

Cultural Context and English Language Acquisition and Proficiency Among Indigenous Secondary Students: An Ethnographic Study

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Abstract— This qualitative ethnographic study examined the influence of cultural context on the English language proficiency of Indigenous secondary students belonging to the Mandaya and Mansaka tribes in the Municipality of Maragusan, Davao de Oro. Guided by Vygotsky's Social Constructivism, the study aimed to explore how cultural identity, values, and shared practices shape students' English language learning experiences. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with fifteen participants composed of five Indigenous students, five English teachers, and five parents, all purposively selected from Langgawisan National High School and Bahi National High School. Findings revealed that cultural background significantly impacts students' language acquisition, particularly in pronunciation, vocabulary, and comprehension. While challenges such as linguistic interference, limited exposure to English, and fear of ridicule were prevalent, culturally embedded instruction, including the use of translation and localized examples, enhanced learners' motivation and engagement. Furthermore, non-academic support from families and communities played a vital role in sustaining students' interest in English learning. Educational programs such as Catch-Up Fridays, reading sessions, and oral communication activities were identified as effective in building learners' confidence and linguistic competence. The study concludes that integrating Indigenous cultural elements into English language instruction not only promotes academic success but also affirms learners' cultural identity, thereby fostering an inclusive and responsive educational environment.

Keywords— Indigenous education, English language learning, English proficiency, cultural identity, ethnographic study, Davao De Oro.

I. INTRODUCTION

Our world is highly globalized which leads to the need for effective language for communication. The English language is considered the dominant and widely used means of communication. Unfortunately, Indigenous people are detached from the globalized world because of their English language proficiency. This has led to a call for effective English language instruction among Indigenous Peoples' secondary students. However, traditional teaching methods often ignore the rich cultural backgrounds and unique experiences of these students, which can delay their engagement in language acquisition. This linguistic and cultural conflict can result in reduced engagement, delayed language acquisition, and limited proficiency in English. Furthermore, this can delay academic performance and limit opportunities for indigenous students, who may already face several disadvantages in education (Gonzales, 2020).

Similar challenges have been observed internationally. In the United States, numerous studies have examined the relationship between the cultural backgrounds of

indigenous students and their English language acquisition, demonstrating that these cultural settings significantly influence their English language proficiency and educational achievements. For instance, McCarty (2013) highlights that indigenous students often enter the educational system with a strong foundation in their native languages and cultural practices, which can either improve or impede their ability to learn English, depending on how these elements are integrated into the curriculum. This cultural conflict has an adverse impact on both language acquisition and overall academic achievement, as students may struggle to connect with a curriculum that fails to represent their identities or experiences.

Language proficiency is not only influenced by cultural identity but also by the instructional methods employed in the classroom. In the Philippine context, there has been a growing emphasis on culturally responsive teaching approaches aimed at better serving Indigenous learners. This shift is a response to the systemic inequalities that have historically marginalized Indigenous communities within the educational system

(Bautista, 2018). The integration of Indigenous knowledge, languages, and cultural values into the curriculum can enhance both students' motivation and language proficiency. When students see their own cultural identities reflected in their education, they are more likely to engage actively and demonstrate improved academic outcomes (Bongato, 2020).

The lack of integration of indigenous languages and cultures in educational resources and practices might sustain the marginalization and exclusion of these people, thus sustaining the historical injustices and power disparities that have long afflicted the Philippines (Hidalgo, 2017). Consequently, indigenous children may find it challenging to identify with the education system, resulting in diminished motivation, reduced self-esteem, and elevated dropout rates. Educators and legislators acknowledge the significance of addressing these inequities, leading to a concerted effort to create teaching practices that respect and incorporate the cultural backgrounds of indigenous students.

