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## Bridging Worlds: Challenges and Triumphs of Non-Indigenous Teachers in Remote Indigenous Communities

Marites S. Abellanosa\*<sup>1</sup>, Alan A. Maglantay<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Segafu Esgapo Integrated School, Glan, Sarangani Province, Philippines

<sup>2</sup> Sultan Kudarat State University, ACCESS, EJC Montilla, Tacurong City, Philippines

Corresponding Author e-mail: [marites.abellanosa@deped.gov.ph](mailto:marites.abellanosa@deped.gov.ph)

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### Abstract

**Aim:** This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of non-Indigenous teachers assigned to remote Indigenous Peoples (IP) communities. It focused on how they perceived and performed their roles, navigated cultural and language barriers, and overcame personal and professional challenges in a distinct cultural setting.

**Methodology:** The study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach, using Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology as the analytical framework. Seven non-Indigenous teachers who served in remote IP schools participated through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Their narratives were analyzed using phenomenological reduction to uncover the core meanings of their experiences.

**Results:** Thematic analysis revealed four major themes: (1) Role Perception and Responsibilities of Teachers in Indigenous Communities, (2) Navigating Cultural Dissonance and Language Barriers, (3) Professional and Personal Growth through Immersion in the IP Community, and (4) Overcoming Challenges in Indigenous Teaching Contexts. The findings highlighted that teacher took on multiple roles as educators, cultural mediators, and community partners. Their immersion in the local culture and efforts to learn Indigenous languages were crucial in building trust and fostering inclusive learning environments.

**Conclusion:** Despite challenges related to isolation, limited resources, and lack of institutional support, non-Indigenous teachers demonstrated resilience, empathy, and a commitment to culturally responsive teaching. The study underscores the need for education policies that provide better support for teachers in Indigenous communities and highlights the transformative impact of culturally relevant education on promoting inclusivity, respect, and empowerment among Indigenous learners.

**Keywords:** culturally responsive teaching, Indigenous education, non-Indigenous teachers, phenomenological study, resilience

### INTRODUCTION

In the far-flung mountains of Sarangani Province, a young boy treks barefoot across muddy trails, clutching his only notebook, determined to reach a modest classroom perched on a hillside. Waiting for him is a teacher who, after hours of travel across rivers and rugged terrain, stands ready to teach—despite the isolation, the lack of electricity, and the heavy burden of working in a community far from his own. Such scenes are not isolated stories; they are the daily realities of education among Indigenous communities in the Philippines.

Education remains a powerful tool for social mobility, yet it is unequally accessible. Globally, Indigenous Peoples are 19% less likely to complete primary education compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts, largely due to poverty, remoteness, and cultural barriers (United Nations, 2016). In the Philippines, where Indigenous communities comprise about 17 million people from over 110 ethnolinguistic groups, the challenges are even more stark (Castro & Ugang, 2017; Dulnuan, 2016). Studies reveal that Indigenous students face compounded difficulties: long distances to school, limited resources, and often a curriculum that disregards their cultural identity (Abdon, 2021; Montemayor, 2020).



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The Department of Education's Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program sought to bridge these gaps by promoting culturally responsive education. Yet despite these efforts, many Indigenous communities, particularly in Sarangani, remain underserved. Local reports show that 75% of teachers assigned to Indigenous schools are non-Indigenous (Department of Education, Sarangani Province, 2022), tasked with crossing cultural and linguistic divides while battling severe logistical and emotional hardships (Lariosa et. al. 2022).

Teaching in Indigenous communities demands more than academic expertise; it requires resilience, cultural humility, and emotional strength. As Gay (2018) and Sanchez, et al. (2022) emphasized, culturally responsive teaching is essential to connect students' backgrounds with classroom learning. However, non-Indigenous teachers often arrive with little preparation for the cultural realities they will face. This gap leads to struggles in building trust, addressing cultural dissonance, and overcoming feelings of isolation (Olsen, 2017; Walters et. al. 2019).

Teachers in Indigenous schools are often described as "light bearers," striving to illuminate the path for learners despite systemic barriers (Lariosa et al., 2022). Yet they are not immune to emotional fatigue. Research by Camello et. al. (2015) revealed that teachers frequently suffer from burnout due to overwhelming workloads, inadequate facilities, and emotional strain. Emotional labor—the need to balance personal emotions with professional duties—is a constant reality for these educators, as Hochschild's (1983) Emotional Labor Theory suggests.

Beyond emotional challenges, cultural disconnection remains a persistent struggle. Fogarty and Kral (2018) observed that non-Indigenous teachers often grapple with integrating Indigenous knowledge systems into their teaching, leading to misunderstandings and frustrations. Phillips and Luke (2017) argue that bridging this cultural gap requires teachers to respect Indigenous worldviews and engage deeply with local traditions. Without this cultural grounding, many educators risk reinforcing, rather than breaking, cycles of marginalization (Muñoz & Sanchez, 2023).

Despite these challenges, non-Indigenous teachers demonstrate remarkable resilience. Nedal and Alcoriza (2018) documented stories of teachers in Lanao Kapanglao who crossed rivers, hiked for hours, and taught in makeshift classrooms with few supplies—all driven by a commitment to education. Similar narratives emerged from Quejada and Orale's (2018) work in Samar, and Pascual's (2000) account of rural teaching hardships, where educators navigated physical and emotional isolation with unwavering dedication.

Theoretical frameworks such as Freire's (1970) Critical Pedagogy and Gay's (2018) Cultural Responsiveness Theory underscore the transformative potential of education in marginalized communities. Meanwhile, Resilience Theory (Garmezy, 1991) provides insight into how teachers adapt in adversity, while Role Theory (Mead, 1934) and Emotional Labor Theory (Hochschild, 1983) offer lenses for understanding the professional and emotional burdens they carry.

Yet gaps remain in the literature. While much has been written about Indigenous learners, fewer studies have focused on the lived experiences of non-Indigenous teachers working in these contexts (Orcales-Tabile, 2024). Understanding how these educators perceive their roles, overcome barriers, and foster culturally affirming spaces is crucial for shaping policies, teacher training programs, and community partnerships.

Thus, this study sought to explore the lived experiences of non-Indigenous teachers assigned to Blaan communities in Glan, Sarangani Province. It aimed to capture not just the hardships they endure but also the resilience, strategies, and hopes they carry. Through their voices, this research hopes to offer insights for building more inclusive, culturally grounded, and emotionally supportive educational systems for Indigenous learners in the Philippines.

## Objectives

This study explored and described the lived experiences of non-Indigenous teachers who educated Indigenous students in impoverished communities, particularly among the Blaan people in the remote Indigenous communities of Glan, Sarangani Province.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What were the experiences and challenges of non-Indigenous teachers in teaching Indigenous students in remote and under-resourced communities?
2. What cultural, social, and logistical difficulties did non-Indigenous teachers face in Indigenous schools?
3. How did non-Indigenous teachers cope with and address the barriers of poverty, cultural differences, and limited resources?
4. What changes in policies and support systems could have helped non-Indigenous teachers improve education for Indigenous students?



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## METHODS

### Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of non-Indigenous teachers assigned to Indigenous communities in Glan, Sarangani Province. Following Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach, it focused on describing how teachers perceived and made sense of their experiences in culturally distinct and socio-economically challenged environments. The design allowed the participants' voices to surface naturally, capturing both the challenges and the personal transformations they underwent while teaching in remote Indigenous schools.

### Population and Sampling

The participants of this study were seven non-Indigenous teachers assigned to remote Indigenous communities in Glan, Sarangani Province. They were chosen through purposive sampling based on specific criteria: they must have taught Indigenous learners in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDA) for at least one year and demonstrated willingness to share their lived experiences. This sampling approach ensured that the participants possessed rich, firsthand insights relevant to the research objectives. The researcher prioritized depth over breadth, focusing on a small but information-rich group to explore the complexities of teaching in Indigenous contexts.

### Instrument

The main instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide developed by the researchers. The guide contained open-ended questions designed to explore the participants' lived experiences, focusing on their challenges, coping strategies, cultural encounters, and personal growth while teaching in Indigenous communities. The questions were validated by experts in qualitative research and Indigenous education to ensure relevance, clarity, and cultural sensitivity.

