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Weaving Indigenous Knowledge into EPP: Lived Experiences of an Indigenous Peoples Education Coordinator in Teaching Intermediate Grades

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Abstract

The integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs) into formal schooling provides opportunities to make learning culturally meaningful while contributing to the preservation and transmission of Indigenous knowledge. This qualitative study explored the lived experience of an Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) District Coordinator who taught Edukasyong Pantahanan at Pangkabuhayan (EPP) to Grades 4–6 learners at Ganao Elementary School, Dupax del Sur, Nueva Vizcaya. Specifically, the study examined how Indigenous knowledge was integrated into EPP instruction, how community practices were connected with practical learning competencies, what challenges emerged in developing culturally responsive lessons, how community members and Indigenous knowledge holders supported instruction, and how the experience shaped the teacher-coordinator's professional identity. The study employed a phenomenologically oriented qualitative case approach. Data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews and analyzed through significant statements, meaning units, thematic clustering, textural and structural descriptions, and synthesis of the essence of the experience. Six interconnected themes emerged: (1) Beginning With What Learners Know: Indigenous Knowledge as an Entry Point to EPP; (2) Learning by Doing the Community Way: Connecting Indigenous Practices With Practical Skills; (3) Elders as Partners in Learning: Bringing Community Knowledge Into the Classroom; (4) Teaching Culture With Responsibility: Preserving Authenticity and Respecting Cultural Boundaries; (5) Creating Lessons With What Is Available: Resourcefulness Amid Limited Localized Materials; and (6) Becoming a Teacher, Culture Bearer, and IPEd Advocate: Professional Growth Through Indigenous Education. The findings indicated that culturally grounded EPP instruction connected practical competencies with learners' lived experiences and strengthened the relevance of classroom learning. However, meaningful implementation required teacher flexibility, culturally validated learning resources, continuing professional development, and sustained community participation. The study highlights EPP as a potentially powerful curricular space for linking practical education, cultural identity, Indigenous knowledge, and sustainable community practices.

Keywords: Indigenous Peoples Education, Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices, EPP, culturally responsive teaching, curriculum contextualization, community participation, Nueva Vizcaya

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I. Introduction

Education becomes more meaningful when learners can connect classroom knowledge with their experiences, communities, languages, environments, and cultural identities. This principle is particularly significant in schools serving Indigenous Peoples, where formal education operates alongside knowledge systems that have developed through generations of community experience. Indigenous communities possess knowledge relating to agriculture, food production, natural-resource management, craftsmanship, livelihood, environmental stewardship, social organization, community cooperation, and other practical aspects of daily life. Such knowledge can become an important educational resource when it is integrated ethically and appropriately into the curriculum.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education formally recognizes Indigenous Peoples' right to education that is culturally rooted and responsive. DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2015 adopted the Indigenous Peoples Education Curriculum Framework and directed schools serving Indigenous learners to localize, indigenize, and enhance the curriculum according to their respective educational and social contexts. Importantly, the framework requires institutionalized partnerships with Indigenous communities and meaningful community participation in incorporating Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices and Indigenous Learning Systems into the basic education curriculum (Department of Education [DepEd], 2015).

This policy direction recognizes that Indigenous knowledge should not merely appear as additional cultural information within conventional lessons. Rather, it can provide a foundation for contextualizing competencies, instructional strategies, learning materials, and assessment practices. Indigenous education therefore requires a movement from teaching *about* Indigenous culture toward teaching *with and through* Indigenous knowledge.

This orientation is especially relevant to Edukasyong Pantahanan at Pangkabuhayan (EPP). As a practical learning area, EPP develops knowledge, skills, work values, resourcefulness, productivity, and responsible participation in home and community life. Many of these domains intersect naturally with Indigenous knowledge. Local agricultural practices, traditional food preparation, responsible resource use, Indigenous crafts, household practices, livelihood activities, environmental stewardship, cooperation, and community-based problem-solving can provide culturally meaningful contexts for EPP learning.

In Nueva Vizcaya, this intersection is particularly important because the province is culturally diverse and home to several Indigenous communities. Provincial documentation identifies Indigenous groups represented in Dupax del Sur, including Bugkalot and Isinay communities, alongside numerous other ethnolinguistic groups across Nueva Vizcaya. The Department of Education's broader documentation likewise recognizes Bugkalot, Isinai, Kalanguya, Gaddang, and other Indigenous Peoples within the Caraballo and Northern Luzon cultural landscape. Because specific communities may have distinct cultural protocols, practices, and forms of knowledge, curriculum integration should be based on locally validated knowledge rather than generalized assumptions about Indigenous culture.