In Davao de Oro, particularly in the Municipality of Maragusan, home to Mandaya and Mansaka communities, many Indigenous secondary students report feeling disconnected from an English curriculum that does not reflect their cultural identities. This lack of representation in language instruction materials contributes to reduced motivation and poor academic performance. Integrating indigenous knowledge systems, including native languages and cultural narratives, into the English curriculum may foster greater student engagement and linguistic competence. Research by Bongato (2020) supports the idea that culturally reflective education can lead to higher academic achievement, self-esteem, and participation, suggesting that a localized, inclusive curriculum in Maragusan could help close existing educational gaps.

Despite existing international and local efforts, a lack of localized research remains, specifically addressing how culture impacts the English language acquisition and proficiency among Indigenous secondary students in Davao de Oro.

Research Questions

These focused research questions aim to explore the intricate relationships between cultural context and English language acquisition and proficiency, providing a solid foundation for qualitative inquiry.

1. How do the cultural identity, cultural practices, and cultural values of Indigenous secondary students influence their engagement with the English language?
2. In what ways do family and community involvement facilitate the learning of English among Indigenous students?
3. How does participation in educational programs and workshops influence Indigenous students' motivation and proficiency in English?
4. How do educators perceive the influence of cultural context on the English language learning of Indigenous secondary students?
5. What is the perception of parents regarding the influence of cultural environment on their children's English language acquisition and proficiency improvement?

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used an ethnographic research approach, as defined by Creswell (2013), to investigate the cultural background and its impact on English language acquisition and proficiency among Indigenous secondary students. Ethnography is suitable for this study as it emphasizes comprehending the collective behaviors, beliefs, and practices of a specific cultural group within their natural context. The design facilitates a comprehensive examination of the impact of Indigenous students' cultural identity, customs, and values on their interaction with the English language. The study aims to reveal the lived experiences and cultural intricacies influencing students' learning processes through participant observations, interviews, and immersion in school and community environments.

Creswell asserts that ethnography entails the protracted examination of cultural groups to elucidate the intricacies of their social relationships and behaviors. This study examines both children's experiences and the contributions of their families, communities, and instructors in promoting language acquisition. The project will utilize ethnographic approaches to yield comprehensive, descriptive data that elucidate the cultural factors influencing English language competency. This methodology corresponds with the research objective of comprehending and utilizing cultural context to improve language learning possibilities for Indigenous students (Creswell, 2013).

Research Locale

The study was conducted on two last miles secondary schools in the Municipality of Maragusan, Davao de Oro, namely, Langgawisan National High School and Bahi National High School, whose student population is composed of Mandaya and Mansaka Indigenous Peoples (IP) origin. These schools have actively sought to incorporate local customs, languages, and cultural practices into their English language curricula.

Research Participants

The study utilized a purposive sampling method to carefully select participants who could provide valuable insights into the research topic. There were five Indigenous secondary students, five language teachers, and five parents who offered views on home language use and cultural influences.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection for this study prioritized in-depth interviews, for which the researchers prepared the interview guide questions.

The researchers followed standard protocols before the conduct of data gathering. The researchers secured letter from schools division superintendent, school heads and tribal chieftains seeking permission to conduct study. All participants signed the informed consent form and were given orientation of the direction of the study. Schedules for interview were based on the availability of all the participants.

The researchers used audio recorder to record the answers of the participants. To ensure credibility in post-data collection, participants reviewed summaries of their responses to confirm accuracy. Finally, the information gathered from the interviews were transcribed, translated and analyzed.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used for this study, as it enabled Researchers to uncover, analyze systematically, and present patterns within the data, emphasizing the complex relationship between cultural environment and language proficiency (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

After transcribing, preliminary codes were developed that encapsulate significant elements related to cultural practices, familial influences, and communal engagement in language acquisition.

