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Research Article

Learning from Their Learners: Non-T'boli Teachers' Lived Experiences of Integrating the T'boli Language in Culturally Responsive Education

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Abstract

Introduction: The Philippine Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) program requires teachers to contextualize and indigenize instruction. In South Cotabato, many teachers of T'boli learners do not speak T'boli. Few studies document how these teachers integrate the language into their instructional practices or how they make sense of this work.

Objective: This study explored the lived pedagogical experiences of Non-T'boli senior high school teachers who integrate the T'boli language into culturally responsive instruction. It examined their practices, perceptions, challenges, coping strategies, and insights.

Methods: The study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Nine Non-T'boli English-specialist teachers from three public secondary schools implementing IPEd in South Cotabato took part. Purposive sampling selected teachers with at least five years of experience in schools serving T'boli and Non-T'boli learners. Data came from validated semi-structured in-depth interviews, field notes, and a reflective journal. Analysis followed the seven IPA stages of Smith, Flowers, and Larkin. A university research ethics committee approved the study (Protocol Code GS-ER-07-26-0682).

Results: Six superordinate themes emerged. Teachers used T'boli as a bridge between academic content and learners' lived experiences. They saw language recognition affirm learners' identity, confidence, and belonging. They turned the classroom into a space for reciprocal learning and shared authority. They managed limited fluency through cultural humility, flexibility, and continuous learning. They observed growing intercultural respect, including less mockery of Indigenous learners' pronunciation. They stressed the need for community partnership and institutional support.

Conclusions: Fluency did not decide whether integration happened. Willingness to learn, to consult, and to share authority with learners did. The findings support Gay's Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Ladson-Billings' culturally relevant pedagogy. Schools should provide T'boli language orientation, validated vocabulary guides and materials, and formal partnerships with T'boli elders and teachers. Future studies should gather the voices of T'boli learners, elders, and school leaders.

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1. Introduction

Indigenous learners often study in a language different from the one spoken at home. When schools ignore the home language, learners lose access to content and lose a place for their identity in school (Adnyana et al., 2025; Tacio & Pelila, 2025). Schools bringing Indigenous languages into instruction report the reverse. In Indonesia, learners in schools using Indigenous languages showed stronger involvement, comprehension, and cultural pride (Adnyana et al., 2025). In South African primary schools, Indigenous language use supported academic performance, cognitive development, and belonging (Omarsaib et al., 2025). An OECD review of programs in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia linked Indigenous language learning to engagement, cultural identity, well-being, and stronger community participation in schooling (Angelo et al., 2022).

The same studies name recurring barriers. Teachers lack preparation. Materials in Indigenous languages are scarce. Institutional support is thin (Adnyana et al., 2025; Omarsaib et al., 2025). In Amazonian Indigenous communities, schools adopting intercultural bilingual education faced poor infrastructure, few resources, learner disengagement, and low parental participation (Santos et al., 2025). Policy support for Indigenous languages does not guarantee classroom practice.

The Philippines has a strong policy base. The Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997 protects the cultural integrity and educational rights of Indigenous Peoples (Republic Act No. 8371, 1997). DepEd Order No. 62, s. 2011 adopted the National Indigenous Peoples Education Policy Framework, a rights-based guide for schooling respectful of Indigenous learners' cultures (Department of Education, 2011). The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 requires a curriculum open to localization and indigenization (Republic Act No. 10533, 2013). DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2016 directs teachers to contextualize daily lessons to learners' settings (Department of Education, 2016). Policy sets the expectation. Teachers carry the work.

The T'boli are an Indigenous people of South Cotabato and Sarangani in southern Mindanao. Their language belongs to the Bilic, or South Mindanao, subgroup of Philippine languages, and published descriptions of T'boli remain few (Bantilan et al., 2025). In Lake Sebu and neighboring municipalities, T'boli learners share classrooms with Hiligaynon, Cebuano, Ilocano, and Maguindanaon peers. Many of their teachers come from Non-T'boli backgrounds. These teachers must indigenize lessons in a language they do not speak.

