Batak parents' challenges and aspirations in indigenous education: Insights for policies and practices

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	This study examines the educational challenges and aspirations of Batak parents in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan, Philippines. Guided by two central questions — "What challenges do you face in school education?" and "How would you like to see your children ten years from now?"— the research adopts a qualitative phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of 24 parents of Grade 5 and 6 learners from selected elementary schools serving the Batak community. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the local language to promote authenticity and comfort in sharing. Thematic analysis, based on Braun and Clarke's framework, revealed three key themes for educational challenges: economic barriers, resource deficiency, and curriculum-related challenges, which encompass financial instability, lack of educational resources, and struggles with standardized assessments and language barriers. For aspirations, three major themes emerged: educational achievement, economic stability and empowerment, and community leadership and contribution. Parents expressed hopes for their children to complete their education, secure stable employment, and contribute meaningfully to their community as leaders and role models. This study stresses the need for culturally responsive educational policies, improved resource allocation, and systemic interventions that address the unique challenges of indigenous communities.

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1.   INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is home to over 110 distinct indigenous peoples (IPs), collectively numbering between 14 to 17 million individuals, each with its unique languages and cultural practices. Among these groups, the Igorot, Lumad, and Aeta have demonstrated remarkable resilience in preserving their cultural traditions despite centuries of colonization. Their rich heritage encompasses various forms of artistic expression, including weaving and carving, as well as the preservation of their languages. Geographically, these Indigenous communities are primarily located in Northern Luzon, Central Philippines, and Mindanao. The Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997 plays an important role in safeguarding their rights, particularly concerning ancestral domains, which promotes the continuation of their cultural heritage amidst ongoing challenges (Simporios, 2024).

In the Philippines' island of Palawan, which is home to approximately 57 ethnolinguistic groups, including the Tagbanua, Palaw'an, and Batak, the demography reflects both diversity and vulnerability. While the populations of other Indigenous groups and migrant communities in Palawan have increased, the Batak population has remained relatively stable. In 1995, the Batak constituted 0.55% of Palawan's total Indigenous population, but by 2020, this figure had dwindled to an estimated 300 individuals, comprising approximately 49 family groups (Tajolosa, 2022). This demographic shift points to the urgent need to address the educational challenges faced by the Batak, particularly in Puerto Princesa City, where their unique circumstances call for focused research.

Despite the provision of free primary education, Batak families encounter significant barriers to accessing quality education. Poverty remains a pervasive challenge, with the Philippine Statistics Authority indicating that the poverty line in Palawan was P6,786 in 2018. Many Batak parents prioritize immediate economic needs over educational aspirations, often requiring their children to skip school to assist with income-generating activities (Catyong et al., 2023). This cycle of poverty not only hampers educational attainment but also perpetuates a lack of basic literacy skills among Batak individuals, as noted by Ancheta (2024), who reported that many lack fundamental reading, writing, and math skills.

Furthermore, the challenges faced by indigenous peoples education (IPEd) teachers in enhancing learners' skills, such as digital literacy and reading comprehension, worsen the educational disparities experienced by Batak learners (Killip, 2024). The struggles of IPEd teachers, compounded by gaps in language learning standards and instructional support, hinder the educational progress of Batak children. This situation is particularly concerning given that a significant proportion of the Batak population is young, with 35% aged 0-10 and 18% aged 11-20, yet many adults remain undereducated, often only

The Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997 represents a significant legislative milestone aimed at recognizing and protecting the rights of IPs in the Philippines. This law mandates the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in educational curricula and promotes the establishment of culturally appropriate educational programs (Reyes et al., 2017; Romero, 2024). The indigenous peoples education (IPEd) program, initiated by the Philippines's Department of Education, seeks to institutionalize these principles by integrating Indigenous perspectives into the national education framework (Tejano, 2022; Grande, 2023). The IPEd program aims to provide a more inclusive and equitable educational environment for IPs, addressing historical injustices and promoting cultural preservation (Jorolan-Quintero, 2013; Jocson, 2018).

