

## SCHOOL CULTURE ADAPTATION AMONG INDIGENOUS PEOPLES COLLEGE STUDENTS AT A PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION IN MINDANAO

<sup>1</sup>JACKSON A. SISON, <sup>2</sup>ANNA KATHRINA OAMINAL-WATIN,

<sup>1</sup>Graduate School of Business, University of the Visayas, Philippines

<sup>2</sup>Program Coordinator, Graduate School of Business University of the Visayas

**ABSTRACT:** This qualitative study investigates the adaption experiences of indigenous college students at the University of Mindanao, Matina-main campus. Eight major themes emerged, including difficulties with language proficiency, online learning, classroom interaction, examination systems, grading procedures, school regulations, resource accessibility, coping mechanisms, and future goals. Implications include the requirement for targeted language proficiency and technology use support, an understanding of adaption processes, interventions to improve resource accessibility, and equitable public administration policies. The study underlines the importance of adaptation in various educational contexts, as well as the role of educators and legislators in creating inclusive learning environments.

**KEYWORDS:** *indigenous college students, adaptation, educational challenges, coping strategies*

### I. INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on Indigenous Peoples (IP) who are college students in a university, acknowledging their unique needs, experiences, and challenges within higher education. The success, well-being, and retention of Indigenous college students rely on adapting the school culture to be inclusive, supportive, and culturally responsive. These students often face difficulties related to cultural adjustment, academic preparedness, financial constraints, and community obligations. Promoting culturally responsive teaching and learning practices within the university is crucial for shaping students with learning that is meaningful to them. Additionally, establishing strong connections between the university and Indigenous communities is vital for providing support to Indigenous college students.

The importance of the interconnectedness in relationship to education underscores the salient need to address not only the intellectual but also the emotional, physical, and social facets of students coming into a new and often academic culture. Responding to the aspirations and needs of diverse learners means valuing their collective intellectual traditions and identities. A holistic approach aimed at supporting the social and emotional well-being of students. Facilitated by mentoring, collaborative circles of learning introduced seminal concepts and the progressive use of newly learned skills (Mueller, 2017).

When minority individuals immerse themselves in a new culture, they must adopt as much of the dominant society's culture as possible, including language, mannerisms, and success goals, often at the expense of their own traditional culture. This underscores the notion that minority individuals must imitate the dominant culture to overcome adversity and oppression. Successful assimilation occurs when minorities become socially, economically, and culturally integrated into the dominant society (Schaefer, 2010).

Indigenous peoples typically reside in isolated areas that are often neglected in terms of national economies and development initiatives. These areas frequently lack basic infrastructure like roads and schools. Development interventions targeted at Indigenous peoples have been infrequent, leaving them ill-prepared to deal with the consequences and opportunities brought about by economic liberalization and globalization. Moreover, they are increasingly frustrated by their limited access to development resources (IFAD).

When some of these Indigenous peoples are entering tertiary education as first-year students and encounter various challenges. They not only have to navigate the pressures of transitioning from secondary to university education but must also immerse themselves in academic disciplines for which they may have had no adequate formal education (Butler and Morgan, 2007).

There exists a significant disparity in academic performance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The school culture plays a crucial role in the learning process and can either enhance or jeopardize the achievement of academic goals (Muaña, 2011). Dyson (2002) has identified multiple factors that influence the performance and success of Indigenous students when they begin their college studies.

Bambae (2011) suggests that a potential reason for the low educational achievement of Indigenous students is the language barrier, as many come from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The challenges Indigenous students face in language education should be investigated, as they can significantly impact educational attainment.

In the Philippines, Indigenous Peoples inhabit upland regions, which they consider part of their traditional territories. They constitute one of the country's poorest and most disadvantaged social groups, facing higher levels of illiteracy, unemployment, and poverty compared to the general population. IP settlements are often remote and lack access to essential services such as education (De Vera, 2007). Among them, the Lumad indigenous peoples of Southern Mindanao, Philippines, use the term "Lumad" to refer to themselves collectively, indicating their indigenous identity. They are the un-Islamized Indigenous peoples of Mindanao.

The rationale behind this research is to shed light on the unique needs and challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples who are college students and to propose strategies for creating an inclusive, supportive, and culturally responsive educational environment that promotes their success and well-being. The specific context of the Philippines and the situation of Indigenous Peoples in upland regions, such as the Lumad indigenous peoples, add a localized perspective to this study.

## II. DOMAINS OF INQUIRY

The study aims to describe the experiences of the selected IP college students on school culture adaptation at a private higher education institution in Mindanao. This study seeks to answer the following sub-problems:

1. How is the school adaptation of the IP college students?
2. What are the meanings of their experiences?
3. What are the implications of their experiences?

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

*Research Design.* This study employed the phenomenological-qualitative research methodology and is exploratory; thus, any features of the information that may be derived will all be fluid, subjective, and given from the viewpoint of the participants and based upon their understanding, feelings, and experiences. I specifically used phenomenological as a way of qualitative research in extracting information on how the indigenous people's college students assimilate the culture of society and adjust their way of life in the modern world with the use of modern technology. It will use small samples purposely. It will take place within natural context and real-world situations which will be studied as they unfold. Its framework allows for flexibility and creativity (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008).

## IV. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

### The School Adaptation Experiences

**Table 2.** Summarized Core Themes and Subthemes

Core themes	Subthemes
Theme 1: Adaptation to Language Use	Language Proficiency
	Misunderstandings
Theme 2: Adaptation to Online Learning	Technical Challenges
	Responsible Usage
Theme 3: Adaptation to Classroom Interaction	Internet Connectivity
	Time Management
Theme 4: Adaptation to Examination Systems	Examination Preparation
	Grading System Challenges
Theme 5: Adaptation to Grading Policies	Compliance with Policies

## Impact of Policies on Academic Progress

Theme 6 Adaptation to School Policies

Access to Resources

Resource Effectiveness

Theme 7. Overall Academic Experience

Personal Growth and Motivation.

Future Aspirations

Theme 8: Coping Strategies and Soft Skills  
Development

Determination

Time Management

Goal setting

**Theme 1: Adaptation to Language Use.** Language adaptation is critical for kids, particularly in different educational environments. The subthemes of language proficiency and misunderstandings highlight the complications that students encounter. While students understand the necessity of strengthening their language skills, they frequently struggle with fluency and understanding. This is consistent with recent research indicating that language proficiency influences academic achievement (Smith, 2019). Furthermore, linguistic difficulties might cause misunderstandings that impede efficient communication and collaboration (Jin & Cortazzi, 2020). As a result, resolving language barriers necessitates focused support to improve proficiency and reduce misconceptions.

**Language Proficiency.** The interview emphasizes students' attempts to adjust to utilizing non-native languages, such as English and Filipino, in academic settings. While students recognize the value of language proficiency, many report difficulties in gaining fluency and comprehending complicated vocabulary. This emphasizes the importance of tailored language support programs and resources for improving children's linguistic abilities and academic achievement. *"I'm not particularly good at speaking English, but I'm trying to improve myself to understand my other subjects, particularly English subjects."* (Informant 7)

**Misunderstandings.** The scenarios depict how language limitations can lead to misunderstandings, hurting students' communication and comprehension. These misunderstandings may result from challenges in comprehending certain words or nuances in non-native languages. Addressing these issues necessitates developing inclusive communication strategies and providing supportive learning environments in which students feel comfortable seeking clarification and effectively expressing themselves. *"The problem that I face with the use of Filipino and English dialects is misunderstandings since there are words that I don't understand that is why there's a misunderstanding that is why I ask first before I react so that there is no problem."* (Informant 10).

