ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26oct1287

Leading for Indigenous Learners: The Lived Experiences of School Heads in Advancing Culturally Responsive Education

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Publication Date: 2026/10/31

Abstract: This study explored the lived experiences of school heads in advancing culturally responsive education for Indigenous learners in Marilog North District, Davao City. It specifically examined their experiences, coping strategies, and educational insights and meanings derived from leading culturally responsive practices. A phenomenological research design was employed involving ten purposively selected school heads with direct leadership experience in schools serving Indigenous learners. Data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews and analyzed using the Ritchie and Spencer Framework Method. Findings revealed four themes describing the participants' lived experiences: Cultural Responsiveness, Contextualized Learning, Community Partnership, and Contextual Challenges. Their coping experiences generated four themes: Collaboration, Adaptability, Professional Learning, and Resilience. Their educational insights and meanings were reflected in four themes: Cultural Respect, Servant Leadership, Shared Leadership, and Leadership Growth. The findings indicated that culturally responsive leadership involved understanding Indigenous contexts, making educational practices relevant to learners' realities, working collaboratively with communities, and responding adaptively to contextual challenges. The study further highlighted that school heads developed deeper appreciation for Indigenous identity, community knowledge, shared responsibility, and continuous professional growth. The study underscores the importance of strengthening culturally responsive leadership, teacher capacity, school-community partnerships, and institutional support to promote inclusive and meaningful education for Indigenous learners.

Keywords*: Culturally Responsive Education; Indigenous Learners; School Heads, Phenomenology; Educational Leadership; Indigenous Peoples Education.*

How to Cite: Janice C. Dumanayos (2026) Leading for Indigenous Learners: The Lived Experiences of School Heads in Advancing Culturally Responsive Education. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 11(10), 2396-2411. https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26oct1287

I. INTRODUCTION

➢ *Background of the Study*

Despite growing recognition of Indigenous Peoples' rights to culturally relevant and inclusive education, a gap remains between policy expectations and actual implementation at the school level. Culturally responsive education goes beyond integrating cultural content into lessons; it requires curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, leadership, and school-community relationships to recognize Indigenous identities, languages, traditions, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs). School heads play a vital role in translating policies into practice by supporting teachers, mobilizing resources, strengthening community partnerships, and establishing culturally inclusive learning environments.

Globally, studies have identified challenges in Indigenous education concerning curriculum relevance, leadership preparation, Indigenous representation, institutional structures, and schools' capacity to address cultural contexts (Huang & Yang, 2020). Longmuir et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of developing culturally responsive leadership capacity, while Williams (2020) highlighted culturally sustaining leadership in supporting Indigenous learners. Similarly, Burgess et al. (2023) underscored the significance of culturally relevant curricula, teacher development, community relationships, and learner participation. These findings demonstrate that advancing Indigenous education requires leadership practices that extend beyond administrative responsibilities.

In the Philippines, the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program provides a policy foundation for culturally responsive education. DepEd Order No. 62, s. 2011 established the National Indigenous Peoples Education Policy Framework, while DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2015 adopted the Indigenous Peoples Education Curriculum Framework. These policies promote curriculum contextualization, localization, integration of IKSPs, and school-community engagement. However, challenges involving language, curriculum contextualization, instructional materials, teacher preparedness, and learner readiness remain evident (Aporbo, 2022; Buenaflor et al.,

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26oct1287

2023). These concerns suggest that policy provisions alone cannot ensure consistent implementation without adequate leadership and institutional support.

In the Davao Region, Aporbo (2022) documented challenges faced by teachers in Indigenous classrooms in Davao de Oro, particularly in language and curriculum implementation. Lugatiman and Bauyot (2024) explored the lived experiences of school leaders in Indigenous People Integrated Schools in Talaingod, Davao del Norte, highlighting their challenges, coping mechanisms, stakeholder engagement, and leadership support. Although these studies provide valuable insights, their findings are situated within specific communities and do not fully capture the experiences of school heads in other Indigenous educational contexts.

This research gap is particularly relevant to Marilog North District, Davao City, where schools serve culturally diverse communities, including Indigenous learners. School heads are expected to balance curriculum requirements with cultural, linguistic, instructional, and community needs. They must guide teachers in contextualizing instruction, engage Indigenous communities, mobilize resources, and ensure that school programs respect Indigenous identities and knowledge. However, limited research has specifically explored how school heads in Marilog North District experience these responsibilities, cope with implementation challenges, and derive educational insights and meanings from their leadership experiences.

To address this contextual and experiential gap, the study employed a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and educational insights and meanings of school heads in advancing culturally responsive education. It examined how they navigated leadership responsibilities, responded to challenges, and interpreted their experiences within their educational contexts. The findings aimed to provide context-specific insights for strengthening culturally responsive school leadership, teacher support, school-community partnerships, curriculum contextualization, and the implementation of Indigenous Peoples Education in Marilog North District.

➢ *Purpose of the Study*

This phenomenological study aimed to explore and understand the lived experiences of school heads in advancing culturally responsive education for Indigenous learners in Marilog North District, Davao City. It focused on how school heads fulfilled their leadership responsibilities in recognizing Indigenous learners' cultural identities, languages, traditions, Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs), and community contexts through curriculum contextualization, instructional support, teacher development, resource mobilization, and school-community collaboration. The study also examined how school heads coped with challenges related to cultural and linguistic differences, learning resources, teacher preparedness, community participation, and balancing educational standards with Indigenous learners' needs. Furthermore, it sought to understand the educational insights and meanings they derived from their experiences, particularly in strengthening culturally responsive leadership, promoting inclusive education, and building meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities. Overall, the study aimed to provide a deeper, context-specific understanding of culturally responsive educational leadership and generate insights that could inform school leadership practices, teacher support and professional development, community engagement, and the implementation of Indigenous Peoples Education in Marilog North District.

➢ *Research Questions*

This study sought to explore and understand the lived experiences of school heads in advancing culturally responsive education for Indigenous learners in Marilog North District, Davao City. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

- What were the lived experiences of school heads in advancing culturally responsive education for Indigenous learners?
- How did school heads cope with the challenges they encountered in advancing culturally responsive education for Indigenous learners?
- What educational insights did school heads derive from their experiences in advancing culturally responsive education for Indigenous learners?

➢ *Theoretical Lens*

The study was anchored on three complementary theoretical lenses aligned with its research questions: Culturally Sustaining Leadership, Adaptive Leadership Theory, and Transcendental Phenomenology. Culturally Sustaining Leadership, as discussed by Williams (2020), guided the exploration of school heads' lived experiences in recognizing and sustaining the cultural identities, languages, knowledge, and traditions of Indigenous learners. Adaptive Leadership Theory, developed by Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009), provided a framework for understanding how school heads coped with challenges related to culture, language, resources, geography, teacher preparedness, and community engagement by adapting their practices and mobilizing support.

