



Pedagogical struggles and gaps in language literacy enhancement: the case of indigenous people's education teachers in the Philippines

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Abstract

Enhancing language literacy is one of the most prioritized learning targets of the K-12 curriculum in the Philippines. Several language acquisition, learning, teaching and assessing principles to which the present Language Arts and Multiliteracies Curriculum (LAMC) is anchored on, are consistently improved to forward maximum and effective instructional efforts in enhancing learners' communicative competence and multiliteracies. At the elementary level, teachers apply innovative pedagogical strategies to develop learners' macro skills which are relevant to have a meaningful interaction with others in a multicultural society. However, this language literacy enhancement is considered as a challenging task for the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) teachers due to several constraints that may have influenced the indigenous learners' language learning competence.

Using the qualitative-case study research design, the responses of the selected IPEd teachers from the semi-structured interviews were examined. The thematic analysis was utilized to determine the challenges encountered in teaching language literacy among indigenous learners in Agusan Del Sur, Philippines. On the other hand, the Provus Discrepancy model was used to determine the gaps between the current language literacy performance and outcomes and the language teaching standards enshrined in LAMC. The results showed that IPEd teachers commonly struggled with enhancing learners' viewing skills and digital literacy, developing reading comprehension, improving writing skills, contextualizing lessons, following spiral progression in language, and teaching orthography and grammar. Moreover, the results showed that these encountered struggles became more complicated due to the gaps in language learning standards, instructional learning support, learners' literacy and readiness level, and teachers' competence and strategies used.

Keywords: language literacy, indigenous peoples education, pedagogical struggles, language teachers

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1. Introduction

1.1. Introduce the problem

Language literacy involves the process of acquiring and learning a target language that is used for real communication (Honigsfeld, 2019). It is fundamental to the learners since learning a specific language is a vehicle to convey one's feelings, thoughts, and experiences; this, in turn, would allow him or her to build relationships and harmony with other people. Thus, language acquisition and learning are an overriding domain of language literacy enhancement as it enables the learners to engage in various communicative settings and learn how to function effectively within society (Kalantzis et al., 2016).

For school-age language learners, there is no solitary way to become literate in their target language. Although they participate in communication activities that provide an atmosphere conducive to language acquisition, teachers remain as the primary source of input in the target language (Paesani & Allen, 2020). With this end view, language teachers are given a central role in honing the learners' language literacy or communicative competence.

In the Philippine context, enhancing language literacy is accompanied by several challenges that impede the learners from acquiring and learning a target language (Leaño et al., 2019). Although language literacy enhancement in the country was reflected in the K-12 curriculum through Language Arts and Multiliteracies Curriculum (LAMC) (DepEd, 2016), it is still a challenging task for Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) teachers to integrate some pedagogical strategies into language teaching given the diverse needs of the indigenous learners (Protacio, 2021).

Language literacy enhancement is a vital intervention to address issues that take place in the process of teaching and learning a language (Vulchanova et al., 2017). It lays down language teaching practices, approaches, and strategies that guide teachers in producing learners that are communicatively competent and highly literate. Based on the main objective of LAMC, learners are expected to develop learning competencies that can be applied to a variety of communicative functions (DepEd, 2016). Being competent and multiliterate in the Mother Tongue, Filipino, and English is part of the curriculum's rationale to equip the learners with the skills necessary to understand the multifarious systems of communication in the era of globalization (Barrot, 2018).

In light of the language teaching principles as stipulated in LAMC, IPED teachers, however, grapple with socio-linguistic constraints that are rooted in the indigenous learners' diverse backgrounds. Aside from socio-linguistic constraints, the absence of teaching and learning support and low functional literacy of both learners and their parents also hinder the effective implementation of LAMC. Additionally, the issue of the digital divide keeps forming educational inequity among indigenous learners.

Furthermore, in the context of IPED, achieving the goals of LAMC requires a repertoire of inclusive processes of language teaching and learning; hence, this study wants to explore the pedagogical struggles and gaps in language literacy enhancement, particularly in the case of the IPED teachers in Agusan Del Sur, Philippines.

1.2 Language Arts and Multiliteracies Curriculum: Nature, Scope, and Purposes

One of the recent developments in the new basic education curriculum in the Philippines is the adoption of Language Arts and Multiliteracies Curriculum (LAMC), which aims to enhance learners' communicative competence and multiple literacies in the Mother Tongue, Filipino, and English (DepEd, 2016). This curriculum enhancement intends to address the needs of the learners to keep up with the pace of change brought about by globalization. In this multicultural world, it is an indispensable requirement that learners must be communicatively competent and highly literate to deal with the complex systems of communication and information.

The ability of the learners to demonstrate competence in various communicative functions and multiliteracies is anchored on the curriculum's five components: learning processes, effective language use, making meaning through language, and holistic assessment. Based on the curriculum framework, the heart of LAMC is making meaning through language. This pertains to the learners' macro-skills of the language and the development of thinking skills necessary for making decisions and solving problems. It stresses the five (5) sub-strands of the curriculum: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing which serve as integral components for understanding and creation of meaning.