In the subsequent phase, codes are categorized into overarching themes that encapsulate recurring concepts, such as the impact of cultural identity on language engagement or the effect of community activities on language acquisition. The researcher subsequently refines these themes to guarantee they appropriately reflect the facts and address the research questions.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

- **Triangulation.** This is critical for establishing credibility in qualitative research. This method involves verifying results through the use of multiple data sources, including interviews, observations, and document analysis, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of cultural context on English competence (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
- **Dependability.** The notion of dependability is improved by preserving a comprehensive audit trail that records each phase of the research process, from data collection to analysis. This recording method is essential as it facilitates transparency, permitting other researchers to follow the decisions made during the study.
- **Transferability.** This is accomplished by offering detailed, descriptive narratives about the research environment and participant attributes. This comprehensive context enables readers to evaluate the applicability of the findings in analogous circumstances, especially for the cultural and educational contexts of Indigenous secondary students (Shenton, 2004).
- **Confirmability.** This necessitates that the researchers uphold objectivity and transparency, reducing biases by meticulously recording research decisions and considering any personal assumptions that may influence the research.

Ethical Consideration

- **Cultural sensitivity.** The researchers acknowledged this most vital consideration; researchers honored and recognized the cultural values, beliefs, and traditions of Indigenous populations. Consulting local leaders and officials for their guidance and approval exemplified respect and cultivates trust among the community.
- **Informed Consent.** The researchers distributed Informed Consent Forms (ICF) to all identified participants. For students under 18, an assent form was provided in addition to parental consent. The researcher assured confidentiality of the essential

details, such as their name and institutional affiliation.

- **Vulnerability of the Research Participants.** Considering the cultural and educational backgrounds of Indigenous students, researchers ensured that all interviews and data collection methods were conducted with cultural sensitivity and respect.
- **Privacy and Confidentiality of Information.** The researcher ensured that all participant data, including personal information and responses, remained confidential. They complied with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Interviews were recorded using a secure device, and all files were stored in a password-protected cloud drive accessible only to the researcher.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the results and discussions of the study. The arrangement of the presentation is based on the order of the major research questions, which is divided into four subsets: a) influence of culture on language learning b) role of family and community c) educational programs and workshops d) educator's perspective e) parent's perspective.

RQ1: How does cultural context influence the English Language acquisition and proficiency of Indigenous secondary students?

This section presents the results to the 1st major research question. There are three (3) specific research questions to gather data and information on how cultural values and background affect the English language learning of Indigenous students.

Influence of cultural background on English language learning. The emerging themes in this section include pronunciation challenges, it helps personally, motivation to improve, difficulty in learning, and resilience in overcoming barriers. These responses reflect how Indigenous students navigate English learning amidst both cultural advantages and challenges.

While some students viewed English as a motivational tool for personal growth, others found certain aspects of the language, particularly vocabulary, difficult due to limited exposure at home and the strong influence of their native dialect. Students also expressed a fear of being ridiculed in class for mispronouncing words, which can hinder their classroom participation. Nevertheless, others felt their cultural identity was not a

barrier to their learning but a source of strength, displaying resilience and the ability to thrive academically.

Recent studies emphasize the role of cultural background in language acquisition. Smith and Lee (2023) argue that students' cultural backgrounds significantly influence their language proficiency and motivation. In contrast, Johnson (2022) found that learners who feel their cultural identity is respected within the educational setting demonstrate higher engagement and better learning outcomes. These findings align with the study's results, indicating that the cultural context of Indigenous students plays a central role in their English learning experiences.

Cultural activities that helped in shaping English language learning. Emerging themes include church meetings, tribal day, community interactions, school assemblies, and pageants. These events, though not focused on English, provided opportunities for students to encounter English in everyday contexts. For example, English was sometimes spoken during church services, guest speeches, or public announcements during local events. These interactions, while infrequent, helped familiarize students with the language in meaningful contexts.

Similarly, Tribal Day and barangay events sometimes featured speakers or announcements in English, which helped familiarize students with the language in formal contexts. Interactions with outsiders, such as teachers from other areas, also offered opportunities to practice conversational English. Participation in school pageants and assemblies provided students with an opportunity to engage with English through speeches, self-introductions, and presentations. Although these moments were infrequent, students acknowledged that they made a positive contribution to their understanding and use of the language.