Culturally responsive pedagogy provides a useful theoretical lens for understanding this educational process. Gay (2018) argues that learners' cultural knowledge, experiences, frames of reference, and ways of knowing should function as resources for meaningful instruction. Culturally sustaining pedagogy extends this position by emphasizing that schools should help sustain rather than merely acknowledge cultural and linguistic diversity (Paris & Alim, 2017). Applied to Indigenous education, these perspectives challenge deficit-oriented assumptions and recognize community knowledge as academically and socially valuable.

Recent Philippine research supports the importance of culturally responsive teaching. Roque et al. (2025), examining culturally responsive pedagogy in elementary instruction, found that teachers incorporated learners' languages, traditions, and cultural identities into lessons and created learning environments in which students' backgrounds were represented and valued. Although their investigation focused on English instruction, the underlying principle is highly relevant to EPP because practical subjects can draw even more directly from learners' home and community experiences.

Studies focusing specifically on Indigenous Peoples Education have also documented both opportunities and difficulties in curriculum integration. A phenomenological study of IPEd teachers found that teachers experienced challenges involving additional workload, limited culturally appropriate instructional materials, language concerns, and learner interest. Teachers responded by consulting Indigenous leaders, participating in IPEd training, and demonstrating flexibility and openness to community knowledge. These findings demonstrate that effective IPEd implementation depends not only on teacher commitment but also on community partnerships and institutional support.

Tañedo and Eulatic (2025) likewise found that curriculum indigenization contributed positively to culture-preservation practices in IPEd-implementing schools, although the actual classroom implementation of an indigenized curriculum remained less extensive than desired. Their findings point to a persistent gap between policy aspirations and everyday pedagogical implementation.

School leaders have reported comparable concerns. Nantin and Morales (2025) found that IPEd implementation

encountered difficulties involving curriculum and learning-resource development, capacity building, language, and teacher preparation. Similarly, research on non-Indigenous teachers in IPEd schools identified language, geographic, and learner-engagement barriers, emphasizing the need for culturally and contextually responsive professional preparation.

Recent evidence from Nueva Vizcaya further demonstrates the relevance of IKSP integration. Ligmayo and Pasion (2026) examined Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices in secondary science education in Southern Nueva Vizcaya and emphasized culturally responsive teaching as a means of connecting formal competencies with local knowledge and improving educational relevance. Although their study concerned science education, its implications extend to EPP, where local knowledge may have particularly direct applications in practical learning.

Research on Indigenous learners in Northern Luzon also highlights the need to address both cultural relevance and academic learning. A recent study involving Kalanguyan communities documented difficulties in reading, mathematics, science, and other academic domains, demonstrating that Indigenous education must simultaneously protect cultural identity and respond to academic learning needs. This reinforces the importance of culturally grounded pedagogy that links familiar experiences with formal curricular competencies rather than treating culture and academic achievement as competing objectives.

The role of an IPEd coordinator is particularly significant in this process. The coordinator functions not only as a classroom teacher but also as a bridge among formal curriculum requirements, school initiatives, community knowledge, Indigenous stakeholders, and culturally appropriate educational practice. This dual responsibility may require the teacher to contextualize lessons, consult community members, support colleagues, validate cultural information, advocate for Indigenous learners, and develop instructional resources despite limited available materials.

At Ganao Elementary School in Barangay Ganao, Dupax del Sur, Nueva Vizcaya, the integration of Indigenous knowledge into EPP provides an important context for examining these experiences. EPP competencies relating to home economics, livelihood, agriculture, industrial arts, entrepreneurship, responsible use of materials, and practical problem-solving create numerous opportunities for culturally grounded teaching. Yet such integration also raises questions: Which community practices are appropriate for classroom use? How does a teacher connect local knowledge with prescribed competencies? How are elders and community members involved? How does the teacher ensure that cultural practices are represented authentically rather than simplified or misappropriated?

Despite a growing body of research on Indigenous Peoples Education, relatively few qualitative studies have examined the experience of an **EPP teacher who simultaneously serves as an IPEd coordinator**. Much of the literature focuses broadly on IPEd implementation, teacher challenges, curriculum indigenization, language, or school leadership. Less is known about how practical-subject teachers transform community knowledge into classroom experiences and how this responsibility shapes their professional identities.