The development of LAMC was an intervention to the poor performance of the learners in the National Achievement Test in all subjects (Barrot, 2018). Grounded on the idea that language, thinking, and learning are intertwined, LAMC was developed as a response to DepEd's overarching goal which is to mold learners that can compete globally (DepEd, 2016). In this curriculum, literacy is multimodal which means that it is not limited to printed or written forms of the language as it encompasses a variety of modes such as music, pictures, and gestures (Sang, 2017). This literacy perspective is known as multiliteracies.

The concept of multiliteracies was originally introduced by the New London Group to strengthen literacy using different forms of languages in a multitude of contexts (Sang, 2017). Multiliteracies approach is a response to the 21st-century demands that have challenged conventional literacy practices. In the era of evolving education, multiliteracies pedagogy has emerged to address the diverse needs of learners through the use of pedagogical strategies for teaching and learning (Ming, 2016).

1.3 Pedagogical Struggles in Language Teaching

Various research studies show that teachers usually face a multitude of challenges in teaching a new language, particularly the English language (Wirawan, 2020; Vilazadeh, 2021; Rahman et al., 2019). These problems are mainly institutional such as overloaded English curriculum, class size, technology and equipment deficiencies (Sali & Kecik, 2018); and personal like teacher's lack of English exposure (Mishra, 2015). Furthermore, Rahman et al. (2019) state that policies in language education, implementation of language teaching curriculum, method, materials, assessment, and teacher's professional development are all salient aspects that preclude the improvement of language teaching situations.

In this rapidly changing world where competence in the use of English language is extremely important, many non-native countries across the globe have been striving for enhancing English language education which is commonly faced by constraining factors such as lack of resources, English literacy problems, and student's internal motivation (Abikar, 2022). Particularly, teaching English in rural areas is a challenging task for teachers as they need to deal with problems that are related to students, teachers, and facilities. Endriyati & Abasa (2019) revealed in their study that the teaching of English in rural areas is confronted by challenges that arise from student's vocabulary, motivation, and parent's support; teacher's knowledge of IT, mastery, and training; and school's lack of computers, building, and LCD.

Several studies also pointed out that diversity of linguistic abilities and needs among learners is a common barrier in learning a target language. Kaptingei (2016) mentioned that student's feelings of exclusion in their classes, the strong influence of first language (L1), and misalignment of language policy are challenges that teachers often deal with. Likewise, Erling et al. (2022) presented the importance of multilingualism in teaching an additional language among diverse students. They emphasized that teachers' negative perceptions of multilingualism contribute to the difficulties of teaching students with diverse backgrounds.

While language teaching is gaining more prominence across non-English speaking countries, as demand for English language education is increasing, common struggles

emerged such as lack of effective teachers, Mother Tongue influence, traditional examination system, and place of English in schools (Renjini & Puri, 2020).

1.4 Gaps in Improving Language Literacy

Having advanced literacy skills is crucial in the world of knowledge. To put it simply, one must possess not only a set of competencies like the ability to recognize words and decode texts but also higher-level skills to synthesize and evaluate information from various sources. Washbrook (2016) stated that learners' poor literacy skills can be associated with their early language development and attention skills.

In the study by Cardoza (2020), there is a gap in the research about the factors that relate to language and literacy. Research suggests that the growth and development of the language is affected by the amount of exposure to a specific language (Hindman & Wasik, 2015). Moreover, the learners' social and language development could be affected when they use more than one language. Nemeth (2015) revealed that dual learners, who can use both their home language and additional language, are usually provided an intervention. Nevertheless, the lack of understanding of the factors that affect language learning could resort to providing language instruction that is not aligned with the diverse needs of the learners (Rydenvald, 2015).

Hodges et al. (2016) mentioned that plenty of literacy journals for practitioners provide innovative pedagogies; however, these lack explanations of the intervention's processes and benefits. Consequently, classroom teachers struggle to fully understand these teaching strategies and practices. It is necessary that teachers know the theoretical underpinnings of the instructional practices to be used before addressing the development needs of the learners.

There is an abundance of studies that propose language and literacy interventions, but many programs fail to address language literacy challenges due to multiculturalism, which is considered as a primary barrier. According to the study conducted by UNESCO (2016), the effective implementation of literacy programs has been hampered by commonly neglected factors such as ignorance of national languages, the resistance of teachers and local communities, and huge disparity in available resources.

1.5 Language Learning in Indigenous Communities

Indigenous peoples (IPs) learn a new language believing that it can help them to become educationally successful in the future. They viewed the practice of learning an additional language as a way to progress and the only way out of poverty. Since indigenous families want their children to be educated, they end up learning a new language though it may put their native language on the verge of extinction (Reyhner, 2017).

In Southeast Asian countries where English serves as a second language, the propagation of English language education even reached indigenous communities as part of the region's overarching goal to compete in the international arena (Low & Ao, 2018). The widespread use of the English language continues to strengthen, while the position of indigenous languages gradually weakens. However, policies promoting the utilization of English language did not come out without problems. One of the dominant concerns is the language shift from Mother Tongue languages to English language. The former is said to be at risk of being forgotten due to the rapid use of the latter one (Low & Pakir, 2018; Wee, 2018).