Philippine research confirms the difficulty. Cubi and Rollo (2025) documented the struggles of non-Indigenous teachers in Indigenous Peoples (IP) schools in Maitum, Sarangani, with language as a central barrier. Berame et al. (2023) found teacher unpreparedness, problems in delivery, concern over language endangerment, and a shortage of contextualized materials in a Manobo community implementing mother tongue-based instruction. Tañon et al. (2026) reported non-IPEd teachers of Subanen learners who began apprehensive and adapted through self-directed community learning, culturally responsive teaching, and peer support. Tacio and Pelila (2025) showed how the dominance of English in school and community pushes Indigenous youth's languages to the margins.

These studies describe barriers and programs. Few examine, from the inside, how non-Indigenous teachers experience teaching through a learner language they are still learning, and what meaning they draw from the experience. This review located no study using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) with Non-T'boli senior high school teachers in South Cotabato. Senior high school deserves attention. Lessons grow more abstract, English carries more of the instruction, and the distance between academic content and the home language widens.

1.1. Theoretical Lens

The study drew on Gay's (2002, 2010) Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Gay argues for instruction built on learners' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and frames of reference. Teachers following this approach treat culture as a resource for academic learning. Ladson-Billings (1995) adds culturally relevant pedagogy, grounded in academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Her framework asks teachers to affirm learners' identities while holding high expectations. Teachers in Samuels' (2018) study described the same commitments as the basis of equitable and inclusive classrooms. Two supporting ideas sharpened the lens. The funds of knowledge perspective holds that households and communities carry knowledge worth bringing into instruction (Moll et al., 1992). Research on translanguaging shows multilingual learners drawing on their full linguistic repertoire to build academic meaning (Karlsson et al., 2020) and positions teachers and learners as co-learners (Li, 2023). Mendoza et al. (2024) caution against reading translanguaging apart from the social and institutional settings shaping language use. Consistent with the inductive stance of IPA, these ideas guided interpretation without fixing categories in advance (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

Research Questions

This study explored the lived pedagogical experiences of Non-T'boli teachers integrating the T'boli language into instruction for multilingual learners. Five questions guided the inquiry:

1.How do Non-T'boli teachers describe their experiences in integrating the T'boli language in teaching multilingual learners?
2.How do Non-T'boli teachers perceive the integration of the T'boli language in classroom instruction?
3.How does T'boli language integration contribute to culturally responsive education and to the sociocultural development of multilingual learners?
4.What challenges do Non-T'boli teachers encounter in integrating the T'boli language, and how do they address these challenges?
5.What insights emerge from the teachers' experiences for strengthening culturally responsive and inclusive education in multilingual classrooms?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

The study used a qualitative design based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. IPA examines how people make sense of significant experiences. The approach is phenomenological in its focus on lived experience, hermeneutic in its attention to interpretation, and idiographic in its commitment to each case before cross-case comparison (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Nizza, 2022). IPA involves a double hermeneutic. Participants make sense of their experience, and the researcher makes sense of their sense-making. This design fit the study's aim. Teaching through an unfamiliar Indigenous language is personal, emotionally charged, and shaped by context, and IPA suits experiences of this kind.

2.2. Respondents and Sampling Procedure

Nine teachers took part. Smith et al. (2009) recommend four to ten participants for doctoral IPA research, a range wide enough to show shared patterns and narrow enough to keep a detailed focus on each case. Purposive sampling produced the homogeneous group IPA requires. Inclusion criteria were: (a) Non-T'boli senior high school teacher in a public secondary school in South Cotabato, (b) at least five years of continuous teaching in a school serving T'boli and Non-T'boli learners, (c) experience integrating T'boli or other Indigenous linguistic elements through contextualization or indigenization, and (d) voluntary participation with written informed consent. Members of the T'boli community, teachers with less than five years of experience, and teachers in schools without T'boli learners were excluded. The five-year threshold ensured enough exposure to culturally diverse classrooms to produce reflective accounts.

Participants came from three public secondary schools in different districts of South Cotabato implementing the IPEd program, here called Schools A, B, and C. School heads and IPEd coordinators supplied a preliminary list of eligible teachers. The researcher screened each candidate against the criteria

and invited only those who qualified, so administrative input served to identify candidates and did not decide selection.

Table 1 presents the participants. Seven identified as Hiligaynon, one as Cebuano, and one as Bol-anon. All specialized in English and taught Grade 11 or Grade 12. Teaching experience ranged from five to thirteen years. Their English specialization gives the study a useful vantage point. English teachers deal daily with language choice, communication, and meaning-making, and these teachers had to balance English, their own languages, and T'boli in the same classroom.

Table 1. Profile of the participants.

School	Teacher	Position	Ethnolinguistic background	Grade level	Years in teaching	Specialization
A	1	T-VI	Hiligaynon	12	13	English
	2	T-I	Hiligaynon	11	5	English
	3	T-I	Cebuano	12	5	English
B	4	T-I	Hiligaynon	12	5	English
	5	T-II	Bol-anon	12	6	English
	6	T-II	Hiligaynon	11	6	English
C	7	T-III	Hiligaynon	11	13	English
	8	T-I	Hiligaynon	12	5	English
	9	T-I	Hiligaynon	12	6	English

Note. T = Teacher (DepEd position title). Schools are anonymized.

2.3. Research Instruments

The main instrument was a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide. Part 1 gathered demographic data: teaching position, years of experience, specialization, and school. Part 2 contained open-ended questions aligned with the five research questions, with probes on experiences, perceptions, challenges, coping strategies, and insights. Three experts in qualitative research, applied linguistics, IPEd, and culturally responsive education validated the guide for clarity, relevance, and appropriateness. A pilot interview with two Non-T'boli teachers outside the sample tested the questions, and their feedback refined the final version. Audio recordings, field notes, and a reflective journal supported the interviews.

2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection began after ethics clearance and written permission from the Graduate School, the Schools Division Superintendent of the Department of Education South Cotabato, and the principals of the three schools. The researcher explained the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of the study before participants signed the informed consent form. Face-to-face in-depth interviews took place individually in private venues and lasted 60 to 80 minutes. Participants gave separate consent for audio recording. They spoke in English, Filipino, Hiligaynon, and Cebuano, often switching among these languages. Transcripts went back to each participant for member checking before analysis. Extracts reported in this article appear in English, with translations by the researcher for passages originally spoken in Filipino, Hiligaynon, or Cebuano. Analysis followed the seven IPA stages of Smith et al. (2009). The researcher (1) read and reread each transcript while listening to the recording, (2) made descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual notes line by line, (3) turned the notes into emergent themes, (4) clustered related themes within each transcript through abstraction, subsumption, polarization, and contextualization, (5) moved to the next case while bracketing ideas from earlier ones, (6) looked for convergence and divergence across cases, and (7) deepened the interpretive account with verbatim extracts. The process yielded six personal experiential themes per participant, or 54 in total. Cross-case analysis grouped these into six superordinate themes recorded in a master table (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

2.5 Trustworthiness and Researcher Positionality

Credibility came from sustained engagement with participants, probing questions, and member checking of all transcripts. Thick description of the setting, participants, and procedures supports judgments of transferability. A documented audit trail of notes, theme tables, and analytic decisions supports dependability. Confirmability rested on grounding each theme in participants' words and on a reflexive journal kept throughout the study. The researcher is a Non-T'boli teacher with ten years of service in a secondary school in Lake Sebu and holds the position of Master Teacher I. This insider position eased access and rapport. It also carried a risk of reading personal experience into participants' accounts. The researcher used bracketing and reflexive journaling to keep the analysis anchored in participants' meanings. No supervisory relationship existed with any participant, and no incentive or penalty attached to participation.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The Research Ethics Committee of the researcher's university approved the study under Protocol Code GS-ER-07-26-0682. Participation was voluntary. Participants could decline any question, pause or stop the recording, or withdraw at any time without penalty. Although the participants were not a vulnerable population, discussing their teaching might cause minimal discomfort, so interviews proceeded with sensitivity, and referral to the school guidance office remained available. The study complied with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173, 2012). Pseudonyms and codes replaced names of participants and schools. Participants reviewed transcripts and asked for removal of any identifying details. Electronic files were password-protected, printed records stayed in a locked cabinet, and only the researcher and adviser had access. All records will be kept for three years after completion of the study and then destroyed.

3. Results and Discussion

Cross-case analysis of the 54 personal experiential themes produced six superordinate themes. Table 2 lists each theme with representative personal experiential themes and the participants contributing to it. Figure 1 shows how the themes relate. Teachers' stance toward their own limited fluency (Theme 4) shaped two classroom practices (Themes 1 and 3), which teachers linked to learner outcomes they observed (Themes 2 and 5). Community partnership and institutional support (Theme 6) formed the base for all of these. The sections below present each theme with participants' accounts and then discuss it against the literature. The learner outcomes reported here reflect teachers' observations, not direct measures of learners.