Transcendental Phenomenology, particularly the perspective of Moustakas (1994), guided the exploration of the educational insights and meanings school heads derived from their experiences. It emphasized understanding the essence of their experiences and how these shaped their leadership perspectives and commitment to culturally responsive education. Collectively, these three theoretical lenses provided a foundation for examining the study's three dimensions: lived experiences, coping with challenges, and educational insights and meanings in advancing culturally responsive education for Indigenous learners in Marilog North District, Davao City.

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26oct1287

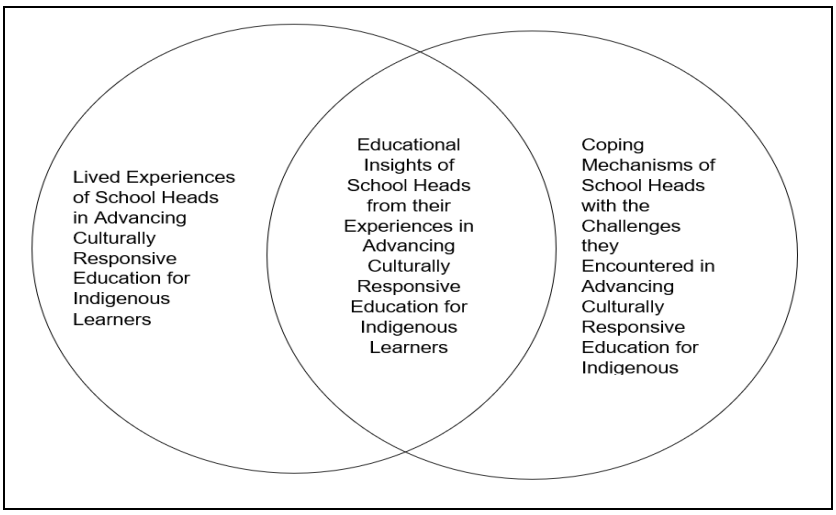


Fig 1 The Conceptual Framewok of the Study

II. METHOD

➢ *Design and Procedure*

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design guided by Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of school heads in advancing culturally responsive education. This design was appropriate because it focused on understanding how school heads experienced culturally responsive leadership, coped with challenges, and derived educational insights and meanings from their experiences. The researcher remained attentive to the participants' descriptions and bracketed preconceived assumptions as far as possible to understand the phenomenon from their perspectives.

The research process involved selecting school heads with direct experience of the phenomenon, orienting them regarding the study's purpose and ethical considerations, and conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interviews were transcribed, reviewed, and analyzed by identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering them into themes aligned with the research questions, and synthesizing textual and structural descriptions. This approach enabled the researcher to understand not only what school heads did but also how they experienced their responsibilities, responded to challenges, and interpreted the meaning of their leadership experiences in promoting culturally responsive education for Indigenous learners.

➢ *Research Participants*

The participants of the study were ten (10) school heads from Marilog North District, Davao City, who had direct experience leading schools serving Indigenous learners and advancing culturally responsive education. They were selected through purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique that identifies information-rich participants based on their relevant knowledge, experience, and involvement in the phenomenon being investigated. To qualify, participants had to be officially assigned to public elementary schools within the district, have leadership experience in Indigenous education, be involved in implementing or supporting culturally responsive education or Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd), and be willing to participate in an in-depth interview and provide informed consent.

School heads without direct experience in leading schools serving Indigenous learners or without substantive involvement in culturally responsive education were excluded to ensure that the data reflected firsthand experiences. For confidentiality, participants were assigned codes P1 to P10, and personally identifying information was excluded from the presentation of findings. The selection of ten participants was consistent with the phenomenological design, which prioritized the depth and richness of participants' experiences rather than statistical representation. Their narratives provided insights into school heads' lived experiences, coping strategies, and educational insights and meanings in advancing culturally responsive education for Indigenous learners in Marilog North District.

➢ *Research Instrument*

The primary research instrument was a researcher-developed semi-structured in-depth interview guide designed to explore the lived experiences, coping strategies, and educational insights and meanings of school heads in advancing culturally responsive education for Indigenous learners in Marilog North District, Davao City. Developed based on the research questions, relevant literature, and theoretical framework, the guide consisted of three sections focusing on participants' leadership experiences, challenges and coping mechanisms, and educational insights and meanings. Each research question was supported by three principal interview questions and corresponding probing questions to encourage detailed responses, concrete examples, and meaningful reflections. The instrument underwent content and expert validation to ensure its clarity, relevance, cultural sensitivity, and alignment with the study's objectives, with revisions incorporated based on the validators' recommendations.

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During data collection, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews using active listening, probing, and follow-up questions to obtain rich descriptions of participants' experiences. With their permission, interviews were audio-recorded, while field notes documented relevant observations, contextual information, and researcher reflections. The recordings were transcribed and reviewed for analysis, with participants identified through codes P1 to P10 to maintain confidentiality. The interview guide served as the primary source of narrative data, providing a structured yet flexible approach to understanding the participants' experiences, responses to challenges, and the meanings they attributed to advancing culturally responsive education for Indigenous learners.

➢ *Data Analysis*

The data analysis was guided by the Framework Method of Ritchie and Spencer (1994), which provided a systematic approach to organizing, coding, comparing, and interpreting the interview narratives of the ten school heads, coded P1 to P10. The analysis followed five stages: familiarization, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting, and mapping and interpretation. The researcher read and reread the transcripts, identified significant statements and recurring patterns, developed codes, and organized the data into a thematic matrix to compare similarities and differences while preserving each participant's experiences. The emerging themes were aligned with the three research questions: lived experiences in advancing culturally responsive education, coping with implementation challenges, and educational insights and meanings derived from leadership experiences. Finally, the researcher examined relationships among themes to understand how school heads' cultural, instructional, linguistic, geographical, and community experiences influenced their coping strategies and shaped their perspectives on culturally responsive leadership for Indigenous learners in Marilog North District, Davao City.