**Theme 2: Adaptation to Online Learning.** The subthemes of technical challenges and responsible usage provided insight into the complexities of online learning. Technical concerns, such as poor internet connectivity, greatly impair learning experiences. This is consistent with a previous study examining the influence of technology hurdles on online education (Hodges et al., 2020). Students, on the other hand, understand the value of responsible technology use in successfully navigating online platforms. Encouraging ethical usage and offering technical support are critical steps in addressing the issues connected with online learning.

**Technical Challenges.** Students face technical problems, such as low internet connectivity, which limit their capacity to fully participate in online learning activities. These difficulties disturb the learning process and underline the significance of dependable technology infrastructure for efficient online education. Educators and institutions must provide technical assistance and alternate learning alternatives to reduce the impact of technical barriers on students' learning experiences. *"Internet connection problem is the common and the major problem that I faced during in my online class. There are times I fail to pass my assignment, miss to answer my exams, and even can't get any notifications of the announcements in the LMS."* (Informant 10)

**Responsible Usage.** Despite the technical hurdles, students point out the significance of appropriate technology usage to maximize the benefits of online learning platforms. This indicates students' understanding of how to manage distractions and prioritize academic objectives while navigating online environments. To improve learning results in virtual classrooms, educators can help students build digital literacy skills and promote responsible online behavior. *"For me, blackboard learning helps me a lot because it makes my school activities easier especially in our situation today's online class, and we need computers and good internet connection."* (informant 7)

**Theme 3: Adaptation to Classroom Interaction.** Internet connectivity and time management are identified as major subthemes influencing classroom engagement. Poor internet access makes it difficult for students to actively participate in online classes, which is consistent with prior research (Rapanta et al., 2020). Additionally, efficient time management is required to attend lessons on time and participate meaningfully. Educators should examine flexible scheduling and asynchronous learning options to meet the different requirements of their students while mitigating the impact of technological limits on classroom interaction.

*Internet Connectivity.* Poor internet access is a significant obstacle to active participation in online classrooms, limiting students' capacity to engage with their peers and teachers. This emphasizes the significance of accessible and dependable Internet infrastructure in enabling meaningful classroom engagement. To accommodate varied connectivity challenges, educators can explore using asynchronous communication methods and providing alternate ways for students to participate in conversations. "*Sa online ngamgaklase, naglisud ko sapagtambongsamatagmitingsaklasetungod kay ang among koneksyonsa internet dilikaayomaayo.*"(Informant 6)

*Time Management.* Students must be able to manage their time well to attend online classes on time and devote enough time to studying. However, time management issues may occur as a result of the fast pace of online classes and competing demands on students' calendars. Educators can help students establish time management methods and self-regulated learning practices to improve their academic success in online contexts. "*I always check my messenger if we have a class for today and set an alarm for me to notice my classes, for me to join my class on time and to avoid being late.*"(Informant 8)

**Theme 4: Adaptation to Examination Systems.** Students' experiences with stress and resilience while adjusting to term-system exams highlight the need for helpful assessment techniques. The subthemes emphasize the enormous stress that comes with hurried preparation and tight exam timeframes. This is consistent with existing research on the psychological impact of high-stakes examinations (Putwain et al., 2013). Students, on the other hand, show resilience in dealing with academic challenges, underlining the importance of comprehensive support structures to enhance mental health and academic performance.

*Examination Preparation.* Students stress the difficulties they have in studying for examinations within the term-system structure, where exams are held often. The excerpts emphasize the importance of appropriate study tactics and time management skills in dealing with challenging examination schedules. Educators can assist students by providing planned study guides, review sessions, and opportunities for practice assessments to help them manage test stress and perform well. "*I was surprised at first that the university has this term-system examination every 15 days because my high school was not like this.*" (Informant 10)

*Grading System Challenges.* Students are concerned about comprehending and adapting to grading rules, particularly the passing score standards. While some people value the opportunities afforded by passing score thresholds, others find it difficult to keep grades above the needed level. This highlights the necessity for clear and equitable grading practices that take into account students' various learning requirements and circumstances. "*When I first encountered this new system, I was adjusting because I was not used to it. But now I always study and review my lessons now and then for me to be able to pass my exams.*"(Informant 10)

**Theme 5: Adaptation to Grading Policies.** Understanding grading policies and achieving scholarship requirements are major problems for students. While basic passing grades provide some respite, maintaining academic performance for scholarship eligibility is always a necessity. This is consistent with research into the socioeconomic implications of grading schemes and scholarship criteria (Gewin, 2021). Transparent communication of grading criteria, as well as focused academic support, can serve to reduce student anxiety and allow fair access to educational opportunities.