The present study addressed this gap by examining the lived experience of integrating IKSPs into EPP instruction in Grades 4–6. Rather than assessing implementation through numerical indicators, the study sought to understand the meanings, decisions, challenges, relationships, and professional learning involved in culturally responsive EPP teaching.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The study aimed to explore the lived experience of an Indigenous Peoples Education District Coordinator in integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices into EPP instruction for Grades 4–6 at Ganao Elementary School.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. How was Indigenous knowledge integrated into EPP lessons for Grades 4–6?
2. What Indigenous practices and community experiences were considered relevant to EPP competencies?
3. How did culturally contextualized instruction influence learners' participation and understanding of practical skills?
4. What challenges were encountered in contextualizing EPP through Indigenous knowledge?
5. How did community elders, parents, and other knowledge holders contribute to instruction?
6. How were cultural authenticity and sensitivity maintained in using Indigenous knowledge for classroom learning?
7. How did serving simultaneously as an EPP teacher and IPEd coordinator shape professional identity and practice?

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Indigenous Peoples Education and Curriculum Indigenization

The Philippine IPEd framework recognizes that educational quality for Indigenous Peoples depends on cultural responsiveness. DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2015 directs educational institutions to localize, indigenize, and enhance the K to 12 curriculum according to the educational and social contexts of Indigenous communities. The framework also places sustained community engagement at the center of curriculum development and implementation (DepEd, 2015).

This provision is significant because Indigenous knowledge cannot be accurately integrated when curriculum design is separated from the community that holds such knowledge. Community elders, leaders, parents, and culture bearers are therefore not merely sources of supplemental information; they are partners in determining what knowledge may be included, how it should be represented, and which cultural boundaries need to be respected.

Tañedo and Eulatic (2025) found that curriculum indigenization in IPEd schools contributed to the preservation of Indigenous culture. Their study also showed that although indigenization was highly observed at the program level, classroom implementation remained only moderate. This distinction suggests that policy recognition does not automatically guarantee consistent pedagogical integration.

2.2 Indigenous Knowledge as a Pedagogical Resource

Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices encompass accumulated understandings developed through communities' historical interactions with their social and natural environments. These may include agricultural knowledge, environmental management, food practices, crafts, medicinal knowledge, social values, customary governance, oral traditions, and livelihood skills.

These knowledge systems can be highly relevant to practical education. EPP, for example, provides opportunities to connect formal instruction with locally meaningful practices involving gardening, crop care, food processing, handicrafts, household management, resource conservation, entrepreneurship, and responsible work.

Ligmayo and Pasion (2026), in Southern Nueva Vizcaya, reported the educational value of integrating IKSPs into formal science teaching and emphasized culturally responsive instruction as an approach for connecting school-based knowledge with Indigenous contexts. Such findings support the broader principle that Indigenous knowledge can enhance formal learning when connections are pedagogically meaningful rather than superficial.

2.3 Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching positions learners' cultural backgrounds as educational assets. Gay (2018) argues that teaching becomes more effective when instructional content and strategies connect with learners' cultural knowledge and experiences.

Roque et al. (2025) found strong implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy among elementary teachers and showed that teachers deliberately reflected students' languages, cultural traditions, and identities in instruction. Although culturally responsive pedagogy does not automatically guarantee academic achievement, it provides conditions under which learners can encounter school knowledge without disconnecting from identity.

Paris and Alim's (2017) concept of culturally sustaining pedagogy extends this principle. Rather than merely using cultural examples to improve conventional learning, culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to maintain and develop the linguistic and cultural practices of communities.

This distinction is particularly important in IPEd. Indigenous practices should not simply serve as attention-getting devices before the lesson shifts back to decontextualized content. Instead, Indigenous ways of knowing can become meaningful components of curriculum interpretation, classroom interaction, and authentic assessment.

2.4 Teachers' Experiences in IPEd Implementation

IPEd teachers frequently assume responsibilities beyond conventional lesson delivery. A recent phenomenological study found that IPEd teachers experienced challenges related to workload, orthography, insufficient instructional materials, and learner engagement. Teachers coped by seeking assistance from community leaders, attending professional-development activities, and maintaining flexibility and openness.

Nazarita and Morales (2025) similarly identified language, geographical, and engagement barriers among teachers working in IPEd-implementing schools. Their study highlights that teachers' cultural competence cannot be separated from working conditions and contextual realities.