Although there have been language teaching and learning programs provided for indigenous communities, these are often confronted by psycho and socio-linguistic difficulties (Hamel, 2016). Conceptions that IPs need to give up their languages and identity to be accepted by the nation commonly resulted in resistance among tribal communities. Additionally, beliefs that indigenous languages are obstacles to literacy development contributed to the ineffective implementation of these programs as teachers resort to the imposition of monolingualism or using the target language only in language classrooms.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

The researchers subscribed to the descriptive-single case study research design to investigate the struggles of the IPed teachers in enhancing the language literacy of indigenous learners among selected IPed-implementing schools located in different hinterland communities in the Municipality of Esperanza, Agusan Del Sur. Among the types of descriptive- case studies, the single case study design is deemed appropriate for the study objectives which are to provide an evidence-informed result and to describe the phenomenon from the context-specific and holistically oriented perspective (Yin, 2003; Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Aside from the descriptive-single case study research design, the researchers also utilized the Provus-Discrepancy evaluation model to determine the gaps between the actual implementation, performance and outcomes, and program standards enshrined in the present Language Arts and Multiliteracies Curriculum (LAMC). This Provus' discrepancy evaluation model (DEM) is a four-step process of program evaluation: a.) determining program standards or the intended outcomes, b.) determining program performance or operational information on how the program is conducted (Rahman et al., 2018), c.) comparing performance with standards, and d.) determining whether a

discrepancy exists between performance and standards (Provus, 1971; Pawilen, 2019). This evaluation model would help teachers obtain concrete evidence about whether the program performance satisfied the set program standards for changing performance, revisiting set competencies, and adjusting program standards.

Since the DEM was applied to school-level settings, the consolidated results were only limited to the available recorded performance of the indigenous learners, interview responses, accomplishment reports, and intervention programs initiated by the IPed teachers in selected schools serving indigenous learners. The results may be used as a baseline study for a more thorough analysis of the discrepancies in language literacy and proposing strategies and interventions to address those curriculum incongruities partially or completely. Furthermore, this DEM provides reasonable assumptions and evidence-informed explanations about the struggles experienced by IPed teachers in language teaching.

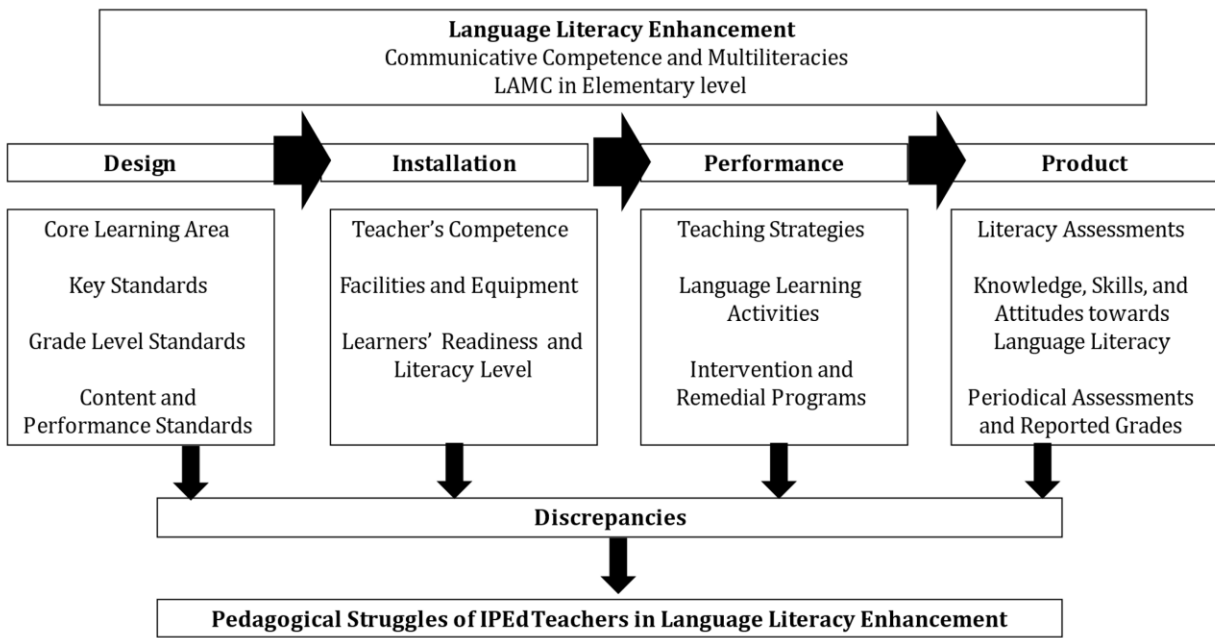


Figure 1. Provus Discrepancy Evaluation Model Applied to Language Literacy Enhancement

Figure 1 shows how Provus discrepancy evaluation model is applied to the present study. It presents the four components of the said evaluation model, namely design, installation, performance, and product. Each component examines the aspects and areas of LAMC implementation at the elementary level. The standards stipulated in LAMC

would serve as comparison criteria to determine possible discrepancies. At each component, a comparison between the standard (what should be) and actual implementation (what really happened) was made (Provus, 1969, 1971).