*Compliance with Policies.* Students understand the necessity of following school policies involving attendance, tuition payment, and test procedures. They do, however, emphasize the obstacles that come with policy compliance, such as financial limits and bureaucratic processes. This emphasizes the importance of adaptive and supportive institutional policies that take into account students' socioeconomic origins and include assistance measures to reduce compliance hurdles. "*Since I'm a scholar I need to study more at least to reach the passing grade.*"(Informant 10)

*Impact of Policies on Academic Progress.* The excerpts demonstrate how institutional regulations, such as the no-permit, no-exam policy, can have a major impact on students' academic performance and well-being. Financial limits, administrative impediments, and procedural delays emerge as significant obstacles that students confront when negotiating school procedures. To ensure academic achievement for all students, institutions must take a student-centered approach to policy development and implementation, focusing on equity, accessibility, and student support services. "*So far I haven't had any issues with the base-15 passing grade because I complete all of my activities on time, engage in class, and expect to pass the examination each term.*"(Informant 6)

**Theme 6 Adaptation to School Policies.** Financial constraints and examination access present significant challenges for students, highlighting systemic inequities in educational policies. The subthemes underscore the disproportionate impact of financial limitations on students' academic experiences. This mirrors findings on the socioeconomic disparities in educational access and attainment (Reeves et al., 2020). Addressing systemic barriers

requires a holistic approach that prioritizes financial assistance programs and inclusive policies to ensure all students can access and succeed in education.

*Access to Resources.* Students underline the importance of having access to learning tools, particularly digital platforms, and online libraries, to help them succeed academically. However, technological limitations and internet access problems prevent them from fully utilizing these resources, restricting their learning potential. To solve this, universities should invest in strong digital infrastructure and offer alternate access choices to enable equal access to learning resources for all students. *"It is difficult if you don't have extra money just to pay for your exam."* (Informant 9)

*Resource Effectiveness.* While students appreciate the availability of learning resources, they also highlight challenges related to resource effectiveness, such as difficulty in navigating online platforms and limitations in resource comprehensiveness. This underscores the importance of user-friendly interface design, comprehensive content curation, and personalized learning features in enhancing the effectiveness and usability of learning resources. Educators and instructional designers should collaborate to design accessible, interactive, and engaging learning materials that cater to diverse learning preferences and needs. *"The school's no-permit, no-exam policy is a serious issue since it prevents students like myself from taking the exam, causing us to fall behind or, worse, miss the exam timetable and fail."* (Informant 6)

**Theme7. Overall Academic Experience.** The difficulty in accessing internet information highlights the significance of adaptive learning methodologies. While students face challenges accessing internet resources, they show creativity in choosing other learning methods. This is consistent with research emphasizing the importance of multiple learning materials to accommodate students' different learning styles and preferences (Hao et al., 2019). Educators should use a combination of online and offline resources to improve accessibility and foster inclusive learning environments.

*Personal Growth and Motivation.* Students reflect on their academic journey and personal growth, highlighting the intrinsic motivation, perseverance, and sense of fulfillment they derive from their educational pursuits. Despite facing various challenges, such as language barriers, technological limitations, and financial constraints, students express resilience and determination in pursuing their academic goals. Educators can cultivate a growth mindset and celebrate students' achievements to foster a positive learning environment that nurtures self-efficacy and resilience. *"Since the Learning and Information Center (LIC) is an online-based resource, problems arise when there is a poor internet connection that unable to access and utilize the LIC for my study."* (Informant 6).