Table 2. Superordinate themes, representative personal experiential themes, and contributing participants.

Superordinate theme	Representative personal experiential themes	Participants
1. T'boli as a bridge between academic learning and lived experience	Bridging difficult lessons through familiar T'boli language (T1). Using translanguaging as a bridge toward English and Filipino expression (T9). Connecting classroom lessons with home and community experiences (T5).	T1–T9
2. Language recognition affirms identity, confidence, and belonging	Building learner confidence through linguistic recognition (T1). Encouraging participation through familiar language recognition (T8). Deepening appreciation of language as cultural identity (T4).	T1–T9
3. The classroom as a space for reciprocal learning and shared authority	Reversing classroom roles through learner-led language teaching (T2). Learning with learners through two-way interaction (T4). Repositioning learners as knowledgeable cultural contributors (T9).	T1, T2, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9
4. Managing linguistic limitations through cultural humility, flexibility, and continuous learning	Navigating limited fluency through visual and multilingual support (T1). Replacing cultural assumptions with respectful inquiry (T4). Addressing cultural knowledge gaps through research and expert consultation (T7).	T1–T9
5. Language integration as a path to intercultural respect and social inclusion	Awakening cultural pride and intercultural curiosity (T3). Reducing linguistic ridicule through awareness of pronunciation differences (T7). Supporting cultural expression and positive social interaction (T8).	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T7, T8

Superordinate theme	Representative personal experiential themes	Participants
6. Authentic integration rests on community partnership and institutional support	Strengthening inclusive education through institutional and community support (T1). Beginning with small, consistent, and validated language practices (T3). Preparing Non-T'boli teachers through training and community guidance (T8).	T1–T9

Note. T = Teacher. Each participant produced six personal experiential themes (54 in total).

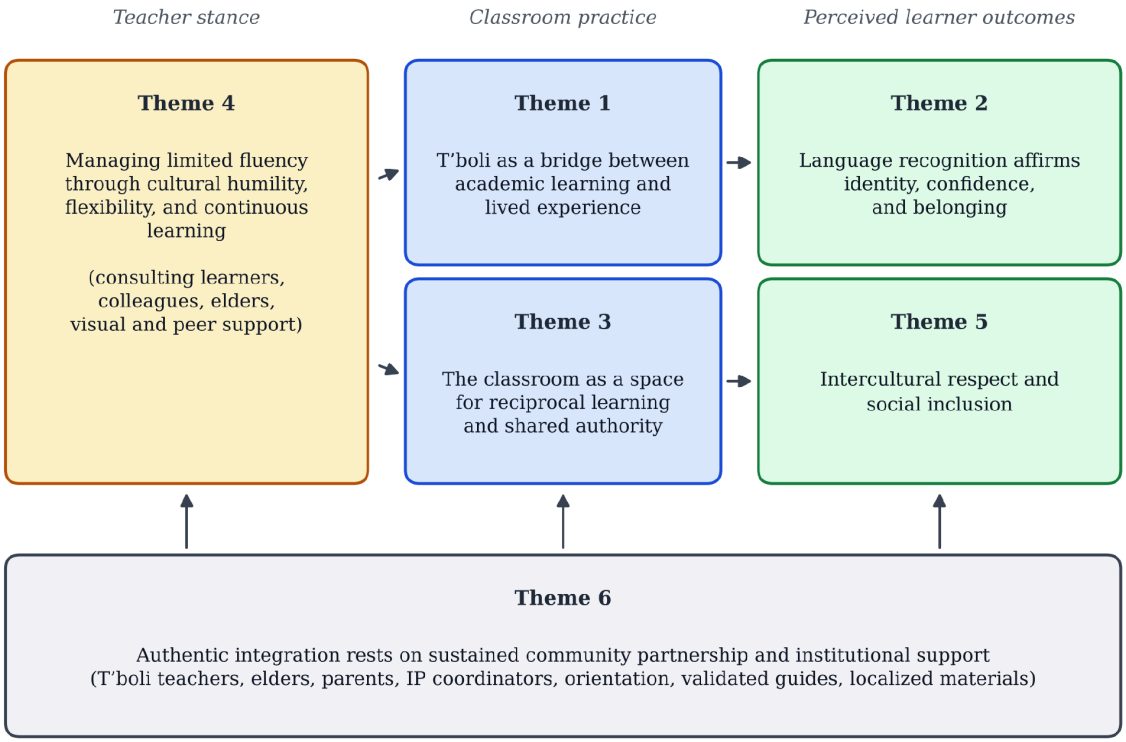


Figure 1. Relationships among the six superordinate themes of Non-T'boli teachers' experiences of T'boli language integration.