Despite these advancements, various challenges hinder the effective implementation of educational policies for IPs. Access to quality education remains a significant issue, particularly in remote and marginalized communities. Many IPs face geographical barriers, lack of resources, and inadequate infrastructure, which limit their educational opportunities (Manaysay, 2020; Supan, 2023). Additionally, socio-economic factors, such as poverty and discrimination, further exacerbate these challenges, which led to high dropout rates among Indigenous students (Mi-ing, 2019; Cabanilla, 2013). The Batak community, for example, has faced unique challenges in accessing education due to their geographical isolation and socio-economic conditions. Studies indicate that the Batak have lower literacy rates compared to other Indigenous groups, reflecting systemic barriers to education (Simporios, 2024; Hung et al., 2022). Furthermore, cultural biases and discrimination within the educational system often discourage Batak students from pursuing formal education, which led to a cycle of marginalization (Quijano, 2021; Abuso, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic has further complicated the educational landscape for IPs in the Philippines. The shift to remote learning has disproportionately affected Indigenous communities, many of whom lack access to technology and reliable internet connectivity (Clariza, 2019; Espada, 2023). This situation has stressed the need for inclusive educational policies that consider the unique circumstances of IPs, to ensure that their rights to education are upheld even in times of crisis (Dondorp, 2021; Cahapay, 2020).

The state of indigenous peoples' education in the Philippines is a reflection of historical injustices, cultural dynamics, and ongoing challenges. While policies like the IPRA and IPEd initiatives have made strides toward inclusivity, significant barriers remain. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from government agencies, education institutions, and Indigenous communities to create a more equitable and culturally responsive educational environment. Thus, in response, the present study aimed to (1) investigate the various challenges that Batak parents encounter regarding their children's education, (2) to explore Batak parents' aspirations for their children's educational achievements, including their hopes for completing schooling and pursuing higher education, and (3) to provide insights that can inform educational policies and practices aimed at supporting indigenous communities, particularly in addressing the unique challenges and aspirations of Batak families. Addressing these gaps and challenges comprehensively is crucial for promoting equitable and inclusive education for Batak learners and other Indigenous Peoples in similar situations (Bayang, 2024).

2. METHODOLOGY
2.1. Design

This study employed a qualitative research methodology grounded in phenomenology to explore the experiences and aspirations of Batak parents regarding their children's education. Phenomenology is particularly suited for this research as it seeks to understand the lived experiences of individuals and the meanings they ascribe to those experiences (Mardiyah & Pamungkas, 2021). By focusing on the perspectives of Batak parents, the study aimed to capture the essence of their challenges in education and their hopes for their children's future.

2.2. Participants and Locale of the Study

This study was conducted in selected schools in Puerto Princesa City under the City Schools Division, Department of Education, focused on parents of Grade 5 and 6 learners of identified elementary schools that cater to Batak learners. These schools are Manggapin Elementary School, Concepcion Elementary School-Tagnaya Annex, Tanabag Elementary School, Maoyon Elementary School, and Cayasan Elementary School.

In the mountains, Manggapin Elementary School, Concepcion Elementary School-Tagnaya Annex, and Cayasan Elementary School stand tall, serving as beacons of knowledge and hope to the Batak learners inclusively. However, reaching these schools is no easy task. One must trek through rugged terrain, crossing rivers multiple times. Due to the ethical considerations, voluntary sampling was employed. Fortunately, all 24 parents of the Grade 5 and 6 voluntarily participated in this study. According to Hennink and Kaiser (2022), data saturation can achieve by at least 9 participants through interview; thus, this justified the total number of our participants.

2.3. Data Gathering Procedure

A formal letter requesting permission to conduct the study was submitted to the office of the school head or principal and duly endorsed to the District Supervisor for approval. Upon obtaining the necessary authorization, the researcher coordinated with the identified schools and set schedules for data collection in consultation with the participants to ensure minimal disruption to their duties.

Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews, which allowed for flexibility in exploring relevant themes while maintaining a consistent framework across all participants. This approach facilitated in-depth and meaningful conversations, enabling the researcher to gain deeper insights into the participants' experiences and perspectives. Interviews were conducted in person and in the participants' preferred language – Filipino to ensure clarity, comfort, and authenticity in responses. Each session was held in a quiet, private setting to foster openness and confidentiality. Prior to each interview, informed consent was obtained, and participants were assured of the anonymity and voluntary nature of their participation.

The interviews lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes, depending on the depth of discussion. With participants' consent, the sessions were audio-recorded to aid in accurate transcription and analysis. Field notes were also taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual observations. All data collected were securely stored and treated with strict confidentiality to protect the identities and responses of the participants.

2.2. Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to strict ethical guidelines to ensure the rights and welfare of participants. Participation is entirely voluntary, with individuals free to decline or withdraw at any point without penalty. Informed consent is obtained through a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and participants' rights. The research complies with the Philippine Data Privacy Act (RA 10173), which requires all personal information and responses be confidential, securely stored, and used solely for the study.