*Future Aspirations.* Informants articulate their aspirations for the future, ranging from career goals to personal aspirations, such as contributing to their families' well-being and making a positive impact in their communities. They underscore the importance of education in realizing their dreams and express optimism about their prospects. Educators can support students in exploring career pathways, setting realistic goals, and developing transferable skills that align with their aspirations through career counseling, mentorship programs, and experiential learning opportunities. *"I aspire to become a successful engineer and contribute to the development of my community."* (Informant 1), *"I dream of pursuing a career in healthcare to help improve the lives of others, especially those in underserved areas."* (Informant 2); *"I want to finish my education and secure a stable job to support my family and uplift their living conditions."* (Informant 3); *"I aim to start my own business someday and create employment opportunities for people in my locality."* (Informant 4); *"I am determined to pursue further studies and become a teacher to inspire and educate the youth in my community."* (Informant 5)

**Theme 8: Coping Strategies and Soft Skills Development.** Students employ various coping strategies and develop soft skills to navigate academic challenges effectively. The subthemes highlight the role of determination, time management, and goal setting in promoting academic success. This aligns with research emphasizing the importance of socio-emotional skills in fostering resilience and well-being (Durlak et al., 2011). Educators should incorporate socio-emotional learning initiatives into the curriculum to support students' holistic development and prepare them for future academic and personal challenges.

*Determination.* This is due to students' tenacity and persistence in the face of academic problems. This sub-theme focuses on the psychological element of pupils' coping methods. Despite challenges such as difficult courses, tight deadlines, or personal losses, students demonstrate persistence by working tirelessly toward their goals. This resilience allows individuals to approach academic obstacles with a positive attitude, which contributes to their overall academic achievement. *"Students employ various coping strategies and develop soft skills to navigate academic challenges effectively."*

*Time Management.* Effective time management is essential for students to make optimal use of their resources and meet academic deadlines. This subtheme emphasizes the importance of students' ability to allocate time efficiently to various tasks, such as studying, attending classes, completing assignments, and engaging in extracurricular activities. By managing their time effectively, students can maintain a balanced academic workload, reduce procrastination, and alleviate stress associated with academic demands. *"The role of determination, time management, and goal setting in promoting academic success."*



*Goal setting.* Identifying specific targets and milestones that students hope to achieve within a certain timeframe. This subtheme emphasizes the importance of goal clarity and direction in encouraging pupils to achieve academic greatness. Setting clear, attainable goals gives kids a feeling of purpose and direction, which improves their focus, motivation, and tenacity in academic efforts. Clear goals allow students to track their development and celebrate their accomplishments along the way. "The role of determination, time management, and goal setting in promoting academic success."

## V. IMPLICATIONS

### Implications for Practice

*Language Proficiency.* Educational institutions should implement personalized language assistance programs to help students improve their linguistic talents and academic performance.

*Technical Support.* Offering technical support and alternate learning options can help to reduce the impact of technology barriers on online learning experiences.

*Flexible Scheduling.* Implementing flexible scheduling and asynchronous learning options can satisfy students' different needs while reducing the impact of internet connectivity concerns on classroom interaction.

*Career Counseling.* Educators should provide career counseling, mentorship programs, and experiential learning opportunities to assist students explore career paths that are compatible with their goals.

### Implications for Theory

*Socio-emotional Learning.* The study emphasizes the importance of social-emotional skills in developing resilience and well-being. This emphasizes the need for additional study on incorporating socio-emotional learning efforts into educational curricula to enhance students' overall development.

### Implications for Research

*Educational policies.* More research is needed to investigate how institutional rules, such as grading systems and examination formats, affect students' academic achievement and well-being.

*Access to resources.* Research should focus on discovering techniques to improve access to learning resources, particularly for students with financial and technological constraints.

### Implications for Public Administration Discipline

*Policy development.* To promote equity, accessibility, and student support in educational institutions, public officials should take student-centered approaches to policy creation and implementation.

*Resource allocation.* Allocating resources for digital infrastructure and alternate access choices can improve educational fairness and inclusivity while tackling structural challenges experienced by students from various socioeconomic backgrounds.

## VI. THEORY OF ADAPTIVE LEARNING IN DIVERSE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

In today's dynamic educational landscape, students face a variety of obstacles as a result of the diversity of educational contexts. From language variety to technology differences, the educational landscape provides a complicated tapestry that students must adapt to to prosper academically. The Theory of Adaptive Learning in Diverse Educational Environments attempts to explain the critical role of adaptability in students' academic success and overall development.

### Axiom

This hypothesis is based on the recognition that educational contexts are fundamentally heterogeneous. This diversity is determined by a variety of factors, including cultural backgrounds, linguistic competency, social status, and technology access. Students face a variety of problems in these various circumstances, requiring adaptive responses to properly interact with their learning surroundings.

*Educational Environments are Diverse.* Educational environments include students from a wide range of cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and technical backgrounds, resulting in a diverse learning environment.

*Adaptation is Essential for Academic Success.* To successfully navigate educational hurdles, students must adapt to a variety of learning contexts, such as language use, online platforms, classroom interaction, test systems, grading standards, and school policies.

*Resource Accessibility Impacts Adaptation.* The availability and accessibility of technical and instructional tools have a substantial impact on students' ability to adapt and thrive in their learning contexts.

### Propositions for Adaptive Learning

The idea proposes various hypotheses to explain how adaptation influences academic success. These propositions cover a wide range of topics, including language adaptation, online learning competency, classroom interaction, examination resilience, grading policy comprehension, school policy negotiation, resource utilization, and soft skills development. Each proposition emphasizes the necessity of adaptability in managing the complexity of varied educational environments.

*Language Adaptation Proposition (LAP).* Students in a variety of educational contexts who actively engage in language adaptation methods, such as enhancing language competency and reducing misconceptions, are more likely to succeed academically.

*Online Learning Adaptation Proposition (OLAP)*. Students who efficiently manage technical problems and use online learning tools responsibly are more able to adapt and flourish academically.

*Classroom Interaction Adaptation Proposition (CIAP)*. Students who overcome barriers to classroom interaction, such as limited internet access and poor time management, show more flexibility and participation in educational environments.

*Examination System Adaptation Proposition (ESAP)*. Students who use stress-coping techniques and show resilience in adapting to examination systems are more likely to achieve favorable academic outcomes despite the pressures of high-stakes exams.

*Grading Policy Adaptation Proposition (GPAP)*. Students who understand grading criteria and actively seek academic support to satisfy scholarship requirements demonstrate superior adaptability and academic performance, regardless of socioeconomic status.

*School Policy Adaptation Proposition (SPAP)*. Students who negotiate financial constraints while advocating for fair access to educational resources display resilience in adapting to school policies and creating a positive learning environment for all.

*Learning Resource Utilization Proposition (LRUP)*. Students who creatively access and use a variety of learning materials, both online and offline, demonstrate versatility in solving educational problems and improving their learning outcomes.

*Coping Strategies and Soft Skills Development Proposition (CSSDP)*. Students who use good coping techniques and learn soft skills like determination, time management, and goal planning show adaptability in overcoming academic challenges and achieving holistic growth.

## VII. FINAL THEORY STATEMENT

In several educational settings, students' adaptive capacity, which includes language adaptation, online learning proficiency, effective classroom interaction, resilience in examination systems, comprehension of grading and school policies, use of learning resources, and the development of coping strategies and soft skills, has a significant impact on their academic success and overall development. Educators and governments may establish inclusive learning environments that promote adaptable learning and thriving for students by recognizing the importance of adaptation and removing barriers to resource accessibility.

The Theory of Adaptive Learning in Diverse Educational Environments proposes that students' adaptive aptitude across multiple domains has a significant impact on their academic success and overall development. Educators and governments may create inclusive learning environments that enable students to thrive in different educational landscapes by recognizing the importance of adaptation and addressing resource accessibility hurdles.

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