In the *Design stage*, the researchers identified the program design of the LAMC. The program design is enshrined in the standards of the curriculum namely core learning area, key standards, grade level standards, and content and performance standards. These standards provide valuable information about the input, process, and output of LAMC.

Next is the *Installation stage*. This stage compares the program inputs with the program standards. Program inputs include IPED teacher's competence, facilities and equipment, and learners' readiness and literacy level which significantly affect the LAMC implementation. In this stage, the researchers examined if the human and physical resources are prepared enough to carry out the plans embedded in the LAMC.

Then, the second comparison was done in the *Performance stage*. This stage deals with comparison between the program processes with the program standards. It assesses whether the processes involved have turned the inputs into outputs. The teaching strategies, learning activities, and intervention and remedial program manifest the actual implementation of the LAMC. Therefore, in this stage, the researchers thoroughly examined how the IPED teachers selected and carried out the lessons in a real teaching situation and determined if there were possible misalignments or mismatches occurred in relation to the set program standards.

Lastly, the learning outcomes or outputs that can be derived from language literacy assessments, documentation of knowledge, skills, and attitude (KSA) toward language literacy, and reported learners' grades in language were then compared to the program inputs. This stage is called the "*Product stage*", which analyzes if the program objectives have been achieved or not. This stage also provides an overview of the overall effectiveness of LAMC implementation at the elementary level. *Participant (subject) characteristics*

2.2. *Research Locale and Participants of the Study*

The Philippines is composed of 110 ethnolinguistic groups that comprise about 15% of the Philippine population (Camaya & Tamayo, 2018; Penaranda, 2019; Eduardo & Gabriel, 2021). Each group represents unique culture and language that have been inherited from their great ancestors. Most of these indigenous groups live in far-flung areas where education is largely inaccessible. Through its inclusive goal as echoed in SDGs, DepEd has leveled up building schools in isolated and hinterland communities

where most indigenous peoples settle. It opened several teaching positions for IPED teachers, who will then be assigned to teach indigenous learners. These selected IPED teachers are indigenous peoples themselves. As such, adjustments to teach in the identified remote areas would be much easier than assigning teachers who are not part of the indigenous community.

In Agusan Del Sur, four indigenous groups populate the province, namely Manobo, Higaonon, Banwaon, and Talaandig (Canoy, 2012). While some have inhabited the river towns and población, most of them still live in the hinterlands and subscribe to agricultural farming as a means of living. Due to their location, indigenous learners are deprived of electricity and internet connection, which are both essential to education. Similarly, IPED teachers are constrained to utilize digital technology for effective language teaching due to the unavailability of equipment and utilities needed.

The main participants of the case study were purposely selected IPED teachers. A total of ten (10) IPED teachers were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. These teachers are assigned to teach indigenous learners in the Municipality of Esperanza, Municipality of Talacogon, and Municipality of San Luis in Agusan Del Sur, Philippines.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were obtained from semi-structured interviews with the purposely selected 10 IPED teachers. To gain more insightful information about the IPED teachers' struggles and gaps in language teaching, the researchers also conducted a simple immersion and participant observation with the approval of the community. To analyze the collected data, the researchers made use of thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke (2006). The generated themes revealed the struggles of IPED teachers in enhancing language literacy in the said research locales.

In identifying the gaps, content analysis and document review were employed in this case study. Content analysis was utilized to determine important concepts about the teachers' execution of the planned instructional activities in LAMC and learners' reception of linguistic competencies. On the other hand, lesson plans, course syllabus, and constructed tests were evaluated using document review. Results were merged to identify the gaps following the procedures of Provus-Discrepancy evaluation in curriculum.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Pedagogical Struggles of the IPED teachers

The identified pedagogical struggles of the IPEd teachers stemmed from the gaps between the LAMC standards and its actual implementation in schools. Most of the pedagogical issues are continuously experienced by the IPEd teachers due to resource-, learners-, and community-related problems.

3.1.1. Enhancing learners' viewing skills and digital literacy

This theme discusses the struggles of IPEd teachers in improving the digital literacy and viewing skills of indigenous learners. To thrive in 21st-century education, learners must be exposed to digital technology as a part of language learning support. Digital technologies provide learners an avenue where they sharpen their skills in language learning. For instance, the commodification of English-subtitled movies and translated ideas on social media will not only enhance learners' skills in viewing and independent learning but also expose them to various vocabulary words applied to a specific and appropriate context. The ICT-based materials can also be utilized for improving the phonological awareness and listening comprehension of the learners. Hence, they are expected to display competence in using digital tools and engage in critical reflection of their own learning.