2.3. Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study utilized thematic analysis, a qualitative method for identifying and interpreting patterns within qualitative data. The analysis focused on the central questions: "What are the challenges you faced in school education?" and "How would you like to see them ten years from now?". The interview responses were recorded, transcribed and translated into English text. Thematic analysis was selected for its flexibility and ability to provide detailed understandings of Batak parents' experiences and aspirations regarding their children's education (Peterson, 2017; Belotto, 2018).

The analysis followed the six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) [Table 1]: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (Chapman et al., 2015). Initially, researchers immersed themselves in the data by reading the interview transcripts multiple times to understand participants' perspectives. In the second phase, initial codes were generated (Mackieson et al., 2018).

Researchers then grouped codes into broader categories which helped us identify the themes. Each theme was reviewed to confirm its representation of the data and distinctiveness from others (Nugroho, 2024). The next phase involved defining and naming themes, articulating their essence and significance in relation to the research questions (Qaissi, 2024). Finally, the report was produced, integrating themes with direct quotes from participants, providing a comprehensive view of their challenges and aspirations.

Table 1. Data analysis framework *(Braun & Clarke, 2006).*

Step	Description	Example from Data
1. Familiarization with data	Data was transcribed, read multiple times, and initial observations were noted to gain a deep understanding of the responses.	Observations: Parents consistently mentioned financial struggles and aspirations for educational success.
2. Generating initial codes	Meaningful segments of the data were labeled with codes that summarized key ideas or patterns.	Codes: *insufficient income* (P3, P5); *children missing school to work* (P6, P7, P9); *Desire for scholarships* (P1, P3, P4, P10, P12, P19).
3. Searching for themes	Related codes were grouped into broader themes that captured recurring concepts and patterns in the data.	Themes: economic barriers**,** educational achievement**,** community leadership and contribution
4. Reviewing themes	Themes were refined to ensure they were distinct and represented the data accurately, consolidating overlapping ideas.	Refinement: Merging "desire for better jobs" into economic stability and empowerment.
5. Defining and naming themes	Themes were clearly defined to represent the participants' perspectives and labeled appropriately to reflect their meaning.	Final Themes: economic barriers**,** resource deficiency**,** educational achievement.
6. Producing the final report	Themes were presented and contextualized, supported by direct participant quotes to ensure authenticity	Report Example: Economic barriers reflect struggles with income, as one parent stated, *'Our earnings are really insufficient.'* (P3, P5)

3.   RESULTS
3.1. Challenges of the Batak Parents

The challenges experienced by Batak parents in relation to their children's education reflect systemic barriers and inequities. Through thematic analysis, their responses point to three primary themes: Economic Barriers, Resource Deficiency, and Curriculum-Related Challenges [Table 2]. These themes reveal how financial struggles, limited access to educational resources, and difficulties with the curriculum affect the educational experiences of their children.

Table 2. Selected codes and emerging themes for challenges.

Theme	Code	Sample Response
Economic barriers	Insufficient income	*"Our earnings are really insufficient. We work hard and take any job to have money for food"* -P3.
	Children missing school due to work	*"Sometimes our children can't go to school; we make them help with work to earn money"*-P9.
	Difficulty finding stable jobs	*"We really don't have jobs, that's why we struggle. We work, we take any job to make money"* -P6.
	Desire for financial assistance	*"If only someone could help us by providing jobs so we could have an income"*-P5.
Resource deficiency	Lack of computers and modern technology	*"They don't have computers at school. They need to learn how to use them so they won't struggle in high school"* -P17.
	Inadequate learning materials	*"They really lack equipment at school; they don't have computers"* -P1.
	Geographic isolation	*"Maybe it's because of the distance and we don't have electricity, so they don't have computers"* -P10.
	Parents trying to compensate with minimal means	*"We try to buy at least a cellphone for them to use"*-P14.
Curriculum-related challenges	Struggles with standardized exams	*"Their scores on the exam are low because they say it's difficult"*-P11.
	Language barriers	*"The subjects they are studying in school are difficult, and they also struggle to understand English"* -P12.
	Overwhelming academic workload	*"They say that there are many tasks being assigned at school now, and they are finding it a bit difficult"*-P8.

3.1.1. Theme 1: Economic barriers

Economic hardships significantly affect Batak parents, who face financial constraints linked to their socio-economic situation. Many rely on subsistence activities, such as gathering *Almaciga resin* or low-

paying jobs. One parent (P3) stated, *"Our earnings are really insufficient. We work hard and take any job to have money for food";* this illustrates their daily struggle just to meet basic needs amid unpredictable income.