During the interviews, probing questions were used to encourage deeper reflection and allow participants to freely express their thoughts and emotions. The flexibility of the semi-structured format enabled the researcher to adapt follow-up questions based on the participants' responses, enriching the data gathered.

### Data Collection

After securing approval from the Graduate Studies Office and the Department of Education, Sarangani Division, the researcher sought consent from school heads and participants. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, and written consent was obtained, including permission to record the interviews.

Data were collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews guided by open-ended questions focusing on cultural adaptation, logistical challenges, and emotional resilience. Each session lasted about 45 minutes to one hour and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent. Field notes and memos captured additional observations. Transcriptions were verified through member checking to ensure accuracy and authenticity.

Throughout the process, confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms, and participants were reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

### Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis to interpret the participants' narratives. Following Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach, the researchers conducted horizontalization by treating all participant statements with equal value. Significant statements were extracted, clustered into meaning units, and organized into major themes that reflected the participants' lived experiences.

Initial coding was followed by thematic clustering, allowing patterns related to cultural adaptation, emotional resilience, logistical struggles, and growth to emerge. Member checking was conducted to validate the findings and ensure that interpretations remained faithful to the participants' intended meanings.





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## Ethical Considerations

The researchers participants were fully informed about the purpose, scope, and voluntary nature of their participation. Informed consent forms were signed, including permissions for audio recording and the use of anonymized excerpts.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning pseudonyms to all participants and securely storing data. Participants were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. Member checking was also conducted to validate the participants' statements, ensuring that their voices were accurately represented.

The study adhered to ethical research principles, protecting the dignity, rights, and welfare of all participants.

## RESULTS and DISCUSSION

This section presents the analyses and interpretation of data obtained from the participants of the study. The information is presented in themes with interpretation and implication. The presentation is organized based on the order of the problems in the statement of the problem

### Experiences and challenges of non-Indigenous teachers in teaching Indigenous students in remote and under-resourced communities

#### Themes

**Navigating Cultural Integration**  
**Embracing Multifaceted Roles Beyond Teaching**  
**Personal and Professional Growth Through Immersion**  
**Overcoming Challenges in Indigenous Teaching Contexts**

#### Theme 1: Navigating Cultural Integration

Non-Indigenous teachers faced the need to adapt quickly to unfamiliar cultural environments. Learning local norms, traditions, and language emerged as essential survival skills rather than optional efforts. Many participants shared that the initial culture shock they experienced was overwhelming. However, intentional immersion into the Indigenous Peoples' (IP) community life, participation in cultural events like *Tukè Fali*, and deep respect for traditions helped them earn trust and strengthen their teaching relationships.

Jane shared her first experience attending a *Tukè Fali* (community gathering), admitting, **"At first, I felt out of place because I didn't understand the rituals, but when I showed genuine respect and asked questions, they welcomed me warmly."**

Similarly, Dar recalled, **"I learned that greeting elders properly and joining even simple events like planting rice with the community made them see that I valued their way of life."**

Teachers in this study adapted their behaviors and communication to align with Indigenous protocols, reflecting the necessity of cultural adjustment for building authentic relationships (Fogarty & Kral, 2018).

Vil emphasized this transformation by stating, **"When I started speaking even a few words in their language, the students became more open. It showed them that I was willing to meet them halfway."**

Rea also reflected on her learning curve, saying, **"At first, I thought just being a good teacher was enough. But here, being a respectful community member is equally important if you want them to trust you and listen to you."**

Through these narratives, it was evident that cultural integration was not merely an adjustment—it was a profound reorientation of the teachers' roles and relationships within the Indigenous communities. Their ability to recognize and honor Indigenous cultural practices became the foundation for building meaningful educational engagement.



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## Theme 2: Embracing Multifaceted Roles Beyond Teaching

Participants often described how their roles expanded far beyond being academic instructors. They became second parents, counselors, protectors, community members, and cultural liaisons. Teachers like Jane and Dar saw themselves providing emotional support to students whose parents were often working in distant farms.

Jane shared, *"Aside from teaching, I had to be a parent figure. Some of my students walked for two hours just to reach school, and when they arrived hungry and tired, you couldn't just start the lesson—you had to show care first."* Similarly, Dar recounted his experience, saying, *"There were times when students had no school supplies or food. We, teachers, would chip in from our own money to make sure they could continue studying. We weren't just teachers; we were guardians."*

This finding aligns with Noddings' (2013) Ethic of Care theory, which emphasizes the importance of emotional investment and caregiving in effective education, particularly in marginalized communities.

Participants also reflected on how their immersion into the community went beyond formal roles. Rea narrated, *"During community gatherings, I was not just the 'teacher.' I helped cook meals, fetch water, and even join the dance rituals. It blurred the line between teacher and community member in the most beautiful way."*

Freire (2018) emphasized the importance of dialogical action, where teachers immerse themselves in their learners' lives to dismantle barriers of inequality—a principle reflected in participants' deep, relationship-based engagement with Blaan communities.

Ann summarized this transformation aptly, stating, *"You cannot just be a teacher here. You must be a sister, a nurse, a neighbor, and a friend. Only then will the students and their families trust you enough to walk with them in learning."*

Through embracing multifaceted roles, the non-Indigenous teachers showed that real education in Indigenous communities was not confined to classroom walls but extended into the very fabric of communal life, driven by compassion, solidarity, and shared hope.

## Theme 3: Personal and Professional Growth Through Immersion

Participants highlighted that teaching in Indigenous communities was a catalyst for deep personal transformation. Living with fewer resources and navigating cultural dissonance challenged their resilience and empathy. Over time, they developed greater cultural sensitivity, emotional intelligence, and a renewed sense of mission.

Ann reflected, *"When I first arrived, I was scared and felt so out of place. But as months passed, I started learning their language, eating their food, joining their gatherings—and I realized, I was not just teaching them; they were also teaching me."*

Similarly, Rea shared, *"I learned that you can't impose your way of thinking. You have to listen. You have to adjust. I used to believe I was open-minded, but living here showed me that true openness means unlearning what you think you already know."*

These experiences reflect Gay's (2018) view that culturally responsive teachers must move from cultural blindness to cultural competence, while Brayboy and Castagno (2009) emphasize the need for educators to "unlearn" dominant narratives and embrace Indigenous ways of knowing.

Dar's experience illustrated this when he recounted, *"At first, I used activities from lowland schools thinking they would work. But here, students learn best through stories, dance, and real-life farming examples. I had to redesign my lessons using their traditions as the center, not just as decoration."*

This deep adaptation not only enriched their teaching practices but also reshaped their worldview. Participants spoke of gaining a renewed commitment to social justice, equity, and community-centered education.

Jane emphasized, *"Teaching here humbled me. It made me realize that success is not measured by test scores alone, but by how much you respect and uplift the community you serve."*

Through immersion, these teachers became more than educators; they became learners themselves—growing in cultural humility, resilience, and a shared dream for inclusive education.



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#### Theme 4: Overcoming Challenges in Indigenous Teaching Contexts

The reality of limited resources—such as the absence of textbooks, lack of classrooms, and poor infrastructure—was a daily hurdle for non-Indigenous teachers. Despite these hardships, they demonstrated remarkable resilience by creating instructional materials from natural resources like leaves, bamboo, stones, and wood, innovating ways to deliver lessons even without technology.

Ann shared, *"We didn't have enough books or even chalk sometimes, so we made flashcards from banana leaves and charcoal. The children loved it because it felt connected to their environment."*

Similarly, Vil recalled, *"When it rained hard, our classrooms would leak, and we would gather the children under the driest part of the roof to continue lessons. It wasn't perfect, but the learning never stopped."*

This finding supports Lariosa et al. (2022), who noted that teachers in remote schools exhibit creativity and resilience despite systemic neglect, while Freire (2018) emphasized that meaningful education can emerge even in oppressive contexts when educators maintain hope and critical consciousness.

Dar reflected this mindset, stating, *"If we waited for perfect conditions, no learning would happen. We worked with what we had, and we made every small victory count."*

Non-Indigenous teachers in remote Indigenous communities demonstrated resilience, cultural adaptability, and deep commitment, embracing culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018) to align with Indigenous traditions and foster authentic relationships. This approach required them to serve as cultural allies, mentors, and second parents, reflecting the critical role of care in marginalized settings (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009). Through deep immersion, they developed cultural competence, empathy, and a renewed mission despite limited resources, reinforcing the idea that impactful education is grounded in human connection, creativity, and mutual respect rather than material abundance (Fogarty & Kral, 2018; Camello et al., 2015).