Li et al. (2021) provided empirical evidence that shows the positive experiences and attitudes of indigenous peoples toward utilizing digital technology to strengthen their language and literacy skills. Similarly, Begoray (2018) reported the positive impacts of digital storytelling and digital narratives on learning of multiliteracies such as language, technology skills, indigenous knowledge, and other skills which are relevant to their wellbeing and empowered self (Pirbhai-Illich, 2009).

However, IPEd teachers stated that using digital technology in language teaching was not fully explored in their respective teaching stations due to a lack of digital tools such as computers, sound speakers, LCD projectors, and television. They also argued that as much as they wanted to do ICT-assisted language teaching, the situation did not permit them because of the absence of electricity and internet connection. Consequently, most of the learners were still computer illiterate even after graduating from the elementary level. Learners were deprived of watching and listening to videos and audio that make use of English language which, in a way, affects their appreciation of and practice of the target language.

The situation above shows that digital inequity seriously exists in indigenous communities. The struggles for securing indigenous learners' right to social connectivity are caused by lack of digital literacy, high costs of online access, and lack of connectivity (Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness, 2020). Having access to the internet is a fundamental human right as declared by the United Nations; therefore, there is a need

for the national government through DepEd to establish internet connectivity in remote areas inhabited by IPs.

3.1.2. Developing reading comprehension

This theme entails that developing reading comprehension of the indigenous learners is one of the struggles faced by the IPed teachers. The focus and effort to enhance the reading comprehension skill has affected the development of other language learning skills that are also relevant to their interaction in life. Several authors claimed that reading comprehension plays an important role in foundational learning which influences the successful participation of learners in adult life (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998; Smith et al. 2000). The ability to comprehend transforms the information received into understanding (Delgadova, 2015).

As early as Grade 2 level, learners are being taught to read with comprehension. The ability to read simple sentences and leveled stories shall be developed once the learners are in Grade 3 level. By Grade 4 level, learners must demonstrate an understanding of text elements, linguistic nodes, and writing styles to comprehend various text types. This skill is further improved in the next grade levels. Generally, reading at the elementary level focuses on using information derived from texts in engaging in oral and written activities (DepEd English Curriculum Guide, 2016).

However, the structured reading instruction and reading performance standards exemplified in the curriculum guide were not systematically met by indigenous learners. In fact, several indigenous learners were still categorized as instructional and frustrated readers based on the reading assessment conducted in schools. IPed teachers revealed that some learners failed to become independent readers even after finishing elementary level. Oftentimes, those learners with low reading comprehension are usually the ones who are non-performing in class, and who eventually stop attending classes.

IPed teachers also mentioned that the difficulty of enhancing reading comprehension was caused by several factors including linguistic variation, language anxiety, lack of ICT-assisted reading strategies, non-exposure to English language especially at home, low motivation, and negative thoughts about their socio-economic status, poor vocabulary, and fear of being criticized when speaking English. Similarly, Obligar & Caraballe (2022), in their study, found out that indigenous learners were frustrated readers in both silent and oral reading. They pointed out that the indigenous learners' difficulty in reading comprehension was induced by poor usage and understanding and limited vocabulary of English language.

To address the problem, IPed teachers stated that they seriously focus on enhancing learners' reading ability through designing and implementing school-based reading interventions. However, they also revealed that concentrating more on reading skills enhancement has sacrificed the time that must have been spent on teaching and

absorbing other language learning competencies such as vocabulary development, writing competence, grammar awareness and structure, and study strategies.

3.1.3. Improving writing skills

Poor vocabulary and reading comprehension skills have a direct influence on the ability of the learners to write effective sentences. Considering the English writing competencies of the indigenous learners, IPEd teachers found out that the learning competencies stipulated in the K-12 curriculum are not aligned with the learners' English writing skills. This means that indigenous learners are left behind in terms of the required writing competencies that they need to achieve.

Based on the K-12 Basic Education Integrated Language Arts Curriculum, the writing domains include grammar awareness and structure, vocabulary, spelling, and writing compositions (DepEd, 2016). Except for spelling, the competencies under these domains must be taught to the learners from kindergarten to Grade 12. For instance, in Grade 1, learners are expected to demonstrate an understanding of the following parts of speech: nouns, adjectives, pronouns, and prepositions. Nonetheless, this is not applicable in the case of indigenous learners as they have zero knowledge of the English language. Hence, IPEd teachers are confronted by dilemmas as to how their students are taught based on the English curriculum guide (Epstein, 2009).

IPEd teachers collectively shared that one of the primary factors that hamper IP learners from acquiring the English language is lack of exposure. Since the target language is not introduced to them, unless they go to school, the learners need to start learning from the basics. The root cause of difficulty stems from the learners' language foundation. It is vital that learners are exposed to various functions of the language. In writing, teachers mentioned that indigenous learners need to learn basic concepts of the language first before they could compose a sentence, paragraph, or essay. As such, they fall behind compared to mainstream students who are more exposed than them in terms of the use of the target language.

Improving the indigenous learners' writing skills is a big challenge to the IPEd teachers. Due to unfamiliarity and lack of exposure to the language, learners commonly exhibit struggles in performing the required writing tasks. This is a serious concern for teachers as they believe that the present English curriculum needs to be aligned with the indigenous learners' needs.