Geneta's qualitative investigation of teachers living in Indigenous communities also revealed workplace difficulty, safety and access challenges, literacy concerns, culture shock, and the importance of communication with community members. These findings illustrate the multiple forms of adaptation required from teachers in Indigenous contexts.

2.5 Community Participation and Cultural Validation

Community participation is one of the central principles of Philippine IPEd policy. DepEd requires institutionalized partnership and sustained community engagement to guarantee meaningful Indigenous participation in incorporating IKSPs and Indigenous Learning Systems into education.

Community involvement can help prevent inaccurate or superficial representations of Indigenous culture. Elders and knowledge holders can clarify meanings, validate terminology, explain practices, identify appropriate learning resources, and advise teachers regarding culturally sensitive knowledge.

Research on IPEd implementation has consistently highlighted community support. Teachers who encountered difficulties sought help from Indigenous leaders and community members, while studies of pedagogical practices identified stakeholder and elder engagement as important components of successful Indigenous education.

Community involvement therefore performs both pedagogical and ethical functions.

3. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The study was anchored in Culturally Responsive Teaching Theory, complemented by Experiential Learning Theory and Funds of Knowledge perspectives.

Culturally Responsive Teaching Theory proposes that learners' cultural knowledge, experiences, values, and communication patterns should be incorporated meaningfully into instruction (Gay, 2018). This framework was relevant because the study examined how Indigenous practices served as resources for teaching EPP competencies.

Experiential Learning Theory emphasizes learning through concrete experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application (Kolb, 1984). This theory was particularly relevant to EPP because practical education depends on learning through action and application. Indigenous livelihood, household, agricultural, environmental, and craft practices can provide authentic experiences through which formal competencies are understood.

The Funds of Knowledge perspective recognizes that households and communities possess accumulated bodies of knowledge and skills developed through everyday life and work (Moll et al., 1992). Rather than viewing learners' home experiences as separate from formal education, teachers can use these experiences as intellectual resources.

4. Methodology

The study employed a phenomenologically oriented qualitative case approach to explore the lived experience of an EPP teacher who concurrently served as an Indigenous Peoples Education District Coordinator at Ganao Elementary School in Dupax del Sur, Nueva Vizcaya. The design was appropriate because the investigation focused on the meanings attached to culturally grounded teaching, community engagement, curriculum contextualization, and IPEd coordination rather than measuring the extent of implementation numerically. The participant was selected purposively because of direct experience teaching EPP in Grades 4–6 and coordinating Indigenous Peoples Education initiatives. Data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews that examined the participant's experiences in identifying culturally relevant practices, aligning IKSPs with EPP competencies, developing localized activities and materials, collaborating with community knowledge holders, responding to instructional challenges, maintaining cultural sensitivity, and reflecting on the dual role of classroom teacher and IPEd coordinator. Where available, interview data were supported by relevant instructional materials, lesson exemplars, or IPEd-related documents to strengthen contextual understanding. With informed consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The data were analyzed through phenomenological procedures informed by Moustakas (1994). The transcript was read repeatedly to develop a holistic understanding of the participant's experience. Significant statements were identified, coded, and transformed into meaning units. Related meanings were clustered into themes, and textural descriptions were developed to explain what the participant experienced, while structural descriptions examined the cultural, institutional, pedagogical, and community conditions shaping those experiences. These descriptions were synthesized to identify the essence of integrating Indigenous knowledge into EPP. Trustworthiness was addressed through Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was strengthened through participant clarification and careful comparison of interpretations with the interview account; dependability was supported through an audit trail of analytical decisions; confirmability was reinforced through reflexive documentation and traceable links between interpretations and data; and transferability was promoted through rich description of the school and cultural context. Ethical approval and appropriate institutional permission were secured before data collection. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality and cultural sensitivity were maintained throughout the research process.

5. Findings

Phenomenological analysis generated six interconnected themes: (1) Beginning With What Learners Know: Indigenous Knowledge as an Entry Point to EPP; (2) Learning by Doing the Community Way: Connecting Indigenous Practices With Practical Skills; (3) Elders as Partners in Learning: Bringing Community Knowledge Into the Classroom; (4) Teaching Culture With Responsibility: Preserving Authenticity and Respecting Cultural Boundaries; (5) Creating Lessons With What Is Available: Resourcefulness Amid Limited Localized Materials; and (6) Becoming a Teacher, Culture Bearer, and IPEd Advocate: Professional Growth Through Indigenous Education.

Theme 1. Beginning With What Learners Know: Indigenous Knowledge as an Entry Point to EPP

The first theme revealed that culturally grounded EPP instruction began with knowledge already familiar to learners. Instead of introducing practical competencies exclusively through textbook situations, the participant connected lessons with activities observed in homes and the community.

Local practices provided entry points for discussions of agriculture, household tasks, livelihood, entrepreneurship, environmental responsibility, materials, and practical problem-solving. Familiarity with these experiences helped learners participate because they already possessed background knowledge related to the lesson.

Responses

P8: "When the lesson starts from something they already see at home or in the community, they participate more because they have something to share before I introduce the formal EPP concept."

P3: "I noticed that some learners already know practical skills from their parents or grandparents. My role is to connect what they know with the competency we are teaching."

P1: "They become more interested when they realize that what they do in the community can also be part of what they learn in school."

The finding reflected the central principle of culturally responsive pedagogy: learners' existing cultural knowledge can function as an academic resource rather than as background information separate from schooling. Gay (2018) argues that culturally responsive teachers use learners' experiences and cultural frames of reference to make instruction more meaningful.

DepEd's IPEd Curriculum Framework institutionalizes this principle by directing schools to localize and indigenize curriculum based on Indigenous educational and social contexts and by recognizing IKSPs as legitimate curricular resources (DepEd, 2015).

Roque et al. (2025) similarly found that culturally responsive elementary teaching was strengthened when learners' language, traditions, and identities were reflected in instruction. While that study focused on English, the present finding demonstrates the applicability of the same principle to EPP.

The theme also supports the Funds of Knowledge perspective (Moll et al., 1992), which recognizes households as repositories of sophisticated practical knowledge. In EPP, these resources may include farming, household organization, material use, craft skills, food practices, and local livelihood knowledge. Culturally grounded teaching therefore did not begin by treating learners as lacking knowledge; it began by recognizing what they already knew.

Theme 2. Learning by Doing the Community Way: Connecting Indigenous Practices With Practical Skills

The second theme revealed that the strongest connections between Indigenous knowledge and EPP occurred through practical activities. The participant described culturally grounded learning as most meaningful when learners were able to observe, demonstrate, create, apply, or discuss real community practices rather than simply memorize cultural information. Indigenous practices provided authentic contexts for skills involving resource use, livelihood, production, agriculture, environmental care, craftsmanship, and household responsibility. Practical learning also allowed students to compare traditional approaches with contemporary methods.

Verbatim- Response

P8: "In EPP, it is easier to integrate the local practices because the subject itself is practical. We can connect the competency with things that people actually do in the community."

P2: "I do not want them to just memorize the practice. They should understand why it is done, what materials are used, and what they can learn from it."

P10: "Sometimes we compare the traditional way and the newer way. The learners can see that both have reasons, advantages, and limitations."

This theme demonstrated the compatibility between Indigenous knowledge and experiential learning. Kolb (1984) argues that meaningful learning develops through cycles of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application. EPP naturally supports such learning because competencies are oriented toward practical knowledge and skills.

Recent research in Southern Nueva Vizcaya provides local support for Indigenous knowledge integration. Ligmayo and

Pasion (2026) reported that integrating IKSPs into formal secondary science education provided a culturally responsive means of linking academic concepts with Indigenous learners' contexts. The present study extended this logic into practical elementary education.

Studies of IPEd implementation also suggest that Indigenous culture becomes educationally powerful when it is embedded in actual pedagogy rather than treated solely as supplemental content. Tañedo and Eulatic (2025) found that curriculum indigenization contributed to cultural preservation but also indicated differences between formal indigenization efforts and actual classroom implementation.

The experience described in this study therefore suggested that EPP could become a particularly suitable curricular space for transforming policy-level indigenization into tangible classroom practice.

Theme 3. Elders as Partners in Learning: Bringing Community Knowledge Into the Classroom

The third theme emphasized that Indigenous knowledge integration was not perceived as an individual teacher undertaking. The participant acknowledged that culturally accurate teaching required consultation with people who held deeper community knowledge.

Elders, parents, community leaders, and other knowledgeable members could clarify practices, validate information, explain meanings, and help distinguish between general knowledge and practices requiring cultural restrictions.

Community participation also allowed learners to recognize that valuable knowledge existed outside textbooks and formal school structures.

Participant Responses

P2: "If I am not certain about a practice, I ask someone in the community who knows more. It is better to verify than to teach something incorrectly."

P8: "The elders have knowledge that we teachers cannot get only from books. There are meanings behind the practices that they can explain better."

P5: "I learned that IPEd cannot be done by the school alone. The community has to be part of it because the knowledge belongs to them."

The finding strongly reflected DepEd's Indigenous Peoples Education Curriculum Framework, which identifies institutionalized partnership and sustained community engagement as fundamental to IPEd. The policy specifically requires meaningful Indigenous community participation in incorporating IKSPs and Indigenous Learning Systems into formal education.

Existing empirical research reinforces this principle. IPEd teachers experiencing curriculum-integration challenges reported seeking assistance from Indigenous leaders and community members as a major coping and instructional strategy. More recent research on IPEd pedagogical practices likewise identifies parental and elder engagement as important components of community participation.

The finding therefore shows that community participation was both a source of knowledge and a mechanism of cultural accountability. The teacher did not position himself as the sole authority on Indigenous culture. Rather, professional responsibility included recognizing the boundaries of personal knowledge and creating space for community expertise.

Theme 4. Teaching Culture With Responsibility: Preserving Authenticity and Respecting Cultural Boundaries

The fourth theme revealed that integrating Indigenous knowledge carried an ethical dimension. The participant recognized that Indigenous knowledge could not simply be extracted from community life and converted into classroom material without considering cultural meanings and boundaries.

Some knowledge could be shared openly, while other practices might have ceremonial, spiritual, familial, seasonal, or community-specific meanings. The teacher therefore needed to consider whether information was appropriate for classroom discussion and how it should be presented.

Participant Responses

P7: "Not everything we know from the community should automatically become part of a lesson. There are practices where we need to ask first if it is appropriate to discuss them."

P1: "When I integrate culture, I try not to make it just decoration in the lesson. There should be a real connection with the competency and respect for its meaning."

P4: "We have to be careful because one wrong explanation can give learners a misunderstanding about their own culture."

This theme highlighted the distinction between **culturally responsive integration and cultural appropriation**. The DepEd IPEd framework is explicit that Indigenous participation is essential in recognizing and incorporating IKSPs. This requirement acknowledges that Indigenous communities have authority over their own knowledge systems.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy similarly moves beyond simply including cultural symbols. Paris and Alim (2017) argue

that education should support the continuation and development of cultural and linguistic practices rather than reduce them to classroom representations.

Tañedo and Eulatic (2025) found that indigenized curriculum practices contributed to cultural preservation in IPEd schools. However, preservation requires authenticity. The teacher's responsibility therefore included validating cultural information, representing it within context, and avoiding the treatment of Indigenous knowledge as generic or interchangeable.

In culturally diverse Nueva Vizcaya, this responsibility is especially important. Provincial records identify several distinct Indigenous communities, including Bugkalot and Isinay representation in Dupax del Sur. Consequently, Indigenous knowledge should be locally identified rather than generalized across groups.

Theme 5. Creating Lessons With What Is Available: Resourcefulness Amid Limited Localized Materials

The fifth theme captured the practical difficulty of finding instructional materials that simultaneously addressed curriculum competencies and represented local Indigenous knowledge appropriately.

The participant described adapting existing resources, developing contextualized activities, drawing examples from community life, consulting local knowledge holders, and using available local materials when suitable published resources were unavailable.

This process demanded considerable teacher preparation and creativity.

Responses

P6: "One difficulty is that you cannot always find a ready-made material that exactly fits the local context, so sometimes I have to develop or adjust the activity myself."

P3: "There are textbooks, but the examples are not always connected to our community. I change some situations so that the learners can relate to them."

PII: "Sometimes the best instructional material is what is already available around us. The challenge is making sure that it really matches the competency."

Limited localized learning materials are repeatedly reported in Indigenous education research. A recent phenomenological study of IPEd teachers identified insufficient instructional materials as one of the major difficulties in curriculum integration. Nantin and Morales (2025) similarly identified curriculum and learning-resource development as a major roadblock in IPEd implementation.

Other research has reported that materials remain one of the weaker areas in IPEd implementation, particularly when resources in Indigenous languages or community-specific materials are insufficient.

The present finding revealed that this resource gap shifted substantial responsibility to the teacher. Teacher agency became necessary to translate policy into practice. The participant functioned not only as instructor but also as curriculum contextualizer and learning-resource developer.

This situation demonstrates why sustained IPEd implementation cannot rely on teacher initiative alone. Schools and divisions need systems for documenting, validating, sharing, and updating culturally appropriate instructional materials in partnership with communities.