#### Cultural, Social, And Logistical Difficulties Did Non-Indigenous Teachers Face In Indigenous Schools

##### Themes:

**Cultural Dissonance and Language Barriers**  
**Social Isolation and Emotional Strain**  
**Logistical Hardships in Remote School Settings**

#### Theme 1: Cultural Dissonance and Language Barriers

Non-Indigenous teachers often struggled with cultural dissonance, finding it challenging to align their teaching with the communication styles, values, and worldviews of Indigenous students.

Jane recalled, *"At first, I thought they were being disrespectful because they didn't maintain eye contact. Later, I learned that among the Blaen, avoiding direct eye contact with elders or authority figures is actually a sign of respect."*

Language barriers further compounded these cultural gaps. Teachers struggled to explain lessons when students had limited proficiency in Filipino or English, the main languages of instruction.

Dar shared, *"Many of my students barely understood Tagalog. I had to learn simple Blaen phrases and use lots of gestures just to make lessons clear."*

These findings align with Gay's (2018) assertion that culturally responsive teaching must adapt to learners' cultural contexts, while Fogarty and Kral (2018) emphasize that grounding education in Indigenous languages and worldviews fosters inclusion and mutual respect.

#### Theme 2: Social Isolation and Emotional Strain

Another difficulty faced by non-Indigenous teachers was the profound sense of social isolation. Living far from their families, friends, and familiar social circles, they often found themselves emotionally detached and vulnerable.





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Ann shared, ***"I would go days without speaking to anyone outside school. During the first few months, it was so lonely that I almost resigned."***

The feeling of being an outsider was intensified by cultural differences that extended beyond the classroom. Teachers had to work hard to gain community trust, and until then, some felt invisible or excluded during local gatherings.

Rea expressed, ***"You can sense that at first, they are careful around you. It takes time—sometimes years—to truly be accepted as one of their own."***

This resonates with Walters et al. (2019), who discussed how isolation in marginalized contexts can lead to emotional fatigue and increased risk of burnout among teachers. Teachers not only carried the burden of instructional duties but also the emotional labor of bridging social and cultural divides.

### Theme 3: Logistical Hardships in Remote School Settings

Logistical challenges—difficult terrains, absence of basic utilities, and lack of school resources—added another layer of complexity to the teachers' work.

Dar recounted, ***"I had to cross two rivers and trek muddy hills just to reach the school. Sometimes, after a night of heavy rain, the path would be gone, and I had to find another way."***

Jane similarly mentioned, ***"Our school had no electricity, no clean water. During the rainy season, classes would sometimes stop because our classrooms would flood."***

Teachers in remote Indigenous schools overcame logistical, cultural, and social challenges by creating makeshift furniture, hand-drawn visual aids, and outdoor classrooms, demonstrating resilience, creativity, and cultural humility (Lariosa et al., 2022). This approach aligns with Freire's (2018) concept of critical hope and Gay's (2018) framework of culturally responsive teaching, emphasizing that meaningful education can thrive even in challenging contexts (Fogarty & Kral, 2018; Walters et al., 2019).

### Non-Indigenous Teachers Cope with And Address the Barriers of Poverty, Cultural Differences, and Limited Resources

#### Themes

**Creativity and Resourcefulness Amidst Poverty**  
**Cultural Immersion and Humility**  
**Building Strong Community Relationships**  
**Emotional Resilience and Faith-Driven Motivation**

### Theme 1: Creativity and Resourcefulness Amidst Poverty

Faced with extreme scarcity, non-Indigenous teachers demonstrated remarkable creativity and innovation to deliver lessons effectively. With very limited access to textbooks, blackboards, or technology, they improvised using what little was available—turning simple local materials into meaningful learning tools.

Ann shared, ***"I made visual aids using cardboard and pencils, and sometimes leaves from trees just to teach the lesson."***

Vil recounted how he turned bamboo and wood scraps into improvised teaching boards: ***"We had no blackboards. I carved bamboo into strips where we could write lessons using charcoal."***

Liv also recalled, ***"Instead of posters, I used old newspapers and illustrated them by hand to make learning more visual."***

These narratives show that poverty, while challenging, often drives teacher creativity and resilience, transforming resource gaps into learning opportunities (Camello et al., 2015). This aligns with Gay's (2018) concept of culturally responsive pedagogy, which emphasizes context-based teaching using familiar materials to connect classroom lessons with community knowledge. Ultimately, effective teaching relies more on creativity, dedication, and heart than on material resources.



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## Theme 2: Cultural Immersion and Humility

Participants emphasized that effective teaching in Indigenous communities requires both professional competence and deep cultural immersion, including learning the language and honoring local traditions.

Ann shared, ***"I really studied their language so that the children and their parents could understand me."***

Rea echoed this sentiment, describing her efforts to integrate into the community: ***"I attended their Tukè Fali ceremonies and wore their traditional clothes. It was important for them to see that I respected their way of life."***

Vil added how cultural immersion opened doors that formal teaching could not: ***"Once they saw me participating in their rituals, they no longer looked at me as an outsider. I became part of their celebrations, and that made learning easier for the children."***

Teachers in remote Indigenous communities built meaningful connections by adapting to their students' cultural contexts, fostering mutual respect and trust (Fogarty & Kral, 2018). This approach aligns with Gay's (2018) framework of culturally responsive teaching, emphasizing that effective education requires embracing students' cultural identities and engaging deeply with their communities.

## Theme 3: Building Strong Community Relationships

Teachers overcame cultural barriers by fully immersing themselves in community life, participating in rituals, farming, and tribal gatherings, and treating students as extended family.

Liv shared, ***"I lived within their area and met with their parents. I made it my mission to show respect and understanding of their culture."***

Ann similarly reflected, ***"I joined them in planting corn and cleaning up the barangay plaza. When they saw me working with them, not just teaching, they opened their homes and hearts to me."***

Rea recalled that simple gestures, like attending funerals, weddings, and tribal council meetings, were powerful ways of showing respect: ***"I made sure to attend important events in the community. It mattered to them that I was present—not just as a teacher, but as someone who cared about their lives."***

By engaging in community life beyond the classroom, non-Indigenous teachers in Indigenous contexts built relational trust, a critical foundation for effective teaching. This approach aligns with Phillips and Luke's (2017) emphasis on trust as a cornerstone of meaningful educational change and Brayboy and Castagno's (2009) view that successful education for Indigenous learners relies on authentic, sustained relationships with the community. It also reflects Freire's (2018) principle of dialogical education, where teachers become co-learners embedded within the community. These connections allowed teachers to transcend outsider status, becoming cultural allies and trusted partners in the educational journey.

## Theme 4: Emotional Resilience and Faith-Driven Motivation

Participants coped emotionally by drawing strength from faith, self-reflection, and a deep sense of mission. Teaching in remote Indigenous communities was not only physically demanding but also emotionally taxing, as many teachers faced loneliness, isolation, and moments of self-doubt. Yet, despite these difficulties, they found ways to persevere through a combination of spiritual grounding, personal resilience, and a firm belief in the importance of their work.

Liv shared, ***"Even though we are far from the city and lack resources, I never turned away from my responsibility."***

Ann similarly reflected on her emotional journey, ***"Whenever I felt lonely or hopeless, I prayed. I reminded myself why I chose to be here—to make even a small difference."***

Rea expressed that finding meaning in her daily interactions with students gave her the strength to continue, ***"There were days when I wanted to quit. But seeing my students smile even with nothing gave me enough reason to stay."***

These insights align with Garmezy's (1991) Resilience Theory, which highlights the role of internal coping mechanisms, including faith, in helping individuals adapt positively under chronic stress. Walters et al. (2019) similarly emphasize that resilience in marginalized settings is strengthened by emotional regulation, social bonds, and reflective practices. Freire's (2018) concept of "critical hope" also resonates, stressing the importance of maintaining belief in the possibility of change even in difficult circumstances. Together, these perspectives underscore that

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emotional resilience, supported by faith, social connections, and a commitment to meaningful teaching, drives transformative education even in the most challenging contexts (Camello et al., 2015; Fogarty & Kral, 2018; Gay, 2018; Walters et al., 2019).

## **Policies and Support Systems to Help Non-Indigenous Teachers Improve Education for Indigenous Students**

### **Themes:**

**Strengthened Cultural Training and Immersion Programs**  
**Enhanced Logistical Support and Infrastructure Improvement**  
**Institutionalized Emotional and Professional Support Systems**  
**Empowerment through Community-based Policy Making**

### **Theme 1: Strengthened Cultural Training and Immersion Programs**

Participants highlighted the need for comprehensive cultural training and orientation before deployment to Indigenous communities, noting that inadequate preparation leads to emotional stress, cultural misunderstandings, and reduced teaching effectiveness.

Rea shared her experience vividly: ***"If I had proper cultural orientation before my assignment, adapting wouldn't have been as difficult. I had to learn everything on the ground, which was overwhelming at first."***

Jane also highlighted language training as a critical need, emphasizing its practical benefit for classroom communication: ***"Formal training on basic Blaang language could greatly help teachers communicate better from the start. The language barrier made simple explanations unnecessarily complicated, especially during my first few months."***

Ann echoed these sentiments, stressing the role of cultural training in facilitating meaningful interactions:

***"Without cultural orientation, I unintentionally made mistakes that seemed disrespectful to the community. A proper training program could have helped me avoid these missteps and build trust more quickly."***

Moreover, Liv suggested integrating direct cultural immersion into the training curriculum to deepen teachers' understanding and appreciation of local traditions: ***"Teachers should experience the Indigenous culture directly before teaching. Even a short cultural immersion or community visit prior to formal deployment would give teachers better insights and confidence."***

Participants highlighted that cultural orientation and language immersion are essential for effective teaching in Indigenous contexts. This aligns with Gay's (2018) culturally responsive teaching, which emphasizes understanding and respecting students' cultural norms. Fogarty and Kral (2018) add that deep cultural engagement builds trust and authentic relationships, while Brayboy and Castagno (2009) stress the importance of training teachers as cultural allies to bridge cultural gaps.

### **Theme 2: Enhanced Logistical Support and Infrastructure Improvement**

Participants frequently highlighted logistical support and the enhancement of school infrastructure as vital policy areas needing immediate attention to significantly improve teaching quality and student engagement in Indigenous communities. The reality of navigating challenging terrains, utilizing inadequate classrooms, and coping with limited instructional resources considerably affected their capacity to deliver effective education and sustain motivation.

Dar vividly described the urgency of infrastructural improvement, stating: ***"Even basic improvements like proper classrooms, durable teaching materials, and access roads would significantly change our teaching conditions. Right now, it's pure survival."***

Ann shared similar sentiments, emphasizing the crucial role that decent accommodations and basic utilities play in attracting and retaining committed educators in remote areas: ***"Providing decent accommodation and basic utilities like electricity and water would encourage more teachers to stay longer in remote areas. It's tough to remain motivated when daily living conditions are so harsh."***



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Jane further articulated the struggles stemming from inadequate facilities, noting how these deficits directly impacted instructional quality: ***"When it rains heavily, our classrooms flood and classes stop. Simple infrastructure improvements would drastically improve attendance and make teaching more consistent."***

Vil also underscored the significance of logistical support, stressing that better transportation infrastructure could greatly reduce the physical risks and emotional burdens faced by teachers: ***"Properly maintained access roads or pathways would reduce travel time and risks. It would give teachers more energy and time to focus on teaching rather than worrying about personal safety."***

Logistical and infrastructural improvements are essential for educational equity, teacher retention, and sustainability in remote Indigenous communities. Lariosa et al. (2022) emphasize that addressing infrastructure gaps reduces dropout rates and improves education quality. Camello et al. (2015) note that inadequate facilities contribute to teacher exhaustion and reduced effectiveness, while Walters et al. (2019) link improved infrastructure to better emotional well-being and reduced burnout. Collectively, these insights highlight the need for urgent infrastructure investments to support both teachers and students.

### Theme 3: Institutionalized Emotional and Professional Support Systems

Participants stressed the need for structured emotional and professional support, citing isolation, emotional strain, and continuous adaptation as major challenges in remote Indigenous schools.

Vil highlighted the acute need for accessible emotional support systems, clearly stating: ***"Teachers should have regular access to counselors or mental health professionals. Emotional strain here is high, and we need structured support. Without it, burnout becomes inevitable."***

Liv further emphasized the importance of peer-based support networks, suggesting structured professional collaboration and mentorship programs as essential tools for emotional resilience: ***"Regular professional development sessions and peer mentoring programs would help us handle the loneliness and isolation we feel. Knowing that you're not alone and being able to discuss shared experiences regularly would make a big difference."***

Jane also described her feelings of emotional exhaustion and the potential benefits of institutional support:

***"I sometimes felt emotionally drained, particularly when dealing with the challenges faced by the community. Having someone professional to talk to about this would definitely help us cope and stay effective."***

Similarly, Rea recommended consistent emotional support strategies to mitigate feelings of isolation and sustain long-term teacher commitment: ***"We often face situations that we were never prepared for emotionally. Structured support from the institution could help us navigate these stressful conditions without feeling abandoned or helpless."***

These narratives highlight the critical need for structured emotional and professional support in marginalized communities. Walters et al. (2019) emphasize that institutional support, including counseling, mentorship, and professional development, reduces burnout and improves retention. Garmezy's (1991) Resilience Theory adds that high-stress environments benefit from structured support, while Camello et al. (2015) note that training and emotional support directly enhance teacher effectiveness.

### Theme 4: Empowerment through Community-based Policy Making

Participants emphasized the importance of involving Indigenous communities in policy-making, arguing that active participation fosters cultural relevance, community ownership, and lasting educational impact.

Ann clearly articulated this perspective, highlighting the practical benefits of direct community involvement:

***"If the Indigenous community actively participates in planning educational programs, policies would be more effective and sustainable. The community understands their unique cultural and practical needs better than anyone from the outside."***

Jane also emphasized the invaluable insight community elders and parents provide, stressing that policy decisions should reflect the authentic voices and lived realities of Indigenous stakeholders:

***"Education policies must involve elders and parents. They know best what their children need, culturally and practically. Policies formulated without their insights tend to miss the mark completely."***



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Liv reinforced this by suggesting that community-based policy making enhances trust and creates stronger school-community relationships: **"Including community members in decision-making builds trust. When the community feels heard and valued, they become more supportive of school programs, which benefits both teachers and students."**

Dar further supported this notion, advocating for structured mechanisms to ensure Indigenous representation at all levels of school management: **"There should be formal structures or councils where elders and parents have a clear voice and decision-making power. Without this, efforts are superficial and unsustainable."**

Participant insights emphasize the need for community-driven educational policies, aligning with Freire's (2018) critical pedagogy, which advocates for marginalized groups actively shaping their educational realities. Brayboy and Castagno (2009) similarly highlight that genuine community involvement in decision-making improves Indigenous student outcomes by respecting cultural identity and fostering meaningful engagement. Fogarty and Kral (2018) add that sustainable educational reforms are more effective when co-created with communities, as they are deeply rooted in local knowledge and lived experiences.

## Conclusions

The lived experiences of non-Indigenous teachers in remote Indigenous communities highlight the importance of cultural immersion, resilience, and adaptive teaching. These educators often assumed roles beyond traditional instruction, becoming caregivers, advocates, and community members, which was essential for building trust and fostering meaningful learning. Despite logistical challenges and emotional strain, they displayed remarkable creativity, using locally available materials to overcome systemic neglect and isolation. Teachers emphasized the need for comprehensive cultural orientation, improved infrastructure, and structured emotional support to enhance their effectiveness. They also advocated for active community involvement in educational planning, stressing that sustainable improvements require shared responsibility and culturally responsive approaches.

## Recommendations

Policymakers should implement mandatory cultural and language immersion programs, improve infrastructure, and provide ongoing emotional and professional support for teachers. Schools should engage Indigenous leaders in decision-making and offer incentives to recognize teachers' efforts. Non-governmental organizations should support innovative teaching practices and facilitate inter-community collaboration. Teacher training programs should integrate culturally responsive methods and immersive experiences. Future research should focus on long-term impacts to guide inclusive educational policies.

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