3.1.4. Contextualizing lessons

This theme entails the struggles of the IPEd teachers in deepening the learners' engagement in educational processes through inclusive, locally grounded, and culture-sensitive pedagogies. Contextualization is one of the mandates of the IPEd curriculum.

This decentralization effort in instructional planning aims to make the curriculum relational as it values the importance of the situation and setting to the learning development of the learners. In addition, curriculum contextualization is a process of matching the curriculum content and instructional strategies that respect the identities, local experiences, and unique contexts of the learners (DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016). Through contextualization, IPEd teachers provide a safe and encouraging learning space for the indigenous learners as they consider the learners' cultural background and subjectivities in educational processes including instructional design, materials development, teaching strategies, and classroom assessment.

Contextualization is significant to language teaching not only to get learners' attention but also to have long-term effects on language learning (Korkmaz & Korkmaz, 2013). Supporting the claim, Abad (2020), in her study, developed culture-based and contextualized reading materials to address the language needs of indigenous learners. She argued that it would be easier for the learners to engage themselves in enhancing their content vocabulary and increase their comprehension despite the language barriers through the use of contextualized materials. Additionally, Maristy (2019) reported that contextualization helped enhance the students' writing ability. They also found that contextualization positively impacted the learners' perspective toward language learning, motivation, writing competence, and reduction of grammatical mistakes.

However, IPEd teachers collectively narrated that they have encountered difficulty in contextualizing lessons due to financial constraints, lack of external support, and lack of recorded history and culture. First, the development of contextualized learning materials systematically requires community validation and quality assurance procedures to determine its appropriateness and cultural relevance to the learners' context before utilizing them in schools. To carry out the validation tasks, IPEd teachers stated that there must be a considerable budget for the salary of the tribal leaders and experts who will exert efforts in the validation process. However, as much as they wanted to push through creating contextualized learning materials, IPEd teachers mentioned that it was not included in their School Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE) due to insufficient budget.

Second, the financial constraints in materials development could be partially or completely addressed if there are other financial sources from external stakeholders. However, only a few of them are involved in school activities. Most of their external support includes school supplies and feeding projects only. IPEd teachers claimed that no external stakeholders have supported the development of contextualized learning materials aside from the DepEd and teacher training institutions within the research locale.

Third, the recorded history and culture of the indigenous learners is a paramount concern in contextualization. Such will be used for writing stories, text translation, and cultural references. In connection, IPEd teachers emphasized that the absence of dictionaries and recorded history reduces the chance of effective contextualization as there will be no basis to be used for cross-checking and validation. They also argued that although IPEd teachers are indigenous peoples themselves, some significant details about their history and culture were not fully practiced nor shared with them; therefore, written history would be of great help. Moreover, IPEd teachers noted that the absence of recorded history limits them from further exploring and understanding the learners' context which is essential to the teaching-learning process.

The results were consistent with the findings of De Ocampo (2019), which found out that there are no textbooks, written in the native language, which are available for teaching indigenous learners. Hence, IPEd teachers were forced to improvise and create original materials from scratch which seems to be time-consuming and demanding on their part (Leite et al, 2018).

3.1.5. Following spiral progression in language

This theme stresses several issues that IPEd teachers deal with using spiral progression when teaching the target language to the learners. In spiral progression, language must be taught at increasing levels of difficulty to make sure learners have developed the foundational competencies before they achieve higher levels of language use. The spiral progression approach involves the teaching of concepts, from basic to complex, to the learners. These concepts must be taught over and over again until mastery is achieved. In short, this affirms the idea that a teacher's lesson must be based on the learner's level of understanding. However, IPEd teachers claimed that the content standard for each grade level is not based on their learners' skills.

Spiral progression is one of the language teaching principles that language teachers need to take into consideration to help learners effectively achieve language acquisition and learning. As stated in LAMC's guide, the domains where the content standards are anchored include oral language, phonological awareness, book and print knowledge, alphabet knowledge, phonics, and word recognition, fluency, spelling, writing and composition, grammar awareness and structure, vocabulary development, reading comprehension, listening comprehension, attitude towards language, literature, and literacy, study strategies, and viewing.

IPEd teachers stated that indigenous learners have little or no knowledge at all of the target language such as English. Due to this reason, teachers need to allot more time going back to the basic concepts; as a result, learners fail to master higher competencies intended for a particular quarter. This situation validates the need for designing a

strategy that bridges IP learners' competency in using the target language (Daling, 2017). In fulfilling this goal, IPEd teachers are struggling to align the curriculum.

3.1.6. Teaching orthography and grammar

This theme presents a bundle of struggles experienced by IPEd teachers in teaching competencies related to the mechanisms of spelling and grammar of the target language such as English. indigenous learners' native or first language has a direct influence on the process of learning correspondences between sounds and spelling and the structure of language or syntax (Dich & Pedersen, 2013). As such, IPEd teachers averred that it is a challenge for them to teach reading and writing due to the characteristics of the learners' native language that affect the acquisition of language literacy.