This economic instability reflects broader systemic issues perpetuating poverty in indigenous communities (Tajolosa & Tajolosa, 2022) and directly impacts children's education. Parents often prioritize immediate survival over schooling; one (P9) shared, "*Sometimes our children can't go to school; we make them help with work to earn money.*" This reveals the tension between survival and educational goals, with literature indicating that economic hardship leads to decreased parental involvement in education and lower expectations for children (Zhang et al., 2020). Other research emphasizes the strain on family dynamics under financial stress which results in reduced educational support for children (Asadi, 2024).

Despite these challenges, parents show a strong commitment to education as a means of escaping poverty. One parent (P11) expressed, "*We tell them to study well so we can rise from poverty*" which demonstrated that they have hope and determination to break the cycle of poverty through learning. Parents often make sacrifices, such as working extra hours. Studies support that families prioritize education for upward mobility despite economic barriers (Zhang et al., 2020).

The economic challenges facing the Batak community are intensified by systemic neglect. The lack of specific livelihood programs reveals the need for strategic interventions, including community-based economic support and scholarships to reduce financial burdens related to education. Research indicates effective poverty alleviation must address the specific needs of marginalized groups by providing culturally relevant educational resources and economic opportunities (Pulgar et al., 2015). Tajolosa and Tajolosa stress the importance of economic empowerment initiatives that can create sustainable livelihoods, which reduces reliance on informal labor.

The intersection of economic barriers and educational access is vital for understanding broader community development implications. Studies show that combining economic empowerment with educational support can significantly improve outcomes for disadvantaged groups (Hostinar & Miller, 2019). Thus, addressing the economic barriers faced by Batak families is essential for their survival, educational success, and community resilience, with Hostinar and Miller's review pointing to the significance of protective factors that can mitigate the adverse effects of economic hardship on children (Hostinar & Miller, 2019).

3.1.2. Theme 2: Resource deficiency

The lack of educational resources poses a significant barrier to learning for Batak children. Parents have noted the absence of computers, modern tools, and basic facilities in schools. A parent (P17) stated: "*They don't have computers at school. They need to learn how to use them so they won't struggle in high school.*"

This lack of technology limits digital literacy and puts Batak children at a disadvantage compared to urban peers (Baldezamo, 2024). Geographic isolation also plays a role, as a participant (P9) mentioned: *"Maybe it's because of the distance and we don't have electricity, so they don't have computers."* This remoteness hinders access to basic utilities, which affects educational opportunities (Alqahtani & Alharbi, 2021). Financial constraints lead parents to rely on cellphones instead of traditional learning materials; this creates further gaps in education. "*We try to buy at least a cellphone for them to use,*" a parent (P14) shared. While mobile devices can aid learning, they cannot replace structured educational resources (Akinrinola et al., 2020; Fajri, 2023).

Parents emphasize the urgent need for resources such as computers, internet access, electricity, and culturally relevant materials for Batak schools. Partnerships with NGOs could enhance access and equity in education. Integrating local knowledge into curricula has proven effective in improving engagement for indigenous students (Purba et al., 2017).

The challenges faced by Batak children are common across indigenous education in the Philippines. Revitalizing local folklore can enrich educational materials (Baiduri & Khairani, 2018). Community-based education initiatives that use local wisdom emphasizes the importance of community involvement (Siagian et al., 2018). The lack of educational resources is a widespread issue affecting many indigenous groups in the country.

3.1.3. Theme 3: Curriculum-related challenges

The current curriculum poses challenges for Batak children, especially in standardized testing and language barriers. Many parents (11 out of 24) reported that their children struggle with difficult assessments. One parent stated, *"Their scores on the exam are low because they say it's difficult."* This issue stems from a disconnect between the curriculum's content and the lived experiences of indigenous students, which usually leads to feelings of alienation and disengagement (Wager et al., 2022).

Language barriers further complicate these challenges, as English is used for instruction and assessment. One parent (P12) remarked, "*The subjects they are studying in school are difficult, and they also struggle to understand English.*" For indigenous children whose first language is not English, this creates a cognitive load that hinders academic performance. Research shows that language proficiency significantly impacts educational outcomes, particularly in non-native language assessments (Ilagan, 2024). Such challenges are common among indigenous students globally, where language issues impede success (Sianturi et al., 2018).

Parents also expressed concern about the heavy workload, which conflicts with familial responsibilities. One parent (P8) noted, *"They say that there are many tasks being assigned at school now, and they are finding it a bit difficult."* Children already assisting with household or income-generating tasks may find excessive academic demands overwhelming, which detracts from their educational focