the language. | TLs have problems with comprehension. | Comprehension |

Educational and Academic Skills – Low Comprehension

Low comprehension is another issue identified in the educational and academic skills of TLs. P2 & P3 expressed that they are confronted with problems regarding the capacity of the TLs to understand the language. To give a clearer picture as to the degree of the severity of the issue, P1 described that TLs in his classroom struggle to comprehend even the basic words, as evidenced by the following response:

"The IP learners in my classroom find it hard to understand even the simple, the simplest English." – P1.

According to a study cited by Lumontod and Pradia (2023), many Indigenous youths face significant challenges in learning English, particularly comprehending words and phrases with different meanings in their region or local area. Additionally, they can struggle to understand the general structure of the language and form sentences, which can impede their progress in the classroom.

This problem in low comprehension is also similar to the findings of the study of Kujur and Krishnan (2019) on Indian tribal students. It was found that they are lagging behind in basic competency of the English language. This results in difficulty in understanding and comprehending the language, its grammar, and its usage.

Table 6. Challenges Encountered by ELTs (Theme 1 – Subtheme 3)

| <i>Cod e</i> | <i>Significant Response</i> | <i>Formulated Meanings</i> | <i>Clustered Theme</i> |
|--------------|--|---|--|
| P2 | Some learners cannot read the basic words seen in Dolch's basic sight words. | Some TLs cannot read basic English words. | Educational and Academic Skills – Macro Skills (Reading) |
| P5 | Mispronunciation of words. So, I need to go back to the basics of reading. | TLs have pronunciation difficulties. | |
| P9 | <i>Nakita ko tong bata, ga struggle gid siya sa pag-intindi sang module niya maski sa pagbasa.</i> (I saw the learner really struggling with understanding his/her module, even in reading.) | Some TLs are struggling with reading. | Educational and Academic Skills – Macro Skills (Speaking). |
| P3 | Aside from that, they're also struggling.... For example, in spelling the words and correct pronunciation of the words | TLs are struggling with spelling and pronunciation. | |
| P5 | Mispronunciation of words. So, I need to go back to the basics of reading. | TLs have pronunciation difficulties. | |
| P4 | <i>So, kung bigyan mo naman sila na sila ang sa presentation o magreport, wala pa din...</i> (If they are given the task to do the reporting, they can't also.) | TLs struggle with reporting and writing tasks due to spelling challenges. | Educational and Academic Skills |
| P4 | <i>Kung sila naman ang magsulat, most of them, they cannot write ng.... Like a spelling, may</i> | | |

*problema...So, murag struggle jud xa kaayo..(TLs cannot write due – Macro Skills
If they are the ones to write, they can't also; to spelling (Writing).
most of them cannot write due to problems difficulties.
like spelling. So, it is really a struggle.)*

Educational and Academic Skills – Macro Skills (Reading, Speaking and Writing)

In addition, ELTs are also faced with challenges regarding the three Macro Skills (Reading, Writing, and Speaking). Regarding reading, the statements from Participants 2, 5, and 9 showed that teaching such skills to TLs is quite a struggle for the ELTs. In particular, the statement of P2 emphasized the degree of difficulty since even reading the Dolch basic sight words is hard for them. The difficulties in understanding what they read, as shared by P9, are quite understandable since reading comes first before understanding happens. For speaking problems, Participants 3 and 5 shared that they have issues with pronouncing words. Likewise, Participant 4 also described that TLs have challenges in participating in oral reporting activities inside the classroom. As for the writing skills, P3 and 4 also discussed that spelling of words is similarly a struggle for the TLs.

To be successful in school, language learners need to develop a sophisticated, advanced level of academic language proficiency. In a study conducted on American Indian English Language Learners, it was found that their language difficulties are associated with limited exposure to highly literate peers and adults in their home and school environments who model academic discourse styles (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2016).

With these findings, difficulties encountered by the tribal learners in the research locale are quite expected considering their passive behaviors and reluctance to mingle with their non-tribal classmates. Since they prefer to interact among themselves, they are not exposed to opportunities to practice the use of the English language.

Similarly, the challenges regarding the three Macro Skills (Reading, Writing, and Speaking) derived from the study are paralleled with the study conducted by Sahoo (2022) among the teachers teaching English to tribal learners. It was noted that among the teachers' experiences, many students could not understand words in English; hence, they did not know how to read and write. In addition, Leño et al. (2019) cited in their research that some Indigenous learners have deficiencies in speaking English, implying that the problems in the three macro skills are generally true across all tribal learners.

Table 7. Challenges Encountered by ELTs (Theme 2)

| <i>Code</i> | <i>Significant Response</i> | <i>Formulated Meanings</i> | <i>Clustered Theme</i> |
|-------------|--|--|-------------------------|
| P6 | <i>Mostly, gina-segregate din kasi talaga ang sarili nila at saka hindi sila, hindi din sila willing to participate. (Mostly, they isolate themselves and are unwilling to participate.)</i> | TL tends to isolate himself and is not willing to participate. | Learners' Participation |
| P8 | <i>Nakikita ko sila na anu... yang hindi sila nagparticipate sa klase.. or they... they are separated</i> | TL tends to separate and doesn't | |

| | | |
|----|---|---|
| | <i>sa iba.</i> (I notice that they don't participate in class or they separate themselves from others.) | participate in class. |
| P3 | I have encountered problems teaching them, especially...uh, for example, in class recitation. They're hesitant to share their ideas in class. | TLs are reluctant to participate in class recitation. |

Learners' Participation

Another experience shared by the participants is the difficulty of learners' participation, as shown in Table 7. Participants 6, 8, and 3 expressed that TLs tend to isolate themselves from the group. Since they don't want to socialize or are unwilling to participate, their performances during group activities and even class discussions are affected. One reason shared by P4 that contributes to this fear of speaking is that most of the TL are afraid that they will be bullied due to their pronunciation, as presented by this verbatim response:

"They don't want to get bullied, so ayaw nila magsalita (they don't want to talk). Though they have the ideas, they are afraid to speak, kasi nga nanduon yung hesitation na mabully ng ibang classmates" (because hesitation is there that the classmates will bully them) as to how they pronounce the words." – P4

With this, it is implied that discrimination still exists in the area. Such fear may be great enough for them to refuse to participate despite the ELT's encouragement, as evident in Participant 7's statement.

"Kung minsan kahit e-encourage mo na sila, ayaw pa rin nilang sumali sa mga activities." (Sometimes, even if you will encourage them, they still don't want to participate in the activities.) – P7

The same participant highlighted their passive behaviors, which could also be perceived as another reason for their refusal to participate:

"Kasi sa tribal parang accept na nila na talagang mahina sila. Hindi na sila ga-effort pa. Parang hindi sila ga-effort. Pag sabihin mo, yun doon lang. After na wala ka ng follow-up, wala din sila. Hindi din sila. Kumabaga pag walang pukpok, wala din lihok." (For tribals, it seems that they already accepted that they are slow. They don't exert effort anymore. They don't seem to exert effort anymore. If you will ask them, only then they will act. After that, no more. If you don't follow-up, none for them too. It's like, no instructions, no action.) – P7

This issue is similar to the one cited by Leño et al. (2019), which showed that some Indigenous learners have deficiencies in speaking English and do not show the willingness to communicate because of so many factors – and in this locale, is the bullying they might experience. This disposition to interconnect is a prerequisite to overcoming English language barriers (Morozova, 2013). These children usually have ideas but cannot find the terms to express their thoughts. This may be related to Word-Finding difficulties (Bator, 2016), wherein

the child feels that the utterance is just on the tip of their tongue, but these thoughts can hardly come out as expressions. The child may think they know exactly what that word is, but the moment they say it, it becomes the wrong word based on their thoughts. Recalling the precise name that communicates the idea in the mind of the Indigenous learner is very hard for them (Coleman, 2014).

This passive behavior could also be associated with shyness which is not only experienced by tribal learners but also by their non-tribal counterparts. As revealed by the study of GhorbanDordi and Davari (2018) on Iranian students, shyness can hinder their willingness to participate in class which consequently leads to lower levels of engagement and achievement. Another research conducted on the Shyness Scale of Turkish EFL learners revealed that shyness negatively impacted language learning and academic success (Abakan, 2019).

To address these challenges, the role of the teacher as the one who sets the mood for learning inside the classroom is crucial. This is to ensure that a learning environment that promotes inclusivity, respect, and support is present for the tribal learners.

Table 8. Challenges Encountered by ELTs (Theme 3)

| <i>Cod e</i> | <i>Significant Response</i> | <i>Formulated Meanings</i> | <i>Clustered Theme</i> |
|--------------|---|---|------------------------|
| P4 | <i>Pag abot sa tasking, medjo ga-struggle jud ang IP learners... Kasi number 1, kung sa amot-amot, as to financial, dehado sila. Then, sa idea, dehado gyapon. Resources halimbawa internet, cellphone, magresearch dehado, wala pa rin. (In terms of tasking, I really struggle with the TL. Because, number 1 in contribution as to financial, they struggle; resources like internet & cellphone for research, they struggle.)</i> | TLs are facing financial/material constraints. | Socio-economic Factors |
| P5 | <i>So, alam na natin na most of the tribal learners come from the mountainous area. So, talagang walang-wala ang mga bata. (Most of our tribal learners are from the mountains, so they are hard up.)</i> | TLs are mostly hard-up. | |
| P10 | <i>I think it is not more on the lacking part, but very limited lang yung kanilang supply (their supply), very limited resources, like they own one pen and for papers, few sheets of papers and then notebooks, makikita mo na (you can see that) some are used and worn out. And then yung kanilang mga uniforms and shoes also, parang gamit na gamit na. (Their uniforms and shoes are worn out.)</i> | TLs have limited resources or supplies and worn-out belongings. | |

Socio-economic Factors

Similarly, it is revealed in Table 8 that ELTs have been challenged concerning the Socioeconomic factor of the TLs. Financial/material constraints such as limited supplies and lack of budget for fare for home-school travels were cited by P4, P5, and P10. This resulted in

another problem with the learners' attendance. This issue of truancy is highlighted in the following verbatim responses of Participants 9 and 10:

“Kay ng, iban kay sa bukid pa man gid. Mag-uli kis-a so amo to. Pag Monday, kis-a wala sila sa klase kay halin sa weekend.” (Since some are from the mountains, they go home sometimes. And then, they will be absent on Mondays). – P9

"Since most or some of our tribal learners live in far-flung areas or areas that are not really near our school, attendance is sacrificed in a sense that we consider their economic status. Kung walang pamasaha, hindi makakapasok sa school." (If there is no budget for fare, they can't come to school.) – P10

In P8's perception, this issue of absenteeism/truancy of the TLs has a direct effect on their learning process since learning is quite impossible because they are not around during the teaching sessions:

“Tapos, naga-struggle ako as teacher paano ko sila maturuan kasi di sila sumisipot sa time na turuan sila dapat.” (Then, I struggle as a teacher kasi most of them don't come on times that I am supposed to teach them.) – P8

These findings are similar to the results of the study by Haufiku, Mashebe, and Aba (2022) about the lived experiences of English Second Language (ESL) teachers in senior secondary schools in the Ohangwena Region of Namibia, and they were faced with several teaching-related challenges such as limited resources for teaching and learning. Casas and Quiambao's (2023) study also indicated that indigenous peoples in Arakan, Cotabato, experience academic challenges, including poverty. These challenges are highly connected since they have demonstrated interrelations in their effects on TLs' education. In some worse scenarios, these socio-economic problems even result in a much bigger concern which is the tribal learners' dropping out of school according to the study of the study of Haseena and Mohammed (2014).

All of these findings affirm the DepEd's report suggesting low survival and completion rates among tribal learners since they would most likely drop out and fail to graduate (DepEd's Indigenous Peoples Participation Framework, 2020).

Table 9. Challenges Encountered by ELTs (Theme 4)

| <i>Cod e</i> | <i>Significant Response</i> | <i>Formulated Meanings</i> | <i>Clustered Theme</i> |
|--------------|--|--|------------------------|
| P4 | Early pregnancy and early marriage for IPS. | | |
| P7 | <i>Isa din sa mga struggles is yung mga students na huminto na because of early marriage or n-engage sila sa parental marriage. (Also, one of my struggles is the students who drop out due to early marriage or parental marriage.)</i> | TL is still prone to early marriage/pregna ncy issues. | Cultural Factors |

Cultural Factors

As shown in Table 9, early marriage and pregnancy are still prevalent issues among the tribal learners. This contributed to a much bigger problem for the teachers regarding the drop-out rate since most TLs who engage in early marriage/pregnancy opted to stop attending school. This conforms to the result of the study covering eight IP communities from different parts of the country cited in DepEd's Indigenous Peoples Participation Framework (2020), stating that the IPs' chance of availing of secondary school and eventually completing such curriculum is low.

The effect of early marriage is notably evident in the education sector as it usually results in dropping out of school (Tembo, 2021). Since they now have obligations to fulfill to their spouses and considering that pregnancies are likely to happen, their tendencies especially the girls are to stop attending school. According to Okonofua (2013), girls who get married while they are young are marginalized and have lower educational attainment, which prevents them from realizing their full potential and, as a result, limits their access to social, economic, and health opportunities.

3.3.Coping Strategies of the ELTs

To address the challenges encountered, ELTs have employed various coping strategies. Four themes emerged based on the participants' discussions – Collaborative Learning through Group/Peer Support, Use of Adaptive Teaching Strategies, Anti-Discrimination/Sense of Belongingness Advocacy, and Collaboration with the Community.

Table 10. Coping Strategies of the ELTs (Theme 1)

| <i>Code</i> | <i>Significant Response</i> | <i>Formulated Meanings</i> | <i>Clustered Theme</i> |
|-------------|--|---|--|
| P1 | I partnered these IPs with the brightest in the class so that they could learn. These smart students in my class, I already give them instructions as to how they can help their classmates. | Teachers use the buddy-buddy system. | Collaborative Learning through Peer Support |
| P6 | <i>Kaya ang ginagawa ko, kung sino yung parang okay-okay doon na mga non-tribal, gina-partner ko sila doon sa mga tribal students.</i> (So, what I do is I partner the tribal learners to non-tribal whose performance is better). | Teachers also have groupings that are mixed with non-TLs. | Collaborative Learning through Heterogeneous Groupings |
| P7 | <i>Ang ginagawa ko as a teacher is, during the activities, hinahalo ko sila sa mga learners na alam kong mas nakakaangat sa kanila.</i> (What I do as a teacher is, during activities, I mix them with learners who are than they are.) | Teachers also have groupings that are mixed with non-TLs. | Collaborative Learning through Heterogeneous Groupings |
| P8 | Ang ginagawa ko.... is mostly yung pag may activities, gina-group with other learners. Ang ginagawa ko is gina-separate ko sila, gina-distribute sa bawat group para makasabay sila. (I do, mostly during activities, group them with other non-tribal | Teachers also have groupings that are mixed with non-TLs. | Collaborative Learning through Heterogeneous Groupings |

learners. I separate the non-tribals and distribute them to the different groups so they can go along.)

Collaborative Learning through Peer Support

Among the strategies ELTs use is collaborative learning through group/peer support. As shown in Table 10 above, some ELTs have applied the buddy-buddy system to assist the TLs. In this approach, TLs are partnered with non-TLs who have good academic performances or can provide assistance.

With this, it is important to note that many teachers believe that peer support through peer tutoring is an effective way to improve young learners' academic performance. This is true not just for the tribal learners but even non-tribal ones as expressed by the study of Parker, Tariq, and Smith (2023) wherein peer tutoring is considered one of the approaches highly recommended for the improvement of English among UK school learners.

To ensure that TLs will not be exposed to discrimination and feel comfortable, it is also important to note that the attitudes of non-TLs as tutors are initially considered before teachers assign them as TLs' buddies, as reflected in the following statement:

“Yung buddy-buddy system, parang ganun, partner-partner sila. Minsan, pinipili ko yung alam kong ito kaya. Tapos as to attitude.” (The buddy-buddy system, something like that. Sometimes, I choose one that I know is capable and also consider the attitude.) – P4

The tutors have a fundamental role in facilitating the type of learning atmosphere for these collaborative or group learning activities (Topping, 2005). Hence, a positive relationship between and among the peer support group is necessary. To ensure that learning happens; that has to take place within the scope of positive tutor-tutee relationships (Pianta, Hamre, and Allen, 2012) as cited in the study of Parker et al. (2023).

Collaborative Learning through Heterogeneous Groupings

A collaborative learning approach through groupings is also utilized as a coping mechanism. These groupings are done heterogeneously, meaning TLs are not grouped. Instead, they are combined with the non-TLs and groupmates with better academic standing.

These strategies employed by the ELTs highlight the importance of collaborative learning through social interactions in learning the English language among tribal learners. As explained by the study of Lumontod and Pradia (2023) conducted among the Manobo students of Kalamansig, Sultan Kudarat, being able to practice the language is an essential aspect of language learning that provides learners with an opportunity to practice their communication skills and develop their confidence in the English language. The collaborative efforts among the students and their friends created a supportive environment for them to cope with language difficulties. Moreover, cooperative learning improves the students' access to essential resources, which helps them overcome obstacles in learning English. Most of the participants' residential areas have no access to resources like textbooks or stable internet. However, practicing the language with their classmates is a coping mechanism for learning conversational English.

Table 11. Coping Strategies of the ELTs (Theme 2)

| <i>Code</i> | <i>Significant Response</i> | <i>Formulated Meanings</i> | <i>Clustered Theme</i> |
|-------------|--|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| P5 | For vocabulary, I have my dictionary in my classroom. So, by group, with some non-struggling or non-tribal learners. I let them group those non-tribal learners with them and look for some of the words in the dictionary. | ELTs use manual and/or | |
| P9 | <i>Pag my cellphone sila, gina-sure ko na may ara sila ma-download na dictionary. Kay during classes, pwede nila ma-view tong ila Filipino-English dictionary.</i> (If they have cellphones, I ensure that they have downloaded dictionaries. So, during classes, they can view their Filipino-English dictionary.) | electronic dictionaries. | |
| P4 | <i>Tapos mag-kwan ko ug activities bitaw na magfit na kanang pwede gud sila masali. Katong ilang capacity, katong ilang kaya pwede mapasulod didto na activities.</i> (Then, I prepare activities that could cater them in consideration of their capacities, something that they can do.) | ELTs observe flexibility in preparing | Use of Adaptive Teaching Strategies |
| P10 | <i>If makita ko na ay mas marami sila ngayon, I have to make sure na yung activity ko, though hindi yun yung naka-indicate sa lesson plan. I have to make sure kailangan mag groupings ako sa ngayon.</i> (If I see that there are many of them present, I have to make sure that I can have group activities now though it is not indicated on my Lesson Plan.) | teaching activities and strategies. | |
| P1 | If I have the luxury of time, I give one by one. I talk to them personally and motivate them by returning and teaching them the basics. | ELTs conduct one- | |
| P3 | I let the student stay after the class for at least 30 minutes or one hour, and at least we have this remediation. | on-one student remediation | |
| P5 | Sometimes, I devote my free time to handling those individual tribal learners in reading, and then I let them see videos so they can understand my lesson. | sessions. | |

Use of Adaptive Teaching Strategies

ELTs also made use of adaptive teaching strategies as coping mechanisms. One such strategy is the use of dictionaries, both manual and electronic, as expressed by the statements of P5 and P9. Taufik et al. (2019) in Indonesia also found that dictionaries were useful in improving the English language skills of tribal students. Using dictionaries helped increase students' vocabulary and improve their writing accuracy. Using a dictionary can also be an effective coping mechanism for language comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. It was cited by Lumontod and Pradia (2023) that Manobo students used dictionaries to improve their understanding of the English language. A bilingual dictionary helped them bridge the gap

between their native language and English. Furthermore, using a dictionary can also help Manobo learners overcome common language barriers, such as word pronunciation and grammar structures. Another study also showed a very high acceptance of the dictionary as an effective teaching resource in the ESL classroom. Although not all the teachers used dictionaries in their pedagogic activities, a significant number applied dictionary skills in teaching English to second language learners (Ezeh, Anyanwu & Onunkwo, 2022).

In addition, teachers have also learned to become flexible in the strategies they employ to the TLs. Participant 4 shared that the activities she prepares during class sessions consider the capacities of these learners to ensure that they can comply. Participant 10's statements similarly expressed that she sometimes conducted activities that were not according to her prepared lesson plan.

Another strategy applied is the one-on-one remediation sessions conducted by the ELTs with the TLs. P1, P3, and P5 described that these sessions are conducted after classes or if they have free time. This implies that ELTs exert extra effort and time to assist the tribal learners in addressing academic concerns outside of the usual teaching-learning schedules.

This result concurs with the study of Anero and Tamayo (2023) outlines the coping strategies utilized by teachers in the Full Implementation of In-Person Classes, including Collaborative Support as well as Adaptability and Flexibility, to overcome obstacles and foster a conducive learning environment in face-to-face education.

Table 12. Coping Strategies of the ELTs (Theme 3)

| <i>Cod e</i> | <i>Significant Response</i> | <i>Formulated Meanings</i> | <i>Clustered Theme</i> |
|--------------|--|--|---|
| P4 | <i>Ini-explain ko sa whole class na hindi sila iba.. Na sinasabi ko sa mga bata na we should be happy na yung mga IPs natin, hindi nila nili-limit yong mga sarili nila sa bundok. (I explain to the whole class that they are not different. I tell them that they should be happy that our tribal people do not limit themselves to be just in the mountains.)</i> | Non-TLs are oriented to learn to appreciate that TLs are not limiting themselves within their community. | |
| P6 | <i>So, ang ginawa ko doon is, sa Homeroom gani, before tayo mag-start, gina-ano ko talaga na kailangan they will treat each other as... parang walang discrimination. (So, during the Homeroom Period, I remind them to treat each other without discrimination.)</i> | A constant reminder to avoid discrimination. | Anti-Discrimination/Sense of Belongingness Advocacy |
| P10 | <i>I have to make sure that they will be. I guess they can work with their classmates to establish rapport. Para lang masanay at hindi sila mahiya or hindi sila matakot (for them to be familiar or not be shy or afraid) whenever they come to class. Hindi nila isipin na they don't belong. (They won't feel that they don't belong).</i> | Promotion of a sense of belongingness for TLs in the classroom | |

Anti-Discrimination/Sense of Belongingness Advocacy

One reason identified earlier relative to the unwillingness of TLs to participate is the fear of bullying. This reason is similar to the challenge identified in the study of Casas and Quiambao (2023), in which he stated that discrimination is one of the academic struggles faced by TLs. With this, ELTs ensure that they can provide a learning environment sans discrimination for their TLs. To achieve this, P4 shared that she instills among her non-TLs a sense of appreciation for the TL's effort of not confining themselves in the mountains, which serve as their comfort zones. Another way to do so is P6's constant reminder or orientation to her students to treat each other without discrimination. Through these, students will be able to feel accepted and have a sense of belongingness in the classroom, as stated by P10.

Teachers' Support Systems

The Teachers' Support System is another theme identified by the study that helps ELTs cope with the challenges. When asked to describe their support systems in teaching tribal learners, their answers include collaboration with government agencies and local government units (LGU). The following statements made by the participants described the partnerships they have with the government agencies and the LGU of Kalamansig Municipality:

"I think the DSWD is supporting us. They provide financial assistance for their educational needs." – P1.

*"At saka may plano ngayon si Ma'am C**** as head of the Committee on Education na magkakaroon ng bunkhouse for free, for free yan siya para sa mga estudyanteng malalayo ang mga bahay dito sa school." (And then, the LGU Committee Chair on Education is planning to have a bunkhouse for free for our students who live far from school.)" – P3*

"We had our time na nag-solicit doon sa LGU especially sa lapis at papel ng mga bata." (We solicited from the LGU for pens and paper from the students). – P5

Another support system mentioned by the participants in partnership with private individuals and tribal leaders is evident in the following statements:

"The Project Pado, I think, would have been the original recipients of the materials sana if they were present. The school supplies from one of the stakeholders from the US." – P9.

"Meron tayong one program sa school before na kina-conduct. Sinasabay ata siya sa Senior Citizens tapos IP Day. (we had one school program before, conducted with Senior Citizen's Day- the IP Day.) We give gifts to them." – P10

"We have this somewhat SMEPA (School Monitoring, Evaluation & Plan Adjustments), where we report learners' progress by ethnicity and enrollment by ethnicity. Then, we address problems. I can still remember we invited the IPMR in IPs and those tribal leaders." – P2

The ELTs rely on the third support system, the parent-adviser or teacher-adviser collaborations. The following statements provide us with a picture of how such collaborations are done:

“I met the parents for especially those who are non-readers. Then, ini-encourage ko na turuan ang mga bata especially kung may magagaling talaga na kamag-anak. (Then, I encourage them or any relative who can to tutor their children.)” – P5

“So, ang ginagawa ko is tina-tap ko yung adviser. At the same time, pinapakiusapan ko yung adviser na kung pwede ipatawag ang parents ng particular na bata para ma-inform siya na low performance siya sa loob ng klase. (So, what I do is I tap the adviser and request him/her to call the parent of a particular learner to inform them that the learner has low performance in class.)” – P6

Lastly is the financial/material assistance from the advisers and school-initiated programs as expressed by the following sharing from the participants:

“Ang iba is adviser na mismo ang nag-implement ng kung.... Halimbawa, nakikita niya yung mga estudyante niya na tribal learners na medjo pigado, so financial assistance... (Others include advisers giving financial assistance to tribal learners who are struggling.)” – P3

“If nakikita ko yung estudyante ko na walang ganyan, kasi nga sabi ko kanina na financially mahina talaga sila. So, ako na ang mag-provide. (I myself, for example, if I see my students lack something, just what I’ve said earlier that they really are struggling financially, I myself is the one who provides.)” - P4

“I think if I’m not mistaken, meron tayong one program sa school before na kina-conduct. Sinasabay ata siya sa Senior Citizens tapos IP Day. (We had one school program before, conducted with Senior Citizen’s Day and IP Day.) We give gifts to them.” – P10

All the statements above reflect the importance of supportive partnerships in teaching Tribal Learners. These students face challenges in accessing quality education due to their geographic locations, discrimination, and other factors. Building relationships and trust with students and their communities is essential for successful Indigenous teaching and learning experiences (Pedroso et al., 2023). Hence, the relationships established between and among the teachers, parents, concerned private individuals, government agencies, and the local government unit contribute to the ELTs' abilities to cope with the challenges they encounter in teaching the English language to the tribal learners.

