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Challenges and Strategies of Non- Indigenous Teachers in Blaen Community: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

Aim: Integrating non- Indigenous teachers into Indigenous communities presents challenges and opportunities in promoting inclusive and culturally responsive education. The study explored the lived experiences of non- Indigenous teachers in the Blaen community, specifically focusing on their challenges, their strategies, and their perceived roles in fostering cultural understanding.

Methodology: This study used a qualitative approach grounded in transcendental phenomenology, to explore the challenges faced by non- Indigenous teachers in the Blaen Community and the strategies they employ to address these difficulties.

Results: The findings revealed four emerging themes on challenges that non-Indigenous teachers encounter when teaching in the Blaen community : (1) linguistic challenges in teaching, (2) cultural adaptation in teaching, (3) limited teaching resources, and (4) communication barriers. To navigate these challenges, teachers adopted strategies such as (1) culturally responsive teaching strategies, (2) building stronger educational partnerships, (3) inclusive teaching approaches, and (4) linguistic adaptation in teaching. In addition, the research also identifies the teachers' perceived role in fostering cultural understanding within the Blaen community as a (1) cultural bridge in Indigenous education, (2) bridging cultures through education, (3) promoting cultural awareness in education, and (4) fostering respect and inclusion through community integration.

Conclusion: The study demonstrates that non-Indigenous teachers in the Blaen community confront numerous hurdles, including linguistic barriers, cultural adaptation, limited resources, and communication difficulties. Despite these challenges, instructors adopt strategies such as culturally responsive teaching and greater collaborations to traverse them. Their work goes beyond teaching to include encouraging cultural understanding, building bridges between cultures, and promoting respect and inclusion. These findings show the need of ongoing teacher support in improving cultural sensitivity and educational outcomes in indigenous communities.

Keywords: Non- Indigenous teachers, Culturally Responsive Education, Inclusive Education, Linguistic Challenges, Cultural Adaptation, Transcendental Phenomenology, Cultural Bridge.

INTRODUCTION

Integrating non-Indigenous teachers into Indigenous communities, such as the Blaen in Sultan Kudarat, had been a complex process with both challenges and opportunities. Educators unfamiliar with local traditions often struggled to connect with their students due to cultural misunderstandings. Language barriers and differing worldviews on education further widened the gap between teachers and learners. As a result, these tensions affected the teaching-learning process and the relationships formed within the community.

Globally, researchers had long observed the disconnect between non-Indigenous educators and Indigenous learners, emphasizing the need for cultural sensitivity and inclusive pedagogies. Moreton (2023) highlighted the importance of mutual respect and cultural integration to bridge this divide. Similarly, Perso (2020) and Chavez et al. (2023) found that educators who recognized and incorporated Indigenous knowledge systems into their teaching improved both student outcomes and community trust. Hence, culturally responsive teaching had become a crucial strategy in Indigenous education worldwide.



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In the Philippines, these global findings echoed the experiences of non-Indigenous teachers working in Indigenous communities. Orcales-Tabile (2024) reported that successful integration required empathy, flexibility, and a willingness to learn local traditions. Adiaton et al. (2023) also noted that misunderstandings arose from differing beliefs about the purpose of education. Furthermore, Chavez et al. (2023) emphasized that the language barrier between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous teachers hindered effective communication and engagement.

In Mindanao, particularly in the Blaan community of Sultan Kudarat, the challenges became more pronounced due to geographic and cultural isolation. DepEd Region XII (2023) observed that language mismatch and lack of local cultural awareness among teachers led to classroom disengagement. Dulay et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of integrating indigenous perspectives to make lessons more relatable and inclusive. Gum (2018) revealed that non-Indigenous teachers needed to adapt both linguistically and culturally to effectively connect with Blaan learners.