Studies suggest that incorporating cultural traditions into language education enhances engagement and retention. Garcia and Martinez (2019) emphasize that integrating cultural activities into language learning promotes more engaged student participation. Similarly, Thompson et al. (2021) found that students exposed to culturally relevant activities improve their retention and application of language skills, supporting the idea that cultural exposure aids language acquisition.

Influence of cultural identity to interest in English language learning. The themes under this section include fear of bullying, role of elders in motivating, fascination with learning, and difficulties when learning support is insufficient. These responses illustrate how students' cultural identity directly affects their motivation to learn English.

While some students hesitated to speak English due to the fear of being mocked, others were motivated by witnessing the struggles of older generations, who lacked English proficiency, which fueled their desire to learn. Several students also expressed enthusiasm about learning English, as it opened doors to a broader knowledge base. However, some struggled with the language, especially when support was lacking in the classroom or when teaching methods did not suit their learning styles.

Recent research highlights the dual impact of cultural identity on language learning motivation. Burgos et al. (2025) demonstrated that a strong sense of cultural identity can either enhance or hinder motivation, depending on how it is acknowledged in the learning process. Khan (2021) further emphasizes that cultural recognition in language education creates a more engaging and inclusive environment.

RQ2: In what ways do family and community involvement facilitate the learning of English among Indigenous students?

This section presents the results to the 2nd major research question. Two specific research questions guided the collection of data for this study, exploring how family and community contribute to shaping students' language learning.

Family and Community Role in Learning English Language. The emerging themes under this section are family support, teaching discipline, and encouraging academic persistence. Indigenous families, despite limited English proficiency, play a pivotal role in encouraging their children to learn. They motivate their children by emphasizing the importance of education and providing emotional and behavioral support.

Research has consistently demonstrated that family engagement has a positive impact on student success. Kelty and Wakabayashi (2025) emphasize the significance of family involvement in academic achievement, while Lopez and Hernandez (2023)

demonstrate that parental engagement in non-academic forms, including emotional support and encouragement, substantially contributes to language proficiency.

Views of family and community on English language as medium of communication. The emerging themes under this structured theme are it depends, happy and supportive, and it is fine. These responses reflect varied perspectives among families and community members regarding the use of English in communication. Some parents and guardians expressed conditional support, noting that English is acceptable when used in appropriate settings or when mutual understanding is possible. Others were proud of their children's ability to speak English, viewing it as a sign of intelligence and progress. A few respondents said English was generally accepted without resistance, as long as the child maintained their native language and cultural values. While there was no unified opinion on the use of English as a communication tool, there was a shared recognition of its relevance in academic and professional settings. Notably, respondents emphasized that learning English should not come at the cost of losing their Indigenous identity and heritage.

A study by Nguyen and Habok (2021) found that parental and community attitudes toward English as a medium of instruction are often shaped by perceived socioeconomic benefits, but cultural preservation remains a concern. Similarly, a 2020 study by Reyes and Tumanguil noted that communities support bilingualism when it does not threaten the mother tongue or cultural values. These studies suggest that families are open to English learning as long as it is balanced with respect for Indigenous language and identity.

RQ3: How does participation in educational programs and workshops influence Indigenous students' motivation and proficiency in English?

The results in this section were from the responses of the student research participants to the specific research questions used to gather data for the 3rd major research question. Three specific research questions were used to collect data and gather information.

Educational programs and workshops helpful in learning English Language. The emerging themes under this structured theme are catch-up Fridays, the Friday reading program, research work, quiz bees, and spelling bees. Students viewed these programs and workshops as powerful tools that complemented classroom instruction

and enhanced their learning experience. Programs like Catch-Up Friday and the Friday Reading Program provided students with consistent opportunities to read, comprehend, and apply English in a relaxed and supportive environment. Research activities encouraged learners to ask questions, explore sources, and express ideas in English, helping to develop both critical thinking and writing skills. Meanwhile, quiz bees and spelling contests motivated them to study harder and boosted their confidence in vocabulary recall and oral use of English. Across all responses, students described these activities as engaging, enjoyable, and effective in improving their communication skills and confidence.