3.1. T'boli as a Bridge between Academic Learning and Lived Experience

All nine teachers described T'boli as a bridge to academic content. None taught whole lessons in T'boli. They used familiar words, phrases, and community examples at points where learners struggled. Teacher 6, teaching Science in English, saw learners lost in the instructions for an activity: "So, I tried to use some simple T'boli words and phrases to explain the activity." Teacher 8 described the same move: "They became more comfortable and were able to follow the instructions more easily." Teacher 1 tied T'boli explanations to daily life and cultural practices when a lesson in English or Filipino stalled. Her students answered with more confidence and finished the activity.

Teacher 2 arrived with the opposite belief. "Before, I really asked why integration was even needed. If it is English, then English only, so the learner can concentrate. I thought mixing languages would confuse them and lower their academic performance." Classroom experience changed her view: "As time went by, I saw how hard that wall was for them. Integration turned out to be more meaningful because it helps simplify the discussion." Teacher 9 let learners clarify ideas among themselves in T'boli before answering: Instead of stopping them and telling them to use English immediately, I allowed them to discuss first using the language they were most comfortable with... After that discussion, they were able to present the idea in English or Filipino. For me, that showed that the use of T'boli did not prevent them from learning English. Instead, it sometimes served as a bridge toward understanding. (Teacher 9)

The bridge also ran to community life. Teacher 3 brought folk stories, songs, poetry, and local practices into lessons so "the class becomes more realistic and more meaningful for them. They no longer look at the school as a foreign place unrelated to their lives." Teacher 9 replaced Western and urban examples with "their community, traditions, family experiences, local environment, or cultural practices." Teacher 3 also found gaps on the learners' side. When he used the T'boli word kmohung, many T'boli students did not know its exact meaning, a sign of a language young people "have started to forget because of modern influences."

These accounts match Gay's (2002, 2010) claim about instruction connected to learners' cultural knowledge and frames of reference. They also echo Karlsson et al. (2020), whose multilingual science learners used their home languages to link everyday experience with scientific concepts. Teacher 9's observation, T'boli talk first and English answers second, reflects the translanguaging argument: the home language serves as a resource for learning the target language (Li, 2023). The use of community stories and household examples draws on what Moll et al. (1992) call funds of knowledge. Teacher 2's shift away from English-only teaching shows how classroom evidence revised a monolingual belief, the same belief Tacio and Pelila (2025) found pushing Indigenous languages aside. The kmohung episode adds a further layer. Integration served comprehension and also returned less familiar vocabulary to young T'boli speakers, consistent with reports linking Indigenous language schooling to language preservation (Adnyana et al., 2025; Omarsaib et al., 2025).

3.2. Language Recognition Affirms Learners' Identity, Confidence, and Belonging

Teachers observed learners speaking up once their language was welcomed. Teacher 1 recalled a change in quiet T'boli learners:

> *Before, I noticed they just stayed quiet at the back, as if they were ashamed to speak because their Tagalog or English might be wrong. But when they heard me pronounce their words and accept their language in class, they felt their identity was not forbidden here. (Teacher 1)*

Teacher 8 reported the same pattern: "Some of them became more active and willing to participate because they felt that their language was being recognized." Teacher 5 stopped requiring English for every answer: "I don't force them to speak English all the time, especially if they are more comfortable speaking their language." Her learners, she said, were no longer afraid to answer or ask questions. Teacher 3 named the change in plain terms: learners felt their language mattered and were not ashamed to answer in it. Teacher 3 also described the reward on his side: "It is deeply satisfying to see them no longer afraid to look you in the eye."

Several teachers described their own perception shifting. Teacher 4 first saw T'boli as one more local language. Through her learners she came to see it as "an important part of their identity and culture." Teacher 5 said the same: "The T'boli language is not just for communication, but also part of learning and their culture." Teacher 9 linked recognition to the unity of home and school: when the home language is recognized, learners "are not separating their classroom identity from their community identity."