Despite existing literature on Indigenous education, limited studies had explored the lived experiences of non-Indigenous educators specifically within the Blaan community. Rivera and Bernardo (2021) and Sanchez, et al. (2022) emphasized the need to localize research for better understanding of region-specific challenges. Balbin et al. (2021) and De Guzman et al. (2022) similarly called for more nuanced studies on how teachers adjusted to Indigenous cultural contexts. Therefore, this study addressed a critical gap by focusing on the voices and strategies of non-Indigenous teachers in a specific Indigenous setting.

This study was deemed timely and necessary due to the growing recognition of the role that cultural understanding played in effective education. The researchers, being aware of the challenges faced by colleagues in Blaan communities, aimed to generate insights that could inform future teacher training programs. Understanding these challenges and adjustments could enhance teaching effectiveness, cultural harmony, and student success. Ultimately, the study aspired to contribute to more inclusive, respectful, and responsive education for Indigenous learners.

Objectives

The study explored the lived experiences of non-Indigenous teachers in the Blaan community.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What challenges do non-Indigenous teachers encounter when teaching in the Blaan community?
2. What strategies do non-Indigenous teachers employ to address challenges in the Blaan community?
3. How do non-Indigenous teachers perceive their role in fostering cultural understanding within the Blaan community?

METHODS

Research Design

This study followed Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenology, which focused on how participants described and made sense of their experiences. A fundamental part of this approach was epoché, where the researchers consciously set aside their own biases to gain a clearer understanding of the participants' perspectives (Muñoz & Sanchez, 2023). This method was appropriate because it allowed the researchers to understand the challenges and strategies of non-Indigenous teachers in the Blaan community.

Population and Sampling

This study was conducted in six schools in the Blaan community of Columbio District II, Sultan Kudarat, focusing on the experiences of 15 purposively selected non-Indigenous teachers. Participants were required to have at least five years of teaching experience in the Blaan community and be willing to participate in interviews. Teachers of pure Blaan ethnicity, those with less than five years of experience, and those married to Blaan educators were excluded to maintain the focus on non-Indigenous perspectives without direct cultural integration through marriage.

Instruments

The study utilized in-depth interviews (IDIs), which is consistent with its phenomenological approach. A semi-structured interview guide, aligned with the research objectives, was validated by experts. It allowed for flexible, detailed responses and was carefully designed for validity. After revisions were made based on the experts' feedback, the guide was pilot-tested with non-participant from an extension school before being finalized and ready



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for data collection. Interviews were audio-recorded using a mobile device, and data were transcribed immediately after each session to ensure accuracy.

Data Collection

The researchers obtained approval from education authorities and collaborated with Blaen school officials to recruit non-Indigenous teacher participants. Data collection took place in March 2025 using the interview guide. Following an orientation session and a pilot interview, the researchers conducted 30–60-minute in-depth interviews with 15 teachers in a quiet and familiar setting, which allowed the participants to freely express their experiences. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded using a mobile device and immediately transcribed after each session to ensure accuracy.

Data Analysis

The study used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis to examine the interview data. The researchers first familiarized themselves with the interview transcripts, coded key terms, and grouped these codes into emerging themes. These themes were refined and named to accurately reflect the participants' experiences. The final report was developed by drawing on participant quotes to illustrate the challenges and strategies of non-Indigenous teachers in the Blaen community.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed strict ethical standards to protect participants, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw. It emphasized social value, minimized emotional risks, and ensured privacy through pseudonyms, secure data storage, and compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. With participants' consent, interviews were audio recorded for accurate transcription and analysis. The researchers, non-Indigenous teachers in the Blaen community, were supported by academic mentors and worked closely with school stakeholders to ensure the study was inclusive, ethical, and impactful.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis and interpretation of the data gathered from the participants. The findings are organized into emergent themes, each accompanied by a corresponding interpretation and discussion of its implications.