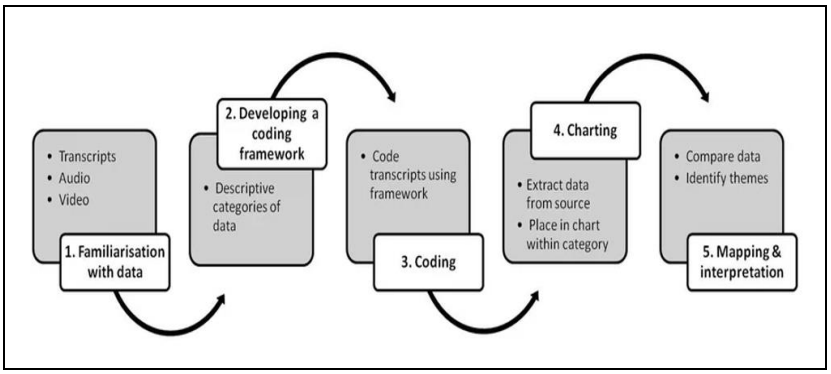


Fig 2 Analytical Framework of the Study

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

➢ *Lived Experiences of School Heads in Advancing Culturally Responsive Education for Indigenous Learners*

The lived experiences of the school heads revealed how they navigated the realities of advancing culturally responsive education for Indigenous learners in Marilog North District, Davao City. Their narratives reflected their efforts to understand Indigenous culture and identity, contextualize learning, build meaningful partnerships with the community, and respond to challenges encountered in practice. These experiences provided insights into how school heads understood and carried out their leadership roles within the cultural and educational contexts of the learners they served. From the participants' accounts, four themes emerged: Cultural Responsiveness, Contextualized Learning, Community Partnership, and Contextual Challenges.

- *Cultural Responsiveness.*

The first theme revealed that school heads viewed understanding Indigenous culture, identity, language, and community circumstances as fundamental to effective leadership. Their experiences indicated that culturally responsive leadership began with listening, learning, and developing sensitivity to the realities of Indigenous learners before making decisions or implementing programs.

✓ *Participant 1 Described this Experience as Follows:*

"My experience has been both challenging and meaningful because I had to understand the culture and situation of our Indigenous learners before making decisions for the school."

✓ *Similarly, Participant 2 stated:*

"I learned that leading Indigenous learners requires patience, cultural sensitivity, and close coordination with the community."

These responses indicate that participants viewed culturally responsive leadership as more than incorporating cultural elements into existing school programs. Instead, they understood it as a continuous process of deepening cultural awareness to guide educational decisions. This approach required school heads to look beyond administrative responsibilities and recognize how learners' cultural identities, languages, family backgrounds, and community experiences influenced their learning needs.

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✓ *This interpretation was reinforced by Participant 9, who emphasized the importance of maintaining learner identity while meeting educational expectations:*

"Leading the school made me more aware of the importance of preserving the learners' identity while helping them meet educational standards."

The response suggests that school heads continually sought to maintain educational standards while preserving the cultural identities of Indigenous learners. This demonstrates a leadership perspective in which academic excellence and cultural preservation were regarded not as conflicting priorities but as complementary aspects of an inclusive and culturally responsive educational environment.

✓ *Participant 6 Further Emphasized the Importance of Listening to the Community:*

"My experience taught me that school leadership involves listening to Indigenous parents and community members before implementing programs."

The finding indicates that listening served as an essential leadership practice, as participants recognized parents and community members as valuable sources of knowledge about learners' circumstances and cultural backgrounds. Rather than relying solely on school personnel to determine appropriate educational programs, school heads acknowledged the importance of community perspectives in making informed decisions.

This finding aligns with Williams' (2020) discussion of culturally sustaining leadership, which emphasizes respecting Indigenous worldviews and ensuring that cultural identities and knowledge are recognized in educational practices. Similarly, Longmuir et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of school leaders' dispositions and behaviors in developing educational approaches responsive to culturally diverse contexts. In the Philippine setting, Ocampo et al. (2021) emphasized participatory processes and empowering approaches in developing culturally grounded Indigenous Peoples Education policies. Aporbo (2022) likewise demonstrated the importance of addressing linguistic and cultural differences through teaching practices that respond to Indigenous learners' backgrounds.

Overall, the participants' experiences suggest that cultural understanding is a fundamental component of effective educational leadership rather than merely an additional competency. For these school heads, leading Indigenous learners required understanding their identities, cultural backgrounds, and community realities to ensure that educational decisions and practices were meaningful, inclusive, and culturally responsive.

- *Contextualized Learning*.

The second theme showed that the participants experienced culturally responsive leadership through efforts to make teaching and learning relevant to the culture, language, environment, and lived experiences of Indigenous learners. School heads described supporting teachers in contextualizing lessons, using familiar examples and vocabulary, incorporating Indigenous knowledge, and adapting learning activities to learners' actual circumstances.

✓ *Participant 3 Stated:*

"One of my major experiences was helping teachers contextualize lessons so that learners could relate the concepts to their own culture and environment."

✓ *Participant 1 Similarly Explained:*

"I encouraged teachers to use familiar local examples and vocabulary."

These responses indicate that school heads regarded curriculum contextualization as an essential strategy for making formal learning relevant and meaningful to Indigenous learners. Their experiences suggest that culturally responsive leadership involved more than complying with educational policies; it required adapting curriculum expectations into learning experiences that reflected learners' cultural backgrounds, local environments, and everyday realities.

✓ *Participant 8 Provided a Related Account:*

"I used contextualized materials that reflected the learners' environment."

✓ *Meanwhile, Participant 9 described providing opportunities for learners to share their cultural experiences in class:*

"I provided opportunities for learners to share their cultural experiences in class."

These responses indicate that contextualization involved more than adapting instructional materials; it also encouraged learners to share their cultural knowledge and experiences during classroom activities. This reflects a shift from treating Indigenous culture as an addition to the curriculum toward recognizing learners' cultural backgrounds as valuable sources of knowledge that enrich the learning process.

✓ *The participants provided specific examples of how this practice was implemented. Participant 2 explained:*

"I allowed learners to explain ideas using their familiar language before expressing them in Filipino or English."

✓ *Participant 3 Recalled:*

"An elder helped us clarify whether a cultural practice was appropriate to include in an activity."

These accounts indicate that curriculum contextualization involved both linguistic responsiveness and cultural validation. Using familiar languages helped improve learners' understanding and participation, while consulting Indigenous elders supported the accurate and respectful representation of cultural knowledge.

This finding aligns with Aporbo (2022), who identified code-switching, the use of learners' native languages,

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translation, and immersion in diverse cultural backgrounds as important strategies for addressing challenges in Indigenous classrooms in Davao de Oro. Similarly, Robiños et al. (2020) found that differences in learners' behaviors and learning styles encouraged teachers of Indigenous learners in Mindoro to adopt learner-centered approaches and promote inclusive education. Quimbo et al. (2023) also proposed a rights-based instructional planning approach for Higaonon learners that prioritizes their cultural contexts and rights. These studies reinforce the importance of adapting educational practices to learners' linguistic, cultural, and community backgrounds rather than relying solely on standardized instruction.

Overall, the participants' narratives suggest that contextualization made education more accessible, relevant, and meaningful to Indigenous learners. School heads played an important role in guiding teachers to connect curriculum standards with learners' lived experiences while ensuring that Indigenous knowledge and cultural identities were respected and valued.

- *Community Partnership.*

The third theme showed that school heads viewed culturally responsive leadership as a collaborative process involving active community participation. Teachers, learners, parents, elders, and other community members were recognized not merely as beneficiaries of school programs but as important partners in decision-making, program development, and identifying learners' needs.

✓ *Participant 10 Expressed this Perspective as Follows:*
"These interactions made me view leadership as a shared responsibility."

✓ *Participant 6 Similarly Stated:*
"These experiences made my leadership more collaborative."

The responses indicate that the participants' leadership perspectives were shaped through their interactions with different stakeholders. Their experiences moved them from a predominantly school-centered understanding of leadership toward a more relational and participatory form of leadership.

✓ *Participant 3 Explained:*
"Parents helped us identify the actual needs of their children."

✓ *Participant 4 added:*
"The community taught me to respect local knowledge and practices."

These accounts demonstrate that parents and community members were regarded as important sources of contextual knowledge. Their involvement helped school heads and teachers understand learners' circumstances that might not be visible within the school setting.

✓ *The significance of community engagement was particularly evident in the participants' descriptions of specific interactions. Participant 1 recalled:*
"A parent explained why a learner was frequently absent, which helped us understand the situation."

✓ *Participant 3 Shared:*
"An elder explained an important cultural practice to us."

✓ *Participant 10 Described a Shift in Leadership Practice:*
"A consultation changed my approach from simply implementing programs to co-planning with stakeholders."

This response highlights a significant shift in how participants understood leadership. Consultation was no longer limited to gaining community support after decisions had been made; instead, it became an integral part of the planning and decision-making process.

This finding aligns with Ocampo et al. (2021), who emphasized participatory policy development and the need for contextualized and empowering approaches in Indigenous Peoples Education in the Philippines. It also supports Longmuir et al. (2022), who underscored the importance of culturally responsive leadership competencies in addressing increasingly diverse cultural settings.

Further support comes from the phenomenological study of Lugatiman and Bauyot (2024) in Talaingod, Davao del Norte. Their findings revealed that school leaders in Indigenous Peoples Integrated Schools encountered challenges in school management and partnership building, with collaboration serving as one way of addressing these difficulties. Although their study differed in setting and participant composition, it provides a relevant regional perspective on leadership within Indigenous education in Davao.

Overall, the participants' experiences suggest that community partnership was more than a source of support for school programs; it was a fundamental aspect of their leadership practice. Through consultation, dialogue, and collaborative planning, school heads gained a deeper understanding of learners' needs and made decisions informed by the knowledge and experiences of the community.

- *Contextual Challenges.*

The fourth theme highlighted the challenges of implementing culturally responsive education in real school settings. Despite their commitment to culturally responsive practices, participants faced difficulties related to limited resources, accessibility, language barriers, teacher preparedness, curriculum contextualization, and the need to align DepEd requirements with the actual conditions and needs of Indigenous communities.

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✓ *Participant 4 Described this Tension Directly:*

"I experienced challenges in balancing DepEd requirements with the realities of our Indigenous community."

✓ *Participant 7 Similarly Stated:*

"I encountered difficulties in resources and accessibility, but these experiences encouraged us to become more creative in supporting our learners."

These responses suggest that culturally responsive leadership involved a continuous process of negotiating between institutional expectations and contextual realities. The participants were required to fulfill formal educational responsibilities while simultaneously responding to conditions that could not always be addressed through standardized approaches.

✓ *The challenges were also evident in the participants' accounts of language and instructional needs. Participant 5 stated:*

"I provided additional support to learners who experienced difficulty understanding lessons because of language differences."

✓ *Participant 10 Explained:*

"I adjusted our intervention after observing that the original approach did not fit the learners' context."

These responses indicate that participants did not regard challenges solely as obstacles but also as opportunities to reassess existing practices and develop more suitable solutions. In this way, difficult school conditions became part of their professional growth and leadership experiences.

This finding aligns with Aporbo's (2022) study, which identified curriculum implementation and language differences as challenges in Indigenous classrooms. The study also highlighted strategies such as translation, code-switching, and culturally responsive teaching to address these concerns. Similarly, Lugatiman and Bauyot (2024) found that school leaders in Talaingod encountered challenging working conditions, geographical isolation, limited resources, and difficulties in delivering quality education in Indigenous Peoples Integrated Schools. These similarities provide a relevant regional comparison, although the geographical and organizational contexts of the studies differed.

Robiños et al. (2020) likewise reported that teachers of Indigenous learners encountered differences in learner behavior and learning styles, requiring them to adopt more learner-centered approaches. These findings reinforce the need for flexibility and responsiveness in Indigenous education rather than relying on uniform instructional practices.

Overall, the participants' experiences suggest that contextual challenges were integral to culturally responsive leadership. Limited resources, language differences, accessibility concerns, and competing institutional demands influenced how school heads understood their responsibilities and determined appropriate responses within their respective schools.

Taken together, the four themes reveal an interconnected process of understanding, contextualizing, collaborating, and navigating challenges. First, school heads recognized the importance of understanding Indigenous learners' cultural identities, languages, and community circumstances. Second, this understanding guided efforts to contextualize curriculum and instruction. Third, school heads engaged teachers, learners, parents, elders, and community members as partners in addressing educational needs. Finally, they carried out these practices while navigating challenges involving resources, accessibility, teacher preparation, language, and institutional requirements.

These findings support existing literature emphasizing the need for culturally responsive leadership that recognizes Indigenous identities, respects Indigenous worldviews, and adapts educational practices to learners' contexts. They also align with Philippine and Davao-based studies highlighting curriculum contextualization, linguistic responsiveness, community participation, collaboration, and adaptability in Indigenous education.

More importantly, the findings indicate that school heads in Marilog North District experienced culturally responsive leadership not as an isolated program or administrative duty but as a continuous leadership practice. Their experiences involved understanding learners and their communities, translating this understanding into meaningful educational practices, collaborating with stakeholders, and responding to the contextual realities that influenced implementation.

➢ *Coping Mechanisms of School Heads with the Challenges They Encountered in Advancing Culturally Responsive Education for Indigenous Learners*

The findings revealed that school heads addressed the challenges of advancing culturally responsive education through collaboration, adaptability, continuous professional learning, and resilience. They faced difficulties involving limited resources, language barriers, teacher preparedness, geographical accessibility, culturally relevant learning materials, administrative responsibilities, community participation, learner adjustment, and compliance with DepEd requirements. Instead of managing these concerns independently, participants described coping as an ongoing process of collaborating with stakeholders, adapting practices to local conditions, enhancing professional knowledge and skills, and remaining committed to culturally responsive education despite existing limitations.

- *Collaboration.*

This emerged as a significant way through which school heads addressed challenges in culturally responsive education. The participants described working with teachers, parents, community members, district personnel, and

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external partners to find solutions to problems that could not be addressed by the school alone.

✓ *P1 Explained,*
"Resource limitations required us to maximize available materials and seek partners,"

✓ *While P6 Stated,*
"I sought assistance from district personnel and external partners."

✓ *Similarly, P4 Shared,*
"Partnerships provided resources that the school could not provide alone."

These responses indicated that collaboration served as both a practical and relational coping mechanism. The school heads recognized that the implementation of culturally responsive education involved knowledge, resources, and experiences that were distributed among different stakeholders.

Consequently, they relied on collective action rather than viewing challenges as the sole responsibility of the school head.

✓ *P2 Further Emphasized the Importance of Community Participation by Stating,*
"Community consultation helped us validate cultural information."

✓ *P8 Likewise Shared,*
"We involved parents in understanding learners' backgrounds."

The participants' accounts indicated that collaboration served not only to mobilize resources but also to ensure that educational practices were culturally appropriate. Engaging community members enabled school heads and teachers to access knowledge that might not be available in formal school materials. This was particularly valuable in understanding Indigenous knowledge, local traditions, language, and learners' cultural backgrounds.

This finding aligns with Williams (2020), who emphasized the importance of building relationships among Indigenous leaders, educators, communities, and other partners to develop educational practices that respect Indigenous worldviews. The study highlighted the value of curriculum shaped by the connections among place, culture, people, and Indigenous perspectives. Similarly, a 2024 study on Indigenous education among the Manobo in the Philippines described learning as a community-based process sustained through shared experiences, collective goals, collaboration with external partners, and the negotiation of formal educational policies.

The finding also supports Lugatiman and Bauyot (2024), whose phenomenological study in Talaingod, Davao del Norte, identified cooperation as an important coping strategy among school leaders managing Indigenous Peoples Integrated Schools. Their findings highlighted mutual assistance, resourcefulness, and collaboration with other government agencies. Overall, the present findings suggest that collaboration helped school heads share responsibilities, obtain additional resources, verify cultural information, and strengthen the implementation of culturally responsive educational practices.

- *Adaptability.*

Adaptability emerged as another important coping mechanism. The school heads described modifying their practices according to the circumstances of learners, teachers, families, and communities.

✓ *P2 Explained,*
"Language differences required me to encourage teachers to use more accessible communication."

✓ *P4 Stated,*
"Accessibility required more careful scheduling and coordination."

✓ *While P7 Shared,*
"We adjusted schedules to accommodate community members."

These responses suggest that school heads moved beyond established procedures when addressing contextual challenges and adjusted their communication, scheduling, instructional practices, and coordination strategies to suit actual school conditions. Their adaptability was especially evident in responding to language differences and geographical barriers. Instead of viewing these challenges as insurmountable obstacles, they modified their approaches to facilitate communication, strengthen participation, and address the needs of their school communities.

Adaptability was also reflected in instructional practices.

✓ *P5 Explained,*
"I encouraged teachers to connect lessons with the learners' environment,"

✓ *While P10 Stated,*
"We continuously reflected on whether our practices were appropriate for the community."

✓ *P10 Further Described,*
"The use of local examples as practical and effective."

These responses indicate that culturally responsive leadership required school heads to tailor educational practices to the specific and changing needs of learners rather than applying uniform approaches.

This finding reflects the principles of adaptive leadership, which emphasize responding to complex challenges through flexible approaches suited to changing circumstances. In Indigenous education, adaptability was

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essential as school heads worked to balance formal educational requirements with local cultural, linguistic, geographical, and community realities.

Similarly, Lugatiman and Bauyot (2024) identified adaptability and resourcefulness as important coping strategies among school leaders in Talaingod who faced the demands of remote Indigenous education. Their participants emphasized adjusting to difficult conditions and developing practical solutions to workplace challenges.

Overall, the findings suggest that adaptability was more than a response to difficulties; it was a continuing leadership practice. Through adjustments in school processes, communication, instructional strategies, and community engagement, school heads worked to make culturally responsive education more relevant and feasible within their local contexts.

Professional Learning. Professional learning emerged from the participants' recognition that culturally responsive education required continuing development among school heads and teachers.

✓ *Several Participants Identified Teacher Preparedness as a Challenge. P3 Explained that,*
"Teacher preparedness required more coaching and sharing of practices."

✓ *P6 Stated,*
"Technical assistance helped teachers improve their practices,"

✓ *While P1 Noted,*
"Conducting collaborative lesson planning helped teachers contextualize their lessons."

These responses showed that school heads coped with challenges not only by solving immediate problems but also by strengthening the capacity of teachers. Coaching, technical assistance, collaborative lesson planning, and peer sharing became mechanisms for improving teachers' ability to contextualize instruction and respond to Indigenous learners' needs.

✓ *P3 Further Stated,*
"Peer sharing helped us develop better learning materials."

This response demonstrated that professional learning was collaborative rather than limited to formal training. Teachers learned from one another by sharing localized materials, strategies, and experiences. Such practices helped transform individual classroom experiences into collective professional knowledge.

Professional learning was also evident in the participants' use of reflection and consultation.

✓ *P9 Shared,*
"Reflection meetings helped us identify what needed to be improved."

✓ *P2 Explained,*
"Community consultation helped validate cultural information."

These responses suggest that professional learning extended beyond improving teaching methods to include learning from the community. Through interactions with teachers, learners, parents, and cultural knowledge holders, school heads and teachers deepened their understanding of culturally responsive education.

Williams (2020) highlighted the importance of culturally sustaining leadership that respects Indigenous worldviews and strengthens educators' capacity to develop culturally grounded curricula. Similarly, a recent study on school-level IPEd implementation in Davao del Norte identified teacher capacity-building, guidance from elders, culturally responsive curriculum development, and stakeholder engagement as important factors in strengthening implementation.

The findings also align with Lugatiman and Bauyot (2024), who identified professional development as part of school leaders' experiences in Indigenous Peoples Integrated Schools. Their study emphasized continuous learning, commitment to public service, and the value of gaining insights from challenging educational situations.

Overall, professional learning served as an important coping strategy by helping school heads and teachers turn challenges into opportunities to enhance their knowledge, skills, learning materials, and culturally responsive practices.

- *Resilience.*

Resilience emerged as the participants' capacity to sustain culturally responsive practices despite persistent limitations and competing demands. The challenges described by the school heads were not isolated incidents. They involved continuing concerns such as limited resources, geographic accessibility, administrative responsibilities, community participation, learner adjustment, and compliance with DepEd requirements.

✓ *P1 described resource limitations as a major challenge, explaining that,*
"These required us to maximize available materials and seek partners."

✓ *P6 responded to competing administrative and instructional demands by stating,*
"I delegated tasks and strengthened teamwork."

✓ *P10, meanwhile, explained,*
"I became more deliberate in prioritizing culturally responsive activities within our school plans."

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These responses indicated that resilience was demonstrated through purposeful action rather than simply enduring difficulties. The participants maximized available resources, delegated responsibilities, strengthened teamwork, prioritized culturally responsive activities, and continued seeking solutions. Their responses suggested that resilience involved maintaining commitment to culturally responsive education while modifying the means through which it was pursued.

✓ *P4 illustrated this practical dimension by stating,*
"We used available resources creatively."

✓ *P5 similarly reported,*
"Using local stories made lessons more meaningful."

✓ *P8 stated,*
"We consulted knowledgeable community members."

These actions showed that resource limitations did not necessarily stop culturally responsive practices; instead, school heads looked for alternative sources of knowledge and locally available resources.

Resilience was also connected to reflective practice.

✓ *P10 explained,*
"The school continuously reflected on whether its practices were appropriate for the community."

✓ *While P9 noted,*
"Reflection meetings helped identify areas for improvement."

This suggested that resilience included the capacity to learn from difficulties and use those experiences to refine subsequent actions.

Lugatiman and Bauyot (2024) found that school leaders in Talaingod developed resilience and resourcefulness while addressing the challenges of managing Indigenous Peoples Integrated Schools. Their participants demonstrated dedication to their profession and perseverance despite difficult working conditions. Similarly, Williams (2020) associated culturally sustaining leadership with strengthening Indigenous learners' resilience through educational practices that respect their culture, place, and worldviews.

The findings further indicate that school heads strengthened their resilience through persistence, collaboration, reflection, and responsiveness to local needs. Rather than simply maintaining existing practices, they sought practical ways to sustain culturally responsive education amid changing circumstances and resource limitations.

The participants' coping strategies formed four interconnected dimensions: collaboration, adaptability, professional learning, and resilience. Collaboration provided access to shared knowledge and resources, while adaptability enabled school heads to respond to local conditions. Professional learning strengthened their own competencies and those of their teachers, while resilience sustained their commitment despite continuing challenges.

These findings highlight the complex nature of Indigenous education, where school heads must address language differences, cultural knowledge, community participation, geographical barriers, culturally appropriate resources, and the alignment of local realities with formal educational requirements. A 2024 study of Manobo Indigenous education in the Philippines similarly emphasized community relationships, collective learning, external collaboration, and engagement with government policies. In addition, a 2026 study in Davao del Norte identified culturally responsive curriculum development, collaborative Indigenous governance, stakeholder participation, teacher capacity-building, and community-based partnerships as important components of IPEd implementation.

Overall, the participants' experiences demonstrate that coping was a continuous leadership process involving collaboration, adaptation, learning, and perseverance. Through the lens of Adaptive Leadership Theory, these experiences illustrate how school heads addressed complex educational challenges by engaging stakeholders, adjusting practices, learning from experience, and sustaining collective efforts to advance culturally responsive education.

➢ *Educational Insights of School Heads from their Experiences in Advancing Culturally Responsive Education for Indigenous Learners*

The findings showed that school heads gained deeper insights into leadership, Indigenous learners, and culturally responsive education through their experiences. Their understanding extended beyond implementing programs and practices toward recognizing leadership as a relational, culturally grounded, and continuous process of development. Participants emphasized respecting Indigenous culture and identity, serving learners and communities, involving stakeholders in leadership, and learning continuously from their experiences. Four themes emerged: Cultural Respect, Servant Leadership, Shared Leadership, and Leadership Growth.

- *Cultural Respect.*

Cultural respect emerged as a central educational insight derived from the participants' experiences. The school heads recognized that culturally responsive education required more than incorporating cultural elements into school activities. It involved understanding Indigenous learners within their cultural, linguistic, family, and community contexts and ensuring that their identity and knowledge were respected in everyday educational practice.

✓ *P1 Expressed this Realization Clearly:*
"I learned that leadership begins with understanding the community."

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✓ *Similarly, P2 Stated,*
"I learned that culture should be considered in educational decision-making."

✓ *P5 Further Emphasized an Important Shift in Perspective:*
"I learned that Indigenous learners should not be viewed only from a deficit perspective."

These responses indicated that the participants had moved from viewing culture as an additional consideration to recognizing it as an essential part of educational leadership and decision-making.

The participants' deeper understanding was also evident in their reflections on culturally responsive education.

✓ *P1 Explained,*
"I now understand that culture should be part of everyday educational practice."

✓ *P2 Similarly Realized that,*
"Culturally responsive education goes beyond celebrating cultural events."

These statements suggested that the participants had developed a more substantive understanding of cultural responsiveness. Rather than limiting culture to celebrations, symbols, or special activities, they came to view it as something that should influence curriculum, communication, relationships, decision-making, and school practices.

✓ *P7 Also Stated,*
"I learned that Indigenous learners have strengths that should be recognized."

This reflected a movement away from deficit-oriented perspectives toward recognition of Indigenous learners' capacities, knowledge, identity, and contributions.

✓ *P8 Added,*
"I became more careful about making assumptions about learners and their families."

The response indicates that the school heads' experiences deepened their cultural humility and taught them to understand learners' behavior within its cultural and social context rather than making assumptions.

This finding aligns with Williams (2020), who emphasized culturally sustaining leadership that respects Indigenous worldviews and connects curriculum with culture, people, place, and community. The study highlighted the importance of cultural humility and holistic perspectives in educational leadership. Similarly, Longmuir et al. (2022) stressed that school leaders need culturally responsive competencies to understand and address diverse educational contexts instead of relying solely on standardized approaches.

Overall, the findings suggest that cultural respect became more than a personal value; it shaped how school heads understood and carried out their leadership responsibilities. Their experiences reinforced the importance of listening, understanding learners' backgrounds, avoiding assumptions, recognizing their strengths, and integrating culture into everyday educational practices.

Servant Leadership. The second theme, Servant Leadership, reflected the participants' growing understanding of leadership as service to learners, teachers, families, and communities. Their experiences led them to view the school head not merely as an administrator responsible for compliance and school operations, but as someone who supports others, protects learner dignity, facilitates opportunities, and responds to community needs.

✓ *P5 Explicitly Stated,*
"I see leadership as service to learners and the community."

This statement captured the participants' broader understanding of their role after experiencing the realities of culturally responsive education.

✓ *P3 Similarly Explained,*
"I see myself as a supporter of teachers who are implementing culturally responsive practices."

Rather than positioning themselves only as supervisors, the participants described their role as providing support to teachers so that culturally responsive practices could be implemented effectively.

The meaning attached to leadership was also connected to inclusion and dignity.