Based on LAMC, spelling, phonics and word recognition, and grammar awareness and structure are all concerned domains relevant for teaching reading and writing competencies (DepEd, 2016). It was deduced from the interview responses of the IPEd teachers that the spelling strategies used by IP learners differ since they spell an English word using a similar sound to their native language. Similarly, teachers find it hard to teach grammar as learners are unfamiliar with the structures and conventions of the target language. Particularly in writing, it was a difficult job for IPEd teachers to address learners' syntactical errors as reflected in their composition.

3.2. Identified Gaps in Language Literacy Enhancement

The gaps in language literacy enhancement were identified through the application of the Provus-Discrepancy curriculum evaluation model. Based on the results, four main gaps have been extracted after a thorough analysis.

3.2.1. Gaps in Language Learning Standards.

The structured and centralized implementation of LAMC has generated a learning gap among indigenous learners. Some learning standards, both content and performance, are too idealistic for the indigenous learners considering their level of knowledge, acquired foundational skills, and situatedness. As stated by Villaplaza (2021), the indigenous culture, knowledge, and language of the learners must be considered in curriculum planning and content. Also, the progression of learning competencies in LAMC is not precisely followed by the IPEd teachers as the curriculum does not take into account the adjustment of the learners in language learning caused by linguistic variation and unique learning context making them alienated from the set expectations of the language curriculum.

IPEd teachers explained that learners' characteristics and lifeways have influenced their ability to recall and focus on language learning following the expected learning competencies articulated in LAMC. They mentioned that some learners had difficulty remembering the concepts being taught in the classroom since these are not practiced and reviewed at home. Also, some learners had a problem mastering the English language skills since they have been exposed to various dialects used in their respective communities: "IP's native dialect", "Sinugbuanong Binisiya", and "Filipino", making them confused. This confusion may be accounted for in the implications related to pronunciation, correct usage, meaning, grammar rules, and word formation. Moreover, as noted by the IPEd teachers, learning the aforesaid dialects are taken by the indigenous learners as more important compared to English language learning, since these have been used for daily transactions and communication with other people once they are in the city proper.

The above-mentioned situation shows that the peculiarities and experiences of the indigenous learners shall be incorporated into the development of contextualized language curricula, especially in planning for content and performance standards. Such may result in bridging the gap in language learning since subjectivities and autonomy in learning have been magnified in the heart of education management, the curriculum in particular.

3.2.2. Gaps in Instructional Learning Support

This identified gap entails a lack of instructional learning support for smooth execution of instructional activities stipulated in LAMC and has affected the language learning appreciation and subject interest of the indigenous learners. Also, it has made the language concepts more abstract since drills and practices are not substantially executed due to the absence of needed facilities and equipment. Similarly, the ability to critically evaluate information and meaningfully understand the language systems expressed in spoken, written, and visual texts are not enhanced since the appropriate learning support and materials are not adequately provided to both IPEd teachers and learners.

IPEd teachers mentioned that phonological awareness, fluency, and pronunciation are less mastered skills by the indigenous learners since there are ICT-based learning materials that could help them teach the required learning competencies. Leano et al. (2019) investigated the speaking difficulties of indigenous learners in English semantics. Some of these difficulties are related to vocabulary, language articulation, and pronunciation. The lack of a speech laboratory, multimedia room, and digital equipment lessened the interest and appreciation of the learners to learn the target language. This has resulted in abhorrence to any writing and speaking engagements where English language is the main medium of communication. San Jose et al. (2013) averred that low

self-confidence in using English is one of the hindrances experienced by indigenous learners.

Furthermore, IPEd teachers argued that contextualized learning materials may generate more positive outcomes and become more meaningful to the indigenous learners if these have been enhanced through digitalization. They asserted that indigenous learners would be more motivated and actively engaged in the language learning process since the discussion is moving and attractive.

3.2.3. Gaps in Learners' Readiness and Literacy Level

This identified gap elucidates the learners' readiness and literacy level in terms of their competencies in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing which are all necessary for successful language learning. Assessing the learners' readiness and literacy level is an integral part of improving language skills. This would enable the teachers to develop appropriate interventions based on the needs of the learners. The lack of basic language skills and difficulties of the indigenous learners in learning a new language only show that they have low readiness and literacy level.

IPEd teachers revealed that the root cause of indigenous learners' difficulty to learn the target language is poor foundational learning. Prior to acquiring higher levels of language use, it is crucial that the learners have already learned the basic language skills. Nag et al. (2014) stated that students without solid foundations of the language prerequisites are at high risk of language learning failure. Considering the case of indigenous learners, there is a need for IPEd teachers to assess the readiness and literacy level of the learners to ensure that the language activities are tailored to their acquired language learning competencies. This can also serve as a basis to enhance the learners' basic knowledge and skills needed to effectively use the language.