1. Emerging Themes on Challenges do non- Indigenous Teachers Encounter when teaching in the Blaen Community

Themes

Linguistic Challenges in Teaching

Cultural Adaptation in Teaching

Limited Teaching Resources

Communication Barriers

1.1 Linguistic Challenges in teaching

The first theme highlights the difficulties of non-indigenous teachers face in understanding and using the Blaen language, which affects lesson delivery and student comprehension. These statements highlight language barriers, translation difficulties, and adaptation challenges, which are all key linguistic challenges in teaching:

"So when I taught about floss, I said that floss is used for cleaning teeth... I didn't know that 'ki-ki' was a bad word in their language." –P1

"The biggest challenge really is the language barrier." –P2

"It's really difficult to speak Tagalog... I also don't know how to speak Blaen." –P3

"Sometimes, you have someone translate for you... but you're not even sure if they translated it correctly." –P4

"If you're new, it's really difficult to adapt to another language... and of course, it's also hard to be accepted by the community." P12



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Non-Indigenous teachers in the Balaan community face significant linguistic challenges, including language barriers, lack of culturally appropriate teaching materials, and difficulties with pronunciation and dialect differences (Nolasco, 2008; Walter & Benson, 2012; Trudell, 2009). Their limited understanding of Balaan sociolinguistic norms can hinder effective communication and classroom rapport. Addressing these issues requires targeted professional development in indigenous language and culturally responsive teaching methods (Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar, 2010).

These obstacles impact communication, student engagement, and classroom dynamics, highlighting the need for training in indigenous language and culturally responsive teaching.

1.2 Cultural Adaptation in Teaching

The second theme presents the challenge of adjusting to Balaan cultural norms, traditions, teaching styles, which can impact classroom dynamics and student-teacher relationships. These statements highlight language learning, collaboration with locals, resource limitations, and flexibility, all of which are essential in adapting to a new cultural setting in education:

"At first, when I was assigned here... I didn't know what to do... I would ask the students, 'What is this in Bisaya? Oh, what is this in Balaan?'"-P1

"We have Balaan colleagues. We borrow materials when they attend seminars at NCIP."-P2

"At the start, we tended to tap the sitio elders and sitio officials to serve as our teaching resources."-P6

"Regarding materials for the Balaan community, especially for teaching, what should we use? ... Now that there's a TV, you just search for it."-P5

"Another issue is the limited resources. Accessing resources and materials that are culturally relevant and appropriate for them is a challenge."-P7

Non-Indigenous teachers in the Balaan community face challenges adapting to local cultural norms due to limited understanding of Balaan beliefs, traditions, and community values (Gay, 2018). They struggle to integrate indigenous content into curricula designed for mainstream education (Battiste, 2013) and often lack the cultural awareness needed to build respectful relationships with community members (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009). Additionally, differing approaches to discipline—where Balaan traditions emphasize communal and restorative methods—can lead to classroom management difficulties (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008)

These difficulties necessitate culturally responsive teaching, community engagement, and training in local norms and beliefs.

1.3 Limited Teaching Resources

The third theme shows how the scarcity of instructional materials, books, and educational tools in the Balaan community hinders effective teaching and learning. These statements highlight the shortage of teaching materials, lack of culturally relevant resources, and limited access to technology, which are key challenges in education.

"Here in our place, there are still no materials in Balaan."-P3

"Yes, in 2017... there were seminars... They provided dictionaries and stories... But the problem with the stories is that, of course, we weren't taught how to read them."-P4

"I can't find any. I also can't find instructional materials that are truly theirs."-P10

"Yes, there's limited access to books and technology—some books are outdated or insufficient, and some students do not have access to computers, the internet, or other digital learning tools."-P12

"Every week, there are no pens, no pencils, no paper... As a teacher, you have to think about buying them yourself."-P14

Non-Indigenous teachers in the Balaan community face significant challenges due to the lack of culturally relevant and physical teaching materials, limited access to digital resources, and inadequate professional training in culturally responsive pedagogy (Pinnock & Vijayakumar, 2009; Trudell, 2009; Kosonen, 2010; Hornberger, 2008). These issues are worsened by insufficient government and institutional support, which restricts resource allocation and training opportunities, ultimately hindering the delivery of effective and inclusive education for Balaan students.