Ladson-Billings (1995) argues for pedagogy affirming learners' cultural identities while pursuing academic success. The teachers' accounts show this affirmation working through small, repeated acts: pronouncing a learner's word, accepting an answer in T'boli, asking for a translation. Teacher 1's phrase "not forbidden here" captures the stakes. Learners read the teacher's acceptance of their language as permission to bring their whole selves into class. Mendoza et al. (2024) note how institutions signal which languages count. In these classrooms, the teacher's choices sent the signal. The finding needs a caution. The data come from teachers. They show what teachers saw, and they do not establish the same response in every learner.

3.3. The Classroom as a Space for Reciprocal Learning and Shared Authority

Limited fluency pushed teachers to learn from learners, and many came to value the exchange. Teacher 2 used the T'boli word hetingon in a lesson on manifestos in English for Academic and Professional Purposes. "When I pronounced it, the students looked at each other and laughed, but happily, and then raised their hands together to correct my tone and usage." She added: "It was great because the students were able to teach me the correct pronunciation of the word and they have

understood the main purpose of manifesto." She summed up the arrangement: "They learn English from me, I learn T'boli from them, we learn from each other."

Teacher 7 made correction a routine: "I also say the word out loud, and let them listen and correct my pronunciation." Teacher 4 called her classroom a place of "two-way learning." Teacher 9 described the change in roles directly:

> *I have learned that I don't always have to be the only source of knowledge. Sometimes I ask my learners what a particular word means or how it is used. They become the ones teaching me, and that creates a different kind of classroom interaction. (Teacher 9)*

Teachers linked these exchanges to learner confidence. Teacher 2 said the exchange gave learners "the chance to showcase or flaunt their roots, identity, and culture in class." Teacher 1 noted learners' confidence growing "because they become my teachers." Shared authority did not mean surrendered responsibility. Teachers still set objectives, guided discussion, and checked academic accuracy.

Li (2023) describes translanguaging pedagogy as co-learning, in which teachers and learners both bring knowledge and both learn. The teachers' accounts fit this description closely. Karlsson et al. (2020) show learners' linguistic resources entering classroom meaning-making, and Moll et al. (1992) treat learners and families as holders of valuable knowledge. Gay (2010) places learners' cultural experience at the center of instruction. The hetingon episode shows these ideas in a single moment: a teacher's error became a lesson, learners became experts, and the target concept still landed. One risk deserves attention. Teacher 7 noted younger learners sometimes lack deep cultural knowledge, and Indigenous learners should not carry the job of explaining their whole culture. Reciprocity works best with other knowledge sources behind it, a point developed in Section 3.6.

3.4. Managing Linguistic Limitations through Cultural Humility, Flexibility, and Continuous Learning

Every teacher described limits in vocabulary, pronunciation, translation, or cultural knowledge. Teacher 2 said integration "does not flow naturally" and left her worried about teaching something wrong. Teacher 3 explained a specific risk: "Some T'boli words are the same but the meaning changes depending on pronunciation... I am afraid I might say something wrong or do something against their culture." Resources were scarce. Teacher 3 had "no books or hard-copy references, only word of mouth from my T'boli co-teachers and from the students." Teacher 2 searched online and then verified with T'boli teachers: "If what you get online is wrong, you might disrespect their culture without meaning to."

Teachers responded in consistent ways. They asked before assuming. Teacher 4 stated the rule: "I believe it is better to ask than to assume." Teacher 9 marked the limits of his knowledge: "Knowing a few cultural practices does not mean that I fully understand the culture... I think humility is important." They layered sources of help. Teacher 7 combined research with T'boli and Muslim co-teachers because "it is difficult to rely solely on the learners' knowledge." Teacher 3 attended community gatherings in Lake Sebu to listen and observe. They used flexible strategies. Teacher 1 relied on visual aids, real community objects, and peer explanation: "If you cannot explain it to me directly in Filipino, say it in T'boli, and let us have your seatmate explain it." Teacher 4 began with greetings she heard daily. Teacher 3 advised new teachers to "start small but consistent, start with just one word... And find a partner. Do not integrate alone."