In addition, another concern underlined by the IPEd teachers is language variation. They unanimously pointed out that the indigenous learners' observable dilemmas in learning the English language are pronunciation (accent), word choice (lexicon), and their choice of grammatical patterns. These problems, as mentioned by Barzan & Heydari (2019), all rise due to language variation. It was further explained that phonemes, morphemes, syntactic structures, and meanings are subject to variation (Barzan & Heydari, 2019). The regional, social, and contextual differences in the way that the indigenous learners used the English language have hampered their development of language literacy (da Rosa, 2017).

3.2.4. Gaps in Teachers' Competence and Strategies Used

This identified gap stresses IPEd teachers' professional knowledge and skills and language teaching strategies used to enhance the language literacy of indigenous learners. In the context of language teaching, teachers' language proficiency is essential

in making sure that specific language concepts are effectively conveyed to the learners. Similarly, teaching skills and strategies are an important consideration in improving the learners' language competencies. However, in the case of IPEd teachers, their competence and strategies in teaching English language among indigenous learners remain a significant concern.

One key factor that affects the acquisition of oral language skills among indigenous learners is the lack of teachers who are experts in reading instruction. IPEd teachers claimed that it was very challenging for them to teach the English language to indigenous learners, particularly in reading. Since they are not reading experts, some of their teaching and assessment practices do not substantially address the reading needs of the learners. As one of the disadvantaged groups, indigenous learners must be given appropriate reading assessments and interventions to enhance their oral language skills. Although they have forwarded several reading interventions, IPEd teachers claimed that some interventions do not completely address the language needs of the learners, particularly the enhancement of reading with evaluative comprehension.

Another significant issue identified among IPEd teachers is the usage of translation style in teaching the target language. IPEd teachers revealed that translation is a commonly employed teaching strategy. While translation is considered a powerful tool to help indigenous learners better understand foreign words for IPEd teachers, Al-Musawi (2014) stressed that using the native language in class is a hindrance to effective language learning. In fact, IPEd teachers admitted that they often speak in "Sinugbuanong Binisaya," a common dialect that has been spoken in the province, since they are General Education graduates and not specialized in teaching the components of a language such as phonology, semantics, morphology, syntax, and pragmatics. This only shows that IPEd teachers' difficulty to speak in English fluently is associated with their preference for using translation strategies in teaching English to indigenous learners.

4. Conclusion

Language literacy enhancement is pivotal to providing learners opportunities that enable them to be communicatively competent and multiliterate. With this end view, the LAMC was developed to address the challenges in Philippine education brought about by the rapidly changing world. To be globally competitive, the provision of language literacy enhancement is necessary to help learners achieve communicative competence and multiliteracies as LAMC's target outcomes. However, these concerned outcomes of LAMC have not been met in the case of indigenous learners as divulged by IPEd teachers in Agusan Del Sur, Mindanao.

Based on the results of the study, there have been identified pedagogical gaps and struggles in the adoption of LAMC as a guide for language literacy enhancement among

IPEd-implementing schools. Considering the diverse needs of the indigenous learners, gaps in language learning standards, instructional learning support, learners' readiness and literacy level, and teachers' competence and strategies used have been found. Failure to address these identified gaps may worsen the challenges experienced by IPEd teachers in enhancing language literacy among indigenous learners. Moreover, although IPEd teachers employed practices and strategies in language teaching, struggles remained existent in enhancing learners' viewing skills and digital literacy, developing reading comprehension, improving writing skills, contextualizing lessons, following spiral progression in language, and teaching orthography and grammar. Given these identified struggles, it can only be deduced that there is a need for improvements in the existing language literacy enhancement program for indigenous learners.

The Philippines, as a linguistically diverse country, contains different discourses and practices in the field of language education, particularly when ethnic and marginalized groups are involved. Since the present education system in the country has revolved around the development of communicative competence and multiliteracies, the concept of interculturality provides essential keys for a deeper understanding of the pedagogical gaps and struggles in language literacy enhancement present among IPEd-implementing schools.

5. Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations are forwarded by the researchers.

1. The Department of Education (DepEd) must provide a considerable financial allocation for the production of contextualized learning materials. These materials must be further checked and validated by the indigenous peoples to determine its level of acceptability and adherence to the cultural norms, lifeways, and learning styles of the community. Also, instructional development models for designing materials appropriate and specific to a particular indigenous community must be developed.

2. There is a need for the DepEd to train tribal leaders to become IPEd coaches and trainers since they have important roles in intergenerational knowledge transfer of their culture and history. Hence, there must be non-teaching or teaching items allocated for them to strengthen their active participation in contextualization as their daily living expenses are supported.

3. Curriculum developers and experts may opt to design LAMC curriculum that reflects the unique language development of the indigenous learners. This shall be created to ensure that learning styles and peculiar learning contexts are respected and emphasized making the teaching-learning process more inclusive and culturally responsive.

4. Both internal and external educational stakeholders must take their steps toward eradicating the digital divide among learners. They must work together to distribute digital tools and build laboratories needed for language teaching to reduce educational inequities; fix the transportation problem and roads to increase accessibility, and install a stable internet connection in remote areas to allow indigenous learners to exercise their right to digitized learning.

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