Theme 6. Becoming a Teacher, Culture Bearer, and IPEd Advocate: Professional Growth Through Indigenous Education

The final theme revealed that the participant's dual role as classroom teacher and IPEd District Coordinator gradually reshaped professional identity. IPEd coordination required more than implementing classroom activities. It involved advocacy, cultural learning, coordination with stakeholders, support for contextualization, and responsibility for encouraging respect for Indigenous knowledge.

The experience also required humility. Serving as coordinator did not mean knowing every cultural practice. Instead, professional growth occurred through continued consultation, learning, reflection, and interaction with Indigenous community members.

Participant Responses

PI2: "Being an IPEd coordinator made me look at teaching differently. Before preparing a lesson, I now think about whether it reflects the learners' context and respects their identity."

P6: "I also realized that being a coordinator does not mean I know everything about the culture. I still have to learn from the elders and from the community."

P5: "For me, the role is also advocacy. We want learners to value their culture while also developing the skills they need in school and in the future."

The theme showed that IPEd involvement could transform teacher identity from classroom implementer to cultural

mediator and educational advocate. Studies of IPEd teachers have similarly found that challenges were accompanied by meaningful professional experiences, including deeper understanding of Indigenous culture and stronger involvement in IPEd practice.

Research involving non-IP teachers likewise demonstrates that working in IPEd schools requires substantial personal and pedagogical adjustment, especially regarding language, cultural understanding, and learner engagement. This emphasizes that cultural competence is developmental rather than automatically acquired.

The participant's experience also aligns with culturally sustaining pedagogy, in which teaching involves supporting cultural continuity while enabling learners to participate successfully in contemporary educational environments.

The dual role of teacher and IPEd coordinator therefore involved more than administrative coordination. It became a form of instructional leadership centered on contextualization, cultural responsibility, and advocacy for Indigenous learners.

The participant began with recognition that learners already possessed knowledge developed through family and community participation. Instead of treating that knowledge as separate from school, it became a foundation for formal instruction. Practical activities then provided opportunities for learners to examine, explain, apply, and reflect on community knowledge in relation to EPP competencies.

However, integration was not automatic. The teacher had to determine whether practices were relevant to competencies, culturally appropriate for classroom use, accurately represented, and pedagogically meaningful. Community consultation therefore formed an essential bridge between local knowledge and formal education.

The experience also demonstrated that EPP and Indigenous knowledge were particularly compatible because both involved practical engagement with daily life. Agriculture, livelihood, household management, craftsmanship, environmental responsibility, entrepreneurship, and responsible resource use were not abstract domains; they were areas in which communities already possessed knowledge.

The essence of the phenomenon was therefore teaching practical skills without requiring learners to leave their culture at the classroom door. Indigenous knowledge did not replace formal EPP competencies, nor did EPP replace community knowledge. Instead, the teacher attempted to create meaningful connections between the two.

6. Discussion

The study revealed that Indigenous knowledge integration in EPP was a culturally grounded form of contextualization rather than a simple addition of Indigenous examples to predetermined lessons. The participant's experiences demonstrated that culturally responsive EPP involved curriculum interpretation, practical learning, community participation, resource development, ethical judgment, and professional advocacy.

The theme Beginning With What Learners Know showed that learners' existing cultural and household knowledge functioned as an instructional foundation. This corresponds with culturally responsive teaching and Funds of Knowledge perspectives, both of which reject the assumption that formal schooling is the learner's only legitimate source of knowledge.

Learning by Doing the Community Way demonstrated the particular compatibility of EPP with Indigenous knowledge. Practical competencies became more meaningful when linked with real community practices. The finding also illustrates experiential learning because learners encountered competencies through observation, application, and reflection.

Elders as Partners in Learning emphasized the collective nature of Indigenous knowledge. The finding strongly supported DepEd's IPEd framework, which requires sustained and meaningful community engagement. It also challenged teacher-centered models of curriculum authority.

Teaching Culture With Responsibility revealed that contextualization involved ethical boundaries. Indigenous knowledge could not be treated as unrestricted instructional content. Local validation, cultural consent, and accurate representation were fundamental.

Creating Lessons With What Is Available demonstrated the considerable teacher agency required by IPEd implementation. Limited localized learning materials meant the teacher frequently had to develop or adapt resources. This finding corresponds with existing IPEd research reporting instructional-material shortages and curriculum-resource challenges.