Teacher 6 described the attitude behind these strategies: "Even if I am not fluent in T'boli, I believe it is important that we are willing to learn and adjust for our learners." She saw the effort itself building trust. Teacher 9 added a professional caution. Integration had to be purposeful and fit within required competencies and limited time: "We should not use T'boli simply for the sake of saying that we integrated an indigenous language." Fisher-Borne et al. (2015) contrast cultural competence, framed as mastery of facts about a group, with cultural humility, framed as ongoing reflection and accountability. The teachers practiced the second. None claimed mastery, and each built routines for checking. The

difficulties match those in Philippine studies of non-Indigenous teachers in IP schools (Berame et al., 2023; Cubi & Rollo, 2025). The coping pattern mirrors Tañon et al. (2026), whose non-IPEd teachers adapted through self-directed community learning. The scarcity of references reflects the thin published record on T'boli (Bantilan et al., 2025). A key distinction emerges from the data: limited proficiency differs from unwillingness to learn. The first did not stop these teachers. The second would have. Individual humility has limits. Without validated references, teachers spent heavy preparation time and still worried about error.

3.5. Language Integration as a Path to Intercultural Respect and Social Inclusion

Teachers observed changes in how learners treated one another. Teacher 7 exposed classes to T'boli, Maranao, and B'laan and discussed pronunciation differences:

> *The instances of laughing at or making fun of how IP students pronounce certain words have been minimized. Through the integration of the T'boli language in classroom activities, learners have become more aware that differences in pronunciation are part of linguistic and cultural diversity. (Teacher 7)*

Teacher 3 observed curiosity among Non-T'boli learners and a change in attitude: "The mockery disappeared and was replaced by respect." Teacher 4 taught learners "even though our dialects differ, we can still understand and respect one another." Teacher 8 saw learners "more open in sharing their culture and experiences" and more comfortable interacting across groups. Teacher 2 used small-group work so learners could explain their perspectives to one another.

Ladson-Billings (1995) includes cultural competence, comfort with one's own culture and respect for others', among the aims of culturally relevant teaching. The teachers' practices made linguistic diversity visible and discussable. Santos et al. (2025) describe intercultural bilingual education in Indigenous communities as a means of identity preservation as well as instruction, and a similar dual role appears here. The evidence calls for restraint. Teachers reported reduced teasing, not the end of prejudice. Respect depended on deliberate teacher action, such as discussing why accents differ and setting norms against ridicule. Exposure to a language alone did not produce it.

3.6. Authentic Integration Rests on Community Partnership and Institutional Support

All nine teachers judged individual effort insufficient. Teacher 1 spoke most sharply:

> *It is not enough for DepEd to tell us to indigenize and then leave Non-IP teachers groping in the dark. We need formal cultural orientations, basic language modules, and teaching guides vetted by T'boli elders and cultural experts. Without this institutional support, teachers will always fear making mistakes, and integration will become tokenism or mere show instead of being truly culturally responsive. (Teacher 1)*

Teachers named specific needs: practical language training, vocabulary guides, dictionaries, storybooks, audiovisual materials, and ready-made lesson resources. Teacher 7 proposed T'boli workshops during in-service training and identified topics suited to integration so it stays "anchored to the lesson." Teacher 6 wanted T'boli stories, local history, modules, and visual resources, and noted her school already used T'boli materials made by learners. Teacher 4 warned against integration done only "for compliance." Teachers also called for community voice. Teacher 3 proposed formal partnerships in which IP teachers and elders validate instructional materials. Teacher 9 insisted: "Indigenous language integration should not be designed only by teachers who are outside the culture. T'boli teachers, elders, parents, and community members should have a voice."

The policy framework already promises this partnership. The IPEd framework calls for community engagement and culturally appropriate materials (Department of Education, 2011). The teachers' accounts show the gap between the promise and their daily reality. Berame et al. (2023) and Cubi and Rollo (2025) found the same shortage of contextualized materials and preparation. Angelo et al. (2022) identify community participation as common ground in successful Indigenous language programs, and Omarsaib et al. (2025) call for teacher training, culturally appropriate materials, and policy support. The teachers' requests align closely with these recommendations. Community partners supply

linguistic authority and cultural accuracy. Schools and the Department of Education supply time, training, and materials. Neither works alone.