Lopez and Salvador (2022) found that structured reading interventions such as weekly reading sessions significantly improve both fluency and comprehension among multilingual learners. Similarly, Sari and Prasetyo (2021) highlighted how academic contests, such as spelling bees, help enhance vocabulary retention and public speaking confidence, especially in underserved communities. Additionally, the work of Torres and Camacho (2020) emphasized that project-based learning and research allow students to actively use language in context, promoting a deeper understanding and retention. These findings confirm that activity-based programs are essential in supporting the English language development of Indigenous students in a way that is interactive, meaningful, and aligned with their real-life experiences.

Influence of programs on learning English. The emerging themes under this structured theme can gain knowledge, improved English, helped and encouraged to learn more, enjoyment and participation, and improved vocabulary. These themes reflect how well-designed programs not only enhance students' English skills but also boost their motivation and sense of achievement. Students shared that participating in activities such as essay writing, reading tasks, and interactive programs helped them realize the value of English and allowed them to apply classroom learning in practical ways. Others noted that these activities increased their confidence, especially when they discovered they could use unfamiliar words or construct meaningful sentences. Some respondents emphasized the joy and fun they experienced in these programs, which made them more eager to participate and continue learning. In general, students associated programs with meaningful progress and emotional reinforcement, which in turn strengthened their willingness to learn.

A study by Kim and Lee (2021) highlighted that when learners experience success and enjoyment in English-related programs, their intrinsic motivation increases significantly. Likewise, Morales and De Guzman (2020) found that students involved in interactive and skill-based programs showed more consistent academic engagement, particularly in language learning. Additionally, Medina and Tolentino (2022) highlighted the importance of using real-world tasks, such as writing and research, as a motivational driver in second language education. These studies validate that integrating practical, student-centered programs into the learning process not only reinforces language acquisition but also cultivates a positive emotional climate that motivates Indigenous students to persist in learning English.

Other programs to support better Indigenous students. The emerging themes under this structured theme are internet connection inside the campus, more programs and activities, general suggestions, program for Sangguniang Kabataan, and once-a-week English reading. Students voiced both practical and creative ideas that reflect their awareness of the barriers they face and the types of support they believe would help overcome them. Many stressed the need for reliable internet access within the school, citing difficulties in accessing online dictionaries, pronunciation tools, and educational resources. They also advocated for more activities outside class hours, such as reading sessions, games, and interactive exercises, that foster English fluency in low-pressure environments. Some acknowledged they had many ideas for improvement but lacked the vocabulary or confidence to articulate them, revealing the need for student voice platforms such as forums or workshops. Others suggested involving the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) in organizing barangay-level English learning events to make English a part of community life, rather than just a classroom experience. A recurring recommendation was the implementation of a once-a-week English reading session, which students believed would build fluency, boost confidence, and promote consistency in language exposure.

Pascual and Relano Pastor (2021) emphasized the importance of technological infrastructure in supporting language learning, especially in underserved Indigenous communities. Their research concluded that internet access expands student exposure to authentic English materials and supports autonomous learning. Serrano and Angeles (2023) found that community-based

programs, when co-organized with local youth groups, enhance participation and contextualize learning, making it more relevant and effective. Meanwhile, Lim and Salvador (2022) highlighted that frequent, low-stakes reading routines such as weekly English reading sessions contribute to increased reading fluency and confidence, particularly among students who lack home-based language support. These findings support the notion that Indigenous learners thrive in environments where access, inclusion, and routine are prioritized through both technological and social support systems.

RQ4: How do educators perceive the influence of cultural context on the English language learning of Indigenous secondary students?

The results in this section were from the responses from the teacher research participants to the specific research questions used to gather data for the 4th major research question. There were three (3) specific research questions used to gather information on the perspective of the educators on the language learning experiences of Indigenous students.

Impact of IP students' cultural background on English language Acquisition. The themes in this section, cannot pronounce English language properly, difficult to understand simple words, find hard to adapt English language, lack of English vocabulary, and English Language learning not easy for IP learners. Teachers expressed that Indigenous learners face considerable difficulties in acquiring English due to the linguistic and cultural differences between their home environment and the language of instruction. They shared that students often mispronounce English words, influenced by the sound patterns of their native dialects. Even simple words can be difficult to comprehend when students have limited exposure to English outside school.

Teachers also noted that students struggle to adapt to the English learning environment, particularly when their cultural norms and communication styles differ from those of the mainstream classroom. The lack of vocabulary was another concern, especially since most families do not use or expose their children to English at home. Overall, educators recognized that English is typically the third or fourth language acquired by Indigenous students (after their mother tongue, Bisaya, and sometimes Filipino), making the learning curve significantly steeper.

Mendoza and Aquino (2020) highlighted the compounded challenges Indigenous learners face in acquiring English, particularly when phonological systems between languages are vastly different. Their study found that pronunciation errors often stem from interference with their first language. Barrios and Reyes (2022) emphasized that limited vocabulary and minimal English exposure at home result in low reading comprehension and oral fluency among IP students.

Furthermore, Salazar and Ilagan (2021) observed that multilingual environments, while enriching, require teachers to employ culturally sensitive and adaptive strategies to support learners' transition into English. These findings validate the experiences of teachers in this study and suggest that cultural background profoundly influences not only the pace but also the process of English language acquisition among Indigenous learners.

Best instructional techniques for relating cultural background to English Lessons. The emerging themes under this structured theme are contextualization and student-centered technique. Teachers emphasized that the most effective approach for bridging Indigenous students' culture and English instruction is contextualization. This involves introducing English concepts by connecting them to local objects, practices, or settings familiar to the students. For example, teachers explained that instead of using unfamiliar city-based terms, they use native tools, produce, and expressions from the students' daily lives. By translating English vocabulary into local languages like Mandaya or Bisaya and using culturally relevant examples, students are able to relate better to lessons and retain meaning more effectively. Another widely used strategy is student-centered instruction, where lessons are designed around students' experiences and learning pace. Teachers reported that this method promotes engagement because students feel that their background is respected. It also helps reduce learning anxiety when students are given time and space to connect their knowledge with what they are learning in English.

Domingo and Magsino (2019) found that contextualized learning improves comprehension and interest among Indigenous learners by making abstract concepts concrete and familiar. Padilla and Franco (2021) also concluded that integrating students' cultural knowledge into instruction fosters participation and deeper cognitive processing. In support of student-centered

methods, Garcia and Tinio (2022) demonstrated that when students are allowed to learn at their own pace and are given tasks related to their real-life context, language retention and classroom engagement increase significantly. These studies confirm that culturally grounded, learner-responsive teaching is essential for effective English language instruction in Indigenous communities.

Importance of integrating students' culture into language learning. The responses generated five emerging themes: very important to help children learn, smooth and faster learning, culture awareness, boost confidence, essential to daily life, and retain cultural practices. Teachers underscored that integrating culture into English instruction is not just helpful, it is necessary. They shared that using culturally relevant examples makes abstract English concepts easier for students to understand. For instance, instead of using unfamiliar terms like "dragon fruit," they use locally grown crops like cabbage to explain parts of speech. Teachers observed that when cultural context is used, lessons become more engaging, learning flows faster, and students participate more willingly. They also noticed that culturally inclusive instruction boosts students' self-confidence by affirming that their heritage is valuable. This reduces feelings of inferiority and embarrassment, particularly around pronunciation or speech style, while building a sense of pride and identity. Teachers further emphasized that cultural integration in school supports the preservation of Indigenous practices and language, which might otherwise be lost over time. For many IP learners, cultural validation is what turns education into empowerment.