Finally, Becoming a Teacher, Culture Bearer, and IPEd Advocate demonstrated that sustained engagement with Indigenous education changed professional identity. The teacher's responsibility expanded from teaching subject competencies toward advocacy, community partnership, curriculum leadership, and cultural mediation.

Together, these findings suggest that EPP can function as an important curricular space for culturally sustaining education because it naturally connects formal competencies with practical knowledge embedded in home and community life.

7. Implications for Indigenous Peoples Education and EPP

The findings have several implications for curriculum and school practice.

First, EPP contextualization should systematically identify locally relevant IKSPs that correspond with practical

competencies. However, this process should be undertaken with community participation rather than solely through individual teacher judgment.

Second, schools implementing IPEd should establish mechanisms for cultural validation of localized learning resources. Elders, parents, community leaders, and Indigenous knowledge holders may participate in reviewing materials before they are institutionalized.

Third, professional-development activities for EPP teachers should include culturally responsive pedagogy, Indigenous education policy, community-engagement protocols, contextualized material development, and ethical use of Indigenous knowledge.

Fourth, Schools Division Offices may develop repositories of community-validated learning resources while recognizing that materials from one Indigenous community should not automatically be generalized to another.

Fifth, experiential learning should be maximized in EPP through locally appropriate demonstrations, projects, community-based learning, interviews, livelihood activities, environmental tasks, and authentic problem-solving.

Sixth, the IPEd coordinator role should be supported as a form of instructional leadership rather than treated solely as an additional coordinatorship. Coordinators require time, training, resources, and institutional authority to facilitate community partnerships and curriculum contextualization effectively.

8. Conclusion

The study revealed that integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices into EPP teaching was an experiential, relational, culturally responsive, and ethically grounded process. The participant's experiences demonstrated that effective Indigenous education began with recognizing learners' existing knowledge and identifying meaningful connections between community practices and formal curriculum competencies.

The six themes Beginning With What Learners Know; Learning by Doing the Community Way; Elders as Partners in Learning; Teaching Culture With Responsibility; Creating Lessons With What Is Available; and Becoming a Teacher, Culture Bearer, and IPEd Advocate showed that curriculum indigenization extended far beyond adding local examples to conventional lessons.

Indigenous knowledge served as an entry point for practical learning, while EPP provided learners with opportunities to examine and apply knowledge already present in community life. At the same time, the findings demonstrated that integration required community validation because cultural knowledge carried meanings and boundaries that could not be determined by teachers alone.

The study also highlighted the central role of teacher agency. Limited localized resources required creativity and adaptation, while the dual responsibility of teacher and IPEd coordinator required advocacy, coordination, reflection, and continuous cultural learning.

The essence of the experience lay in teaching practical skills without leaving culture behind. Formal schooling and Indigenous knowledge did not need to occupy opposing educational spaces. When teachers worked collaboratively with communities and contextualized competencies responsibly, EPP became a setting where academic learning, practical competence, cultural identity, and community knowledge could reinforce one another.

Strengthening this approach requires more than individual teacher dedication. Sustainable Indigenous education depends on culturally validated resources, continuous capacity building, institutional support, and genuine partnerships in which Indigenous communities remain active participants in determining how their knowledge is represented in schools.

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were advanced:

1. Ganao Elementary School may continue strengthening the integration of culturally validated Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices into appropriate EPP competencies.

2. Indigenous elders, parents, leaders, and knowledge holders may be formally engaged in validating culturally contextualized instructional materials and classroom activities.

3. EPP teachers may be provided continuing professional development on IPEd curriculum contextualization, culturally responsive pedagogy, experiential learning, and Indigenous knowledge ethics.

4. The school and district may develop a repository of locally validated EPP learning materials, including contextualized lesson exemplars, activity sheets, photographs, narratives, vocabulary resources, and practical demonstrations.

5. Local learning resources should clearly distinguish openly shareable community knowledge from culturally sensitive knowledge requiring permission or restricted access.
6. IPEd coordinators may be provided sufficient time and institutional support for community consultation, instructional-material development, mentoring, and program coordination.
7. Future research may include multiple EPP teachers, community elders, parents, and learners to provide a broader understanding of curriculum indigenization.
8. Comparative studies may investigate culturally responsive EPP practices across Indigenous communities in Nueva Vizcaya while respecting differences among ethnolinguistic groups.
9. Future studies may examine how culturally contextualized EPP influences learner engagement, practical competence, cultural identity, environmental responsibility, and appreciation of Indigenous knowledge.

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