3.7. Theoretical Implications

The six themes support and extend Gay's (2002, 2010) Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Ladson-Billings' (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy. Themes 1 and 2 confirm the core claims: instruction connected to learners' culture aids understanding, and affirmation of identity supports participation. Themes 3 and 5 show culturally responsive teaching producing relational outcomes, such as shared authority and intercultural respect, beyond academic ones. Themes 4 and 6 extend the frameworks to a case they treat lightly, teachers working outside their own linguistic and cultural group. For these teachers, culturally responsive practice did not begin with knowledge of the culture. It began with humility, consultation, and partnership. Culturally responsive pedagogy for non-Indigenous teachers therefore needs a stronger account of cultural humility (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015) and of the institutional conditions sustaining it.

3.8. Implications for Practice

Four implications follow. First, teachers should use T'boli purposefully at points of difficulty and connect content to community examples, with the lesson objective in view. Second, teachers should welcome learners' language in answers and discussion and invite learners to correct and teach, while drawing on adult knowledge holders for deeper cultural content. Third, schools and division offices should provide T'boli language orientation and in-service workshops for Non-T'boli teachers, with validated vocabulary guides, dictionaries, and bilingual materials. Fourth, schools should form standing partnerships with T'boli teachers, elders, parents, and IPEd coordinators to co-design and validate materials, so integration rests on community authority and not on individual guesswork.

4. Conclusion

This study examined how nine Non-T'boli senior high school teachers in South Cotabato experienced integrating the T'boli language into culturally responsive instruction. The teachers used T'boli as a bridge between academic content and learners' lives. They saw learners gain confidence and a sense of belonging when their language was welcomed. They turned their limited fluency into reciprocal learning with students. They managed uncertainty through humility, consultation, and flexible strategies. They observed growing respect across linguistic groups. They agreed integration cannot rest on individual goodwill. The central insight concerns fluency. Fluency did not decide whether integration happened. Willingness to learn, to ask, and to share authority with learners did. The study contributes an insider account of culturally responsive teaching by non-Indigenous teachers and extends Culturally Responsive Pedagogy toward cultural humility and institutional support. For practice and policy, the findings point to language orientation, validated materials, and formal partnerships with T'boli communities as the next steps for IPEd schools.

5. Limitations of the Study

The study has several limitations. First, it involved nine teachers from three schools in one province. IPA seeks depth, not statistical generalization, so readers should judge transferability against the setting described here. Second, all participants specialized in English, and teachers of other subjects might report different experiences. Third, the findings rest on teachers' self-reports. Claims about learner confidence, participation, and respect reflect teachers' observations and were not measured directly. Fourth, the researcher's insider position, as a Non-T'boli teacher in the same division, might have shaped interpretation despite bracketing, reflexive journaling, and member checking. Fifth, extracts spoken in Filipino, Hiligaynon, and Cebuano appear in translation, and some nuance might be lost. Future research should address these limits. Studies of T'boli learners would show how they experience the use of their language by non-native teachers. Studies of school heads, elders, and culture bearers would clarify institutional gaps and community expectations for how the language is represented in school. Design-based research could develop and test validated T'boli materials, bilingual dictionaries,

and digital tools. Comparative studies across other Indigenous communities in Mindanao would test whether the patterns found here hold more widely.

Supplementary Details

Supplementary Materials & Data availability statement:
The interview transcripts are not publicly available because they contain information compromising participant confidentiality. De-identified excerpts are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and with approval of the ethics committee.

Author Contributions:
Contributions follow the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT), shown in the table below.

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Author 1	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Author 2	✓	✓		✓						✓		✓		

C : **C**onceptualization
M : **M**ethodology
So : **So**ftware
Va : **Va**lidation
Fo : **Fo**rmal analysis
I : **I**nvestigation
R : **R**esources
D : **D**ata Curation
O : Writing - **O**riginal Draft
E : Writing - Review & **E**diting
Vi : **Vi**sualization
Su : **Su**pervision
P : **P**roject administration
Fu : **Fu**nding acquisition

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Informed Consent Statement:
The study adhered to ethical standards in research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, participants were provided with a comprehensive informed consent form detailing the purpose of the study, procedures, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, and their rights, including voluntary participation and the option to withdraw at any time.

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Conflicts of Interest:
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Disclosure Statement:
The authors used Grammarly only for language editing. No AI tools were used in the data analysis or in generating the study's results. The authors reviewed and validated all content and take full responsibility for the article's accuracy, originality, and integrity.

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