3.4. Insights Gained in Teaching English to Tribal Learners

When the research participants were asked about the insights they gained from their experiences in teaching tribal learners, two emergent ideas came out. The first thing they learned is that one of the qualities of teachers necessary to handle the TLs effectively is patience. The following statements expressed in this thought:

"One lesson I acquired from those experiences was patience in dealing with the tribal learners." – P3.

"I need more patience to love those tribal learners." – P5.

"Yung pagiging patient sa pagtuturo. Kailangan mo talaga ng mahabang pasensya na turuan sila. (Being patient in teaching, you really need patience teaching them.)" – P9

As discussed previously, ELTs are exposed to various challenges that contribute to their difficulties in teaching the language to TL. Hence, they really must show extra tolerance when dealing with them. Therefore, patience is really necessary to be possessed by ELTs. As Morris (2020) cited in his study, patience is an important personality trait that leads to intrapersonal and interpersonal skills (Comer & Sekerka, 2014). It is particularly important in teaching because teachers who show patience and support to their students can positively impact their students' success (Sherman, Rasmussen, & Baydala, 2008).

Another insight acquired by the ELTs is flexibility/adjustments/simplifying of strategies, which are necessary to ensure inclusive learning for our TLs.

"That as teachers, you should look for strategies that could cater to individuals or learners na na-belong sa IPs." – P4.

"E-simplify mu din yung mga words na gagamitin mo sa kanila. Or hangga't maari e-simplify mo din yung activities pero inclined pa rin doon sa lesson." (You have to simplify the words you use to them and, as much as possible, simplify also the activities but still inclined with the lesson.) – P7

"Being a teacher requires a lot of things. Nandiyan yung kinakailangan talaga flexible tayo." (There is a need to be flexible.) – P10

As described by the statements above, it is believed that a flexible disposition has always been essential in an effective teacher. This way, teachers could conceive other ways of teaching to meet the exigencies of the learning environment. The study by Lubke, Pinguart, and Schwinger (2021) identified that flexibility showed direct effects on teachers' attitudes toward the achievement of mainstream students and students with learning difficulties, attitudes toward social benefits of inclusion for students with emotional and behavioral disturbances, and teachers' self-efficacy regarding the support of students' social skills.

Furthermore, indirect effects of flexibility on intentions and behavior regarding the support of social skills were found. The findings emphasize the importance of teachers' flexibility in realizing inclusive education.

4. IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study suggest that English language teachers perceived teaching to tribal learners as a challenging task. Handling such learners comes with struggles and responsibilities that ELTs must address or handle to ensure effective learning.

This implies that specialized teacher training focusing on adaptive teaching methods and collaborative learning techniques is essential to address diverse learning needs. Considering that tribal learners comprise approximately only seven percent of the total student population, it is recommended that the school prioritize the development of targeted in-service training programs for English language teachers assigned to classes with tribal learners. These programs should focus on culturally responsive teaching practices, the integration of indigenous knowledge in lesson planning, and the use of adaptive strategies that address the linguistic challenges faced by tribal learners. Emphasis should also be placed on collaborative learning techniques grounded in Vygotsky's social constructivist theory to enhance peer interaction and support language learning.

Strengthening partnerships with parents, tribal leaders, and the broader community is also encouraged to mitigate socio-economic and cultural barriers, fostering a more supportive learning environment. Such partnership can also be a venue to start crafting a progressively developed bilingual dictionary of English basic words to their dialect.

Financial and institutional support is also crucial to providing necessary resources that the tribal learners lack such as school supplies and uniforms as well as in alleviating challenges including absenteeism and early marriage. Hence, there is a necessity to maintain linkage to the tribal communities and various concerned government units.

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