✓ *P4 Stated,*
"My role means ensuring that Indigenous learners are included and valued."

✓ *P6 Explained,*
"My role involves protecting the dignity and identity of Indigenous learners."

These responses suggested that leadership had acquired a moral and relational dimension. The participants understood that their responsibilities extended beyond academic outcomes to creating an environment in which Indigenous learners could participate without having their identity diminished or disregarded.

✓ *P1 Further Described the Meaning of His Role.*
"I see my role as creating an environment where every learner's culture is respected."

✓ *P2 Also Cited.*
"I consider my role as a bridge between the school and the Indigenous community."

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These statements portray school heads as relationship-builders who promote inclusive and supportive learning environments.

This interpretation aligns with Williams (2020), who described culturally sustaining leadership as an approach that prioritizes Indigenous worldviews and strengthens learners' resilience. The study emphasized the importance of relationships, cultural humility, and collaboration in improving educational practices. Similarly, Longmuir et al. (2022) highlighted the role of school leaders in developing culturally responsive competencies and shaping educational practices that reflect the cultural realities of learners and their communities.

The findings also correspond with the phenomenological study of Lugatiman and Bauyot (2024) in Talaingod, Davao del Norte. Their participants reported that working in Indigenous Peoples Integrated Schools contributed to their professional growth, leadership resilience, resourcefulness, and commitment to serving communities despite challenges.

Overall, the participants' experiences broadened their understanding of leadership from an administrative role to a commitment to service. They recognized that culturally responsive leadership involves supporting teachers, safeguarding learners' dignity, fostering meaningful relationships, and providing educational opportunities that address both academic and cultural needs.

- *Shared Leadership.*

Shared Leadership emerged from the participants' recognition that advancing culturally responsive education could not be accomplished by the school head alone. Their experiences taught them the value of teachers, parents, Indigenous elders, learners, community members, district personnel, and external partners in making educational decisions and addressing challenges.

✓ *P1 Identified,*
"Teachers as my strongest source of support,"

✓ *While P4 Stated,*
"Parents and community members were important partners."

✓ *P5 Identified,*
"Indigenous elders as sources of cultural guidance."

✓ *P6 Explained,*
"The school leadership team helped distribute responsibilities."

These responses indicated that the participants came to understand leadership as a collective process in which different stakeholders contributed distinct forms of knowledge, expertise, and support.

The participants also described how these relationships affected their leadership decisions.

✓ *P2 Explained,*
"Fellow school heads helped through sharing experiences."

✓ *While P3 Noted, '*
"District personnel provided technical guidance."

✓ *P7 Identified,*
"External partners as sources of resources and expertise."

These accounts showed that support networks expanded the capacity of school heads to respond to complex educational concerns.

The importance of shared decision-making was especially evident in the participants' future-oriented responses.

✓ *P8 Stated,*
"I will promote more collaborative decision-making."

✓ *P10 Similarly Explained,*
"I now see culturally responsive education as a shared responsibility among school and community stakeholders."

These statements demonstrated that collaboration was not merely a coping mechanism during difficult situations; it became an educational insight that shaped how the participants intended to lead in the future.

The role of Indigenous knowledge holders was particularly important.

✓ *P5 Stated,*
"Elders helped ensure cultural accuracy."

✓ *P7 Explained,*
"Learning from elders strengthened my appreciation of local knowledge."

✓ *P4 Likewise Reported,*
"An elder's explanation helped me appreciate Indigenous knowledge."

These responses suggest that school heads recognized community members and elders not merely as beneficiaries or participants in school activities but as valuable knowledge holders whose perspectives could guide educational practices.

Williams (2020) highlighted the importance of networks involving Indigenous leaders and allies in advancing educational change and placing Indigenous knowledge at the center of school-community relationships. Similarly, Longmuir et al. (2022) emphasized relational and culturally responsive leadership in addressing the needs of increasingly diverse educational communities.

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This finding also aligns with Lugatiman and Bauyot (2024), whose study of Indigenous Peoples Integrated Schools in Talaingod identified cooperation, resourcefulness, professional development, and community partnerships as important aspects of school leadership. Their findings indicated that school leaders relied on networks and collective efforts to address the challenges of remote Indigenous education.

Overall, the participants' experiences helped them recognize that effective leadership for Indigenous learners was not an individual endeavor but a shared and relational responsibility. It required school heads to listen to teachers, learn from elders, engage parents and communities, collaborate with district personnel, and establish partnerships with external stakeholders.

- *Leadership Growth*.

The fourth theme, Leadership Growth, reflected the participants' realization that culturally responsive leadership was a continuing process of learning, reflection, and adaptation. Their experiences did not simply provide solutions to existing problems; they changed how the participants understood themselves as leaders and how they intended to lead in the future.

✓ *P10 Stated,*
"I now see culturally responsive education as a shared responsibility among school and community stakeholders."

✓ *While P9 Explained,*
"I now understand leadership as continuous learning and adaptation."

These responses demonstrated that the participants viewed leadership development as an ongoing process shaped by actual experiences rather than something completed through formal preparation alone.

The sources of support identified by the participants further demonstrated this process of growth.

✓ *P9 Stated,*
"Professional learning activities helped improve my understanding."

✓ *While P10 Explained,*
"Personal reflection and experience helped me become more prepared."

✓ *P10 Further Noted,*
"Reflection helped me learn from previous experiences."

These statements indicated that reflection transformed experience into professional knowledge.

✓ *Specific Experiences Also Contributed to this Growth. P6 Explained,*
"Handling unexpected challenges taught me flexibility."

✓ *P9 Stated,*
"Resource limitations taught me creativity."

✓ *P5 Shared,*
"Listening to learners changed how I understood their needs."

These responses suggested that difficulties became learning opportunities. Through experience, the participants developed greater flexibility, creativity, cultural awareness, and sensitivity to learner needs. The future-oriented responses provided further evidence of leadership growth.

✓ *P1 Stated,*
"I will strengthen community consultations."

✓ *P3 Planned,*
"I'll provide teachers with continued technical support,"

✓ *While P9 Stated,*
"I will continue reflecting on our practices and improving them."

✓ *P10 Expressed,*
"I will work toward a school environment where Indigenous learners feel respected, included, and valued."

These statements indicate that the lessons gained from past experiences influenced how school heads intended to improve their future leadership practices. This finding aligns with Lugatiman and Bauyot (2024), who identified professional development, resilience, and resourcefulness as important insights gained by school leaders in Indigenous Peoples Integrated Schools in Talaingod. Their participants viewed challenging assignments as opportunities to strengthen their leadership abilities, deepen their commitment, and develop practical solutions.

Similarly, Williams (2020) associated culturally sustaining leadership with reflection, cultural humility, and educational practices that respect Indigenous worldviews. Longmuir et al. (2022) also emphasized the importance of developing culturally responsive leadership competencies to ensure that educational practices address the needs of culturally diverse communities.

Leadership growth therefore represented the transformative aspect of the participants' experiences. Rather than simply overcoming difficulties, school heads learned from these challenges and allowed their experiences to reshape their understanding and practice of leadership.

Taken together, the findings revealed four interconnected themes that captured the educational insights gained by the participants. Cultural Respect reflected their

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recognition of Indigenous learners' identities, languages, knowledge, and strengths. Servant Leadership emphasized their commitment to serving learners, teachers, families, and communities. Shared Leadership highlighted the collective responsibility of advancing culturally responsive education through meaningful stakeholder participation. Finally, Leadership Growth illustrated how experiences, challenges, relationships, and reflection influenced their leadership perspectives and future practices.

These themes can be understood as a progression from Cultural Respect to Servant Leadership, Shared Leadership, and ultimately Leadership Growth. This progression reflects how school heads developed a deeper understanding of Indigenous culture, translated that understanding into service, involved others in educational decisions, and continued to improve their leadership practices.

Consistent with the study's phenomenological approach, participants described not only their leadership actions but also the meanings they attached to their experiences. Their narratives demonstrated a progression from understanding Indigenous culture and serving learners and communities to sharing responsibilities and becoming more reflective, culturally responsive leaders.

Viewed through Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological perspective, the findings highlight the significance of the meanings participants derived from their lived experiences. The essence of their accounts extended beyond implementing culturally responsive programs to transforming their understanding of leadership within Indigenous educational contexts. Their experiences reinforced the importance of listening before making decisions, respecting cultural perspectives before taking action, collaborating rather than working independently, and continually reflecting on the effects of their leadership practices.

These findings also support the broader literature on culturally responsive leadership. Williams (2020) emphasized cultural humility, Indigenous worldviews, and relationships among culture, place, and people. Longmuir et al. (2022) highlighted the culturally responsive competencies needed by school leaders in diverse educational settings. In the Philippine context, Lugatiman and Bauyot (2024) similarly found that working in Indigenous Peoples Integrated Schools contributed to school leaders' professional development, resilience, resourcefulness, and commitment to serving Indigenous communities.

Overall, the participants' insights suggest that advancing culturally responsive education involves more than implementing appropriate programs and policies. It also transforms school heads through their relationships with learners, teachers, families, and communities. Their experiences taught them to lead with cultural respect, serve with purpose, share responsibility, and pursue continuous growth through reflection and practice.

IV. IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

➢ *Implications*

The findings imply that school heads should move beyond administrative management and compliance by developing culturally responsive leadership grounded in an understanding of Indigenous learners, families, knowledge systems, and community contexts. They should strengthen community consultations, promote culturally relevant instruction, provide teachers with technical assistance, and integrate culturally responsive priorities into school planning and decision-making. School heads should also serve as advocates and bridges between schools and Indigenous communities while reflecting on the effectiveness of their practices.

Teachers need continuous professional support to strengthen their skills in curriculum contextualization, culturally responsive teaching, language-sensitive instruction, and the appropriate integration of Indigenous knowledge. Collaborative lesson planning, coaching, peer sharing, and reflection sessions can help improve classroom practices. Teachers should also engage with learners, parents, elders, and community members to develop meaningful learning experiences that respect Indigenous identities, languages, cultures, and strengths. Learners' voices should likewise be considered in decisions concerning school programs and interventions.

The findings emphasize that parents, elders, and community members should be recognized as essential partners in educational planning and decision-making. Schools should establish sustained mechanisms for consultation, dialogue, collaborative planning, and feedback to ensure that cultural knowledge and community perspectives are appropriately represented. Meanwhile, district and division leaders should provide continuous technical assistance, professional development, and organizational support in culturally responsive leadership, IPEd implementation, adaptive leadership, and community engagement. Sharing successful practices among school heads can further strengthen collaboration and professional growth.

Finally, effective culturally responsive education requires alignment among educational policies, school practices, teacher competencies, community knowledge, and learners' needs. Schools should be given appropriate flexibility to adapt programs, instructional materials, communication strategies, and community engagement approaches to local Indigenous contexts while remaining consistent with DepEd policies. These findings may guide the development and improvement of School Improvement Plans (SIPs), Annual Implementation Plans (AIPs), and school-based programs to ensure that Indigenous learners receive meaningful, inclusive, and culturally responsive education.

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➢ *Future Directions*

The findings of the study provide a basis for strengthening culturally responsive education for Indigenous learners through improved leadership, professional development, community engagement, and reflective educational practices. School heads should deepen their understanding of Indigenous cultures, knowledge systems, and community contexts while promoting culturally relevant instruction, regular consultations, teacher support, and culturally responsive school planning. Teachers should receive continuous professional development in curriculum contextualization, culturally responsive pedagogy, language-sensitive instruction, and the appropriate integration of Indigenous knowledge. Collaborative planning, coaching, peer sharing, and reflection should be encouraged to ensure that classroom practices respond to learners' cultural identities, experiences, and educational needs.

Indigenous learners, parents, families, elders, and community leaders should be recognized as essential partners in advancing culturally responsive education. Schools should provide opportunities for learners to participate in culturally meaningful activities and contribute to decisions affecting their education. Parents and families should be actively involved in consultations, program development, and feedback, while elders and community leaders should help validate cultural information, traditions, and Indigenous knowledge. These partnerships should respect community protocols and promote trust, shared responsibility, and meaningful participation in school activities and decision-making.

District and division education leaders, IPEd implementers, and external partners should provide sustained technical assistance, professional development, appropriate resources, and organizational support to schools serving Indigenous learners. These efforts should address challenges related to geographical accessibility, teacher preparedness, language differences, instructional materials, and community participation. Universities, nongovernment organizations, private institutions, and other partners may contribute expertise, training, research, and learning resources based on identified needs. Meanwhile, school planning teams should integrate culturally responsive priorities into the School Improvement Plan (SIP), Annual Implementation Plan (AIP), and other school programs while ensuring alignment with DepEd policies and the specific needs of Indigenous communities.

Future researchers may expand the study by exploring other Indigenous communities and including the perspectives of learners, teachers, parents, elders, and community leaders. Further research may examine the relationship between culturally responsive leadership and learner engagement, academic achievement, cultural identity, language development, and school-community relationships. Comparative, longitudinal, mixed-methods, and action research designs may provide additional evidence on effective and sustainable practices. Overall, these directions emphasize the importance of collaborative leadership, continuous professional learning, community participation, and evidence-based improvement in creating inclusive educational environments where Indigenous learners are respected, supported, and empowered to succeed while maintaining their cultural identities and connections to their communities.

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