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These challenges impede successful teaching and learning, emphasizing the need for improved resource allocation, professional development, and culturally sensitive materials (Salendab & Sanchez, 2023).

1.4 Communication Barriers

The fourth theme highlights the struggles in establishing clear and meaningful interactions due to language differences and cultural nuances, affecting both instruction and student engagement. These statements highlights the challenges in communication.

"Language barrier... It's hard to express what you want. Sometimes, if you raise your voice, they think you're angry."-P4

"That's the problem—the learners find it so difficult to understand Tagalog and English."-P5

"Sometimes, we still need a child or an elder who can translate into Bisaya or Blaen."-P7

"There's a lack of communication with Blaen parents... It's very difficult to call for homeroom meetings here at school."-P10

"There is limited access to interpretation, translation, and communication. Communication is really our main difficulty."-P12

Non-Indigenous teachers in the Blaen community face major communication challenges due to language differences, unfamiliarity with Blaen communication norms, and a lack of culturally responsive teaching strategies. Students often struggle with comprehension and expression because instruction is delivered in Filipino or English, not their native language (Nolasco, 2008; Kosonen, 2010). Misinterpretations also arise from differing communication styles, such as silence being seen as disengagement rather than respect (Ball & McIvor, 2013). Teachers' limited understanding of Blaen sociolinguistic norms and the absence of inclusive instructional methods further hinder effective classroom interaction (Trudell, 2009).

These impediments impede students' comprehension, participation, and engagement. To increase student learning results, teachers must be trained in intercultural communication and culturally sensitive instructional strategies.

2. Emerging Themes on Strategies Do Non-Indigenous Teachers Employ to Address Challenges in the Blaen Community

Themes

Culturally Responsive Teaching Strategies
Building Stronger Educational Partnerships
Inclusive Teaching Approaches
Linguistic Adaptation in Teaching

2.1 Culturally Responsive Teaching Strategies

The first theme highlights how non-Indigenous teachers integrate Blaen cultural elements into their teaching methods to make learning more relevant and engaging for students. These statements emphasize using cultural elements, local materials, storytelling, and language integration to make learning more engaging and meaningful for indigenous students:

"That's really my strategy, ma'am—translation. Yes, that's it. Every time I teach, I use pictures. And then, they will recognize it and say, 'Ah, ma'am, that! What is that in Blaen?'"-P1

"Integrating storytelling into lessons... Through storytelling, students' engagement increases."-P6

"Maybe for their cultural heritage, we can integrate it into teaching, for example."-P8

"I have to use local teaching materials, and over time, we gained storybooks from the division office."-P9



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"We use localized materials, especially in music and P.E. Of course, to preserve their culture, we let them perform their traditional dances."-P10

Non-Indigenous teachers use culturally responsive strategies to support Blaan students, including integrating indigenous knowledge into the curriculum (Gay, 2018), using bilingual instruction to enhance comprehension (Cummins, 2000), and building strong community ties through collaboration with elders and parents (Paris & Alim, 2017). They also adopt flexible, student-centered approaches like differentiated instruction to address learners' diverse needs (Tomlinson, 2014).

These strategies improve student participation, cultural pride, and academic performance.

2.2 Building Stronger Educational Partnerships

The second theme presents how teachers collaborate with local leaders, parents, and community members to foster a supportive learning environment and bridge cultural gaps. These statements recognize the value of collaboration and actively form partnerships with the community.

"So during the time of HLI, since Limonzo ES was a beneficiary of HLI, the Health and Learning Institution, that's when parents started to cooperate more because there were six sessions or meetings where children, parents, and community leaders had to participate."-P1

"For me, ma'am, communication is key. Together with the PTA and Home Room Officers, we need to engage with the parents. We've already created a group chat."-P2

"A strategy for me is maintaining good communication with each other. Respect—respect for their beliefs as well."-P4

"As I mentioned earlier, ma'am, collaboration with indigenous communities and educators is essential. Because when it comes to teaching indigenous learners, collaboration is the key."-P7

"Call for a parents-and-teachers meeting and provide an agenda that directly addresses the learners' challenges."-P10

"As I said earlier, ma'am, it all comes back to communication and collaboration. Open and transparent communication with learners, parents, and community members."-P13

Key strategies for non-Indigenous teachers working with Blaan communities include fostering strong school-community partnerships by engaging with Blaan elders, parents, and leaders (Brayboy et al., 2012). Open communication with families, such as home visits and using translators, improves student achievement (Epstein, 2018). Incorporating indigenous teaching methods like storytelling and experiential learning (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001) and promoting professional development for teachers are also crucial for culturally responsive education. Collaborative learning among teachers further enhances culturally relevant teaching practices.

Providing professional development for teachers on indigenous perspectives helps them better address the unique needs of Blaan students and create a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

2.3 Inclusive Teaching Approaches

The third theme shows how teachers implement diverse and flexible teaching methods to accommodate different learning needs and ensure all students feel valued and included. Sample statements are as follows:

"One of our strategies is hands-on learning through experimental activities. Children learn better when they experience things firsthand in their environment."-P5

"For our students, ma'am, collaborative teaching practices are really present."-P6

"The best way would be to explain your lesson in their language. If you can't explain it in their language, they won't understand it."-P8

"The first thing in class is the 'little teacher' approach. If one student knows the lesson well, I make them the teacher."-P9

"In the Blaan community, effective engagement strategies focus on respecting cultural traditions, fostering relationships, and making learning relevant to daily life."-P11



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"For me, effective strategies for engaging students and community members include conducting celebrations that highlight their culture and traditions."-P12

Effective strategies for non-Indigenous teachers in the Blaan community include differentiated instruction to meet diverse learning needs (Tomlinson, 2014), incorporating Blaan history and traditions into the curriculum to foster identity and belonging (Banks & Banks, 2019), and using multilingual teaching methods to support language inclusion (Cummins, 2000; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). Additionally, creating an inclusive environment through social-emotional learning (SEL) strategies and culturally responsive classroom management enhances academic achievement and strengthens students' cultural confidence (Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

These approaches help promote academic success, cultural affirmation, and a sense of belonging for Blaan students.

2.4 Linguistic Adaptation in Teaching

The fourth theme demonstrates how teachers develop strategies such as learning key Blaan phrases or using bilingual resources to overcome language barriers and improve communication with student learnings. These statements highlight the importance of learning and using the students' native language, collaborating with Indigenous teachers, and respecting cultural-linguistic traditions to enhance communication and understanding in teaching:

"Vital approach? I think you really need to... You really need to learn their dialect. You really need to study their dialect so you can understand each other."-P1

"As a non-Indigenous teacher, I challenge myself to communicate using their language..."

"We ask them what certain words mean in their language."-P10

"Well, a vital approach to overcoming teaching challenges would be to participate regularly or continuously in IPED training. Second is to collaborate with Indigenous teachers because they have the innate or natural knowledge about the IP community."-P7

"As a teacher, you should adopt their culture because they are not the ones who should adapt to you. As a teacher, you should know how to level with them."-P14

"Build trust and acceptance by respecting Blaan traditions, language, and knowledge... This encourages parental and community support."-P11

Non-Indigenous teachers working with Blaan students address language barriers by using multilingual strategies that combine Blaan and national languages to improve comprehension and affirm cultural identity (Cummins, 2000; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). Translanguaging allows students to use both languages fluidly, enhancing learning and validating their linguistic background (Garcia & Wei, 2014; Hornberger & Link, 2012). Incorporating oral storytelling (Battiste, 2013), visual aids, and non-verbal communication supports understanding, especially for younger learners (August & Shanahan, 2006; Hammond, 2015). Collaboration with the Blaan community and teacher training in indigenous language education ensures these approaches are culturally relevant and sustainable (McCarty & Nicholas, 2014; Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 2009).

These approaches enhance learning by integrating both the Blaan language and the mainstream language. Teachers also use visual aids, gestures, and community collaboration to support comprehension and create an inclusive environment, ensuring linguistic and cultural needs are met.

3. Emerging Themes on how non-Indigenous teachers perceive their role in fostering cultural understanding within the Blaan community

Themes

Teacher as a Cultural Bridge in Indigenous Education

Bridging Cultures through Education

Promoting Cultural Awareness in Education

Fostering Respect and Inclusion through Community Integration



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3.1 Teacher as a Cultural Bridge in Indigenous Education

The first theme highlights how non-indigenous teachers view themselves as mediators who connect Indigenous traditions with mainstream education, ensuring that cultural values are integrated into learning. These statements highlight the teacher's role in connecting Indigenous culture with education, ensuring that students maintain their cultural identity while gaining knowledge and skills:

"As an educator, I see the role of a non-Indigenous teacher in the Blaan community as a cultural bridge, helping students understand and appreciate their own culture while also providing them with the knowledge and skills they need for the future."-P11

"For me, I perceive my role as a facilitator of cultural understanding and a bridge between the educational system and the local community."-P13

"I see my role in helping students understand and appreciate their culture by bringing them closer to their traditions... Keeping their culture alive and integrating it into lessons."-P12

"I see my role by integrating IKSPS, or what we call Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices, into the teaching and learning process."-P7

"As a teacher here, my role is to encourage them to take pride in their tribe and culture and to preserve their traditional customs."-P15

Non-Indigenous teachers view their role as facilitators of cultural exchange, integrating Blaan history, traditions, and values into lessons to create a culturally responsive learning environment (Gay, 2018). They build meaningful relationships with the Blaan community by participating in local traditions and collaborating with elders, gaining insights into students' cultural backgrounds (Battiste, 2013). By using bilingual strategies and working with local language speakers, they help reinforce students' cultural identity (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). Teachers also advocate for indigenous rights, cultural preservation, and empowerment, positioning education as a tool for preserving heritage rather than promoting cultural assimilation (Hammond, 2015).

Through community engagement, bilingual strategies, and culturally responsive teaching, they foster inclusion, preserve cultural identity, and empower students to take pride in their heritage while succeeding academically.

3.2 Bridging Cultures through Education

The second theme presents the role of teachers in facilitating mutual understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives, fostering a more inclusive learning environment. These are the example statements:

"Though I am not a Blaan teacher, I do everything I can to give the children what they deserve... I have practiced and studied their dialect. At the same time, they also understand my dialect, which is Bisaya. It's like a mutual exchange, ma'am."-P1

"As a non-Indigenous teacher in the Blaan community, I ensure that learning materials and methods reflect the Blaan way of life."-P11

"It's like I am bridging the gap in the educational system. I present their culture within the educational framework to help bridge that gap."-P13

"This is cultural exchange... Adapting to their culture while also allowing them to adapt to aspects of ours as Christian or non-IP teachers."-P6

"As a non-Indigenous teacher, I attend trainings and seminars on how to integrate Blaan culture and traditions into the lesson and apply them."-P10

Non-Indigenous teachers in Blaan communities enhance cultural understanding by using culturally responsive teaching methods, integrating Blaan traditions and language into lessons (Gay, 2018). Building strong community relationships with elders and parents helps foster trust and improve teaching strategies (McCarty & Nicholas, 2019). Professional development and cultural sensitivity training are crucial for improving teaching effectiveness (Sleeter, 2020). Mentorship programs and experiential learning, such as incorporating local crafts and customs, help preserve indigenous knowledge and improve instructional approaches (Smith, 2021).



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They encourage mutual respect and appreciation among indigenous and non-indigenous populations by using culturally responsive teaching methods, collaborating with local leaders, and including indigenous tales into the curriculum.

3.3 Promoting Cultural Awareness in Education

The third theme shows how teachers emphasize the importance of incorporating Indigenous knowledge and traditions into their teaching to enhance students' cultural appreciation. These are the example statements:

"That includes the IP celebration, the IP Day celebration... I really try to encourage them to explain using their dialect, ma'am."-P1

"Teaching them about their traditions, language, and the history of the Blaan... Because nowadays, if you ask children, they don't even know the history of the Blaan."-P3

"To develop and expand understanding and respect for culture, we incorporate local lessons... Reminding students about the importance of respect."-P5

"This is about preserving their culture for the future. Then, applying their culture in the lesson—integration, integration."-P8

"First is using respectful expressions like 'po' and 'opo' within and outside the classroom... Another is reducing the use of informal language like 'hoy'."-P6

"So, to expand understanding and respect for culture, I need to participate in their activities... It's important to show them the significance of celebrating IP Day."-P4

Non-Indigenous teachers in the Blaan community foster cultural understanding by integrating indigenous perspectives into their lessons and using culturally responsive teaching methods (Ladson-Billings, 1995). They act as mediators between indigenous and mainstream educational paradigms, adopting learner-centered approaches that align with Blaan cultural practices (Hammond, 2015). Building strong relationships with the Blaan community, particularly through immersion and collaboration with elders, helps educators develop more effective teaching strategies (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). Teachers also advocate for cultural equity, empowering Blaan students and promoting inclusivity, ensuring education bridges rather than divides cultures (Paris & Alim, 2017).

By fostering cultural awareness, they contribute to preserving Blaan heritage and nurturing students' self-confidence in their identity.

3.4 Fostering Respect and Inclusion through Community Integration

The fourth theme highlights the efforts of teachers in engaging with the local community to build trust, promote respect, and create an inclusive educational experience. These are the sample statements:

"Strengthening school-community partnerships like visits to homes and participation in community gatherings to understand backgrounds better." -P9

"By making Blaan culture an active part of the classroom, students not only learn about their heritage but also develop respect for diverse traditions." -P10

"Understand them and encourage students to share real-life experiences about their culture and traditions as a Blaan people." -P12

Non-Indigenous teachers in the Blaan community enhance cultural understanding by building strong relationships with local elders, integrating indigenous knowledge into lessons, and promoting a culturally responsive curriculum (Battiste, 2013; Gay, 2018). They collaborate with Blaan families to create a shared responsibility for education, while also engaging in self-reflection and professional development to improve their cultural sensitivity and teaching effectiveness (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). These efforts help foster an inclusive and respectful learning environment for Blaan students.

This community integration not only strengthens relationships but also fosters a sense of respect and inclusion, ensuring that education remains a collaborative effort between the school and the indigenous community.



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Conclusions

Overall, the experiences of the non-Indigenous teachers in the community of Blaen show the intricacies of teaching within a cross-cultural setting, along with the opportunities it presents for meaningful transformation. Their efforts to adapt, collaboration, and connect promote not just academic growth but also cultural understanding as well as harmony between the non-Indigenous and the Indigenous people.

Recommendations

The recommendations suggest that educational institutions should implement mandatory training programs for non-Indigenous teachers, focusing on language skills and cultural orientation to improve communication and engagement in the Blaen community. Collaborative efforts are needed to create and distribute culturally relevant teaching materials. Non-Indigenous teachers should engage with Blaen community leaders and members through cultural immersion and collaborative activities to build trust and promote inclusivity. Finally, future research should explore the impact of culturally responsive training on teacher effectiveness and student outcomes, incorporating Indigenous educators' perspectives.

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