Agcaoili and Diaz (2021) emphasized that culturally responsive language instruction enhances learner motivation and improves both comprehension and retention. Their study showed that students are more confident when they see their culture reflected in lessons. Santiago and Ubaldo (2022) found that integrating local identity and practices into English teaching not only improves participation but also preserves cultural knowledge among Indigenous youth. Additionally, Morales and Santos (2023) argued that without cultural integration, language learning feels disconnected and impersonal, making it harder for marginalized students to engage meaningfully. These findings confirm that incorporating cultural context into

language learning is crucial for both linguistic and social development.

RQ5: What is the perception of parents regarding the influence of cultural environment on their children's English language acquisition and proficiency enhancement?

The results in this section were from the responses from the parent research participants to the specific research questions used to gather data for the 5th major research question. There were three (3) specific research questions used to gather information on the perspective of the parents on the language learning experiences of Indigenous students.

Impact of cultural background on child's English language acquisition. The responses generated three emerging themes, having difficulty in learning English, having difficulty in understanding English, and afraid of being laughed at. Parents described their children's cultural background as a strong influence on how they acquire English. Most respondents explained that in their homes and communities, the primary language spoken is Mandaya or Minandaya, with little or no exposure to English. As a result, students often struggle to grasp the fundamentals of the language, particularly in areas such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and comprehension. Some parents admitted that their children struggle even with simple English words, noting that English is encountered almost exclusively in school. Others observed that their children feel self-conscious or even fearful when trying to speak English aloud, especially if they anticipate being laughed at or corrected. Despite these challenges, parents affirmed that their children are eager to learn, often working harder to overcome these cultural and linguistic obstacles with the help of teachers and school programs.

Torres and Malonzo (2021) found that limited exposure to English at home, particularly in Indigenous communities, has a significant impact on early language acquisition and listening comprehension. Pascua and Ibanez (2022) noted that children from language-minority households tend to experience lower confidence and increased anxiety in classroom communication, particularly when pronunciation or speaking aloud is involved. Moreover, Garvida and Clemente (2023) emphasized that students in multilingual homes benefit from culturally responsive instruction that acknowledges their language background while scaffolding English learning in a

supportive way. These studies confirm that while cultural background can pose learning challenges, targeted school-based interventions can help bridge linguistic gaps and empower children to succeed.

Particular cultural traditions, events, or activities that helped shape child's English language learning. The emerging themes are, church meetings sometimes, assemblies and school activities, none, Pyagsawitan Festival, and school and church programs. Parents shared that while English is not a dominant part of community traditions, there are certain events where their children are indirectly exposed to the language. For example, church services, especially those with visiting pastors or youth speakers, sometimes include English prayers or sermon parts that help children become familiar with the sound and meaning of common English words. Likewise, school-based programs such as assemblies and reading contests provide children with opportunities to hear and occasionally speak English, particularly during introductions or speeches. Some parents recalled that during the Pyagsawitan Festival, guests and program hosts used English when addressing the audience, which created a meaningful exposure for their children. Other parents, however, admitted that such opportunities are rare, as most activities in the barangay or school are conducted in local languages. A few recognized that structured school and church programs, especially those that intentionally include English elements, are helpful in gradually familiarizing children with the language outside of the classroom.

Lopez and Calderon (2021) highlighted that even brief, incidental exposure to English in religious and community events contributes to early listening comprehension and vocabulary development, especially among students with limited classroom engagement. Fernandez and David (2020) emphasized the importance of culturally relevant programs, such as local festivals and school celebrations, as platforms for applied language exposure in multilingual settings. Additionally, Ramos and Lazo (2022) found that integrating English into informal community-based activities improves learner confidence and engagement, particularly when done in culturally safe environments. These findings confirm that even modest exposure to English through traditional and social events can play a supportive role in a child's language development.

Implications for Practice

Based on the findings, the following implications for practice are offered.

On Influence of Cultural Background on English Learning. It can be concluded that Indigenous students' cultural identity strongly influences how they learn English, sometimes empowering them with confidence and motivation, and at other times, creating linguistic and emotional challenges. Schools and teachers should recognize the cultural diversity of learners and treat it as an asset rather than a barrier. This implies the need to develop culturally inclusive teaching strategies, encourage identity-affirming conversations, and provide safe spaces where students can express themselves freely without fear of judgment or ridicule.

On Challenges in Learning English. The difficulties expressed by students in understanding English vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar reveal the urgency for instructional support systems that are differentiated and scaffolded. Teachers must be trained to recognize pronunciation anxiety and respond with patience and phonological awareness. Additional support, such as remedial reading sessions and the use of translation strategies (from English to Bisaya or Mandaya), should be adopted to improve comprehension.

On Suggestions for Culturally Responsive Programs. Students proposed simple yet powerful interventions, such as weekly English reading sessions, barangay-based programs supported by the SK, and stronger internet access within the campus. These should be taken as actionable insights for school administrators and community leaders. Implementing these learner-driven recommendations can lead to higher engagement and reduced anxiety in learning English. Collaboration between schools and local government units (LGUs) may enhance program reach and sustainability.

On Teacher Practices and Strategies. Teachers should consistently apply contextualization and student-centered approaches. Incorporating local examples, native expressions, and culturally familiar visuals can help bridge the understanding gap. Furthermore, the translation of Indigenous stories into English should be encouraged not only as a pedagogical tool but also as a means of preserving Indigenous literature while enhancing literacy in both languages.

On Parental and Community Involvement. Parents, even without formal English proficiency, serve as motivators and supporters of learning. Schools should foster stronger partnerships with parents by offering workshops, local-language newsletters, and regular communication that emphasizes their role in supporting English learning. Community events and school activities can also be tailored to include both cultural celebration and language exposure.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study explored the influence of cultural context on the English language learning of Indigenous secondary students from the Mandaya and Mansaka tribes in Maragusan, Davao de Oro. Through the perspectives of students, teachers, and parents, the study uncovered the deeply intertwined relationship between cultural identity, language acquisition, language proficiency learning motivation, and instructional strategies.

Findings revealed that students' cultural background plays both a supportive and challenging role in their English learning. While their sense of identity often fuels motivation and persistence, it can also create gaps in comprehension, vocabulary, and pronunciation, particularly when English is not used at home or in the community. Despite these challenges, the learners demonstrated resilience and a strong willingness to adapt, often offering insightful suggestions on how to improve their learning experience. Programs such as weekly reading sessions, after-class activities, and teacher-led translations were consistently valued by the students for their ability to make English more accessible and engaging.

Teachers highlighted the need for contextualized and student-centered approaches to instruction. By relating lessons to students' daily lives, incorporating local examples, and affirming cultural identity in the classroom, educators found that students became more responsive and confident in their learning. Similarly, parents, even those with limited English proficiency, demonstrated deep support for their children's education, motivating them at home, encouraging them to read, and trusting teachers to guide their academic growth.

The research also emphasized that integrating culture into instruction is not a supplemental strategy; it is essential. Language learning becomes more meaningful and effective when it affirms rather than suppresses the

learner's identity. As such, this study advocates for the continued implementation and development of inclusive, culture-based English learning programs supported by community involvement and responsive teaching methods.

Ultimately, the findings confirm that Indigenous learners do not need to choose between embracing their heritage and achieving language proficiency. With the right support, culturally grounded instruction, and collaborative effort between schools and communities, Indigenous students can thrive in both worlds, preserving their identity while gaining the linguistic tools they need to succeed in broader academic and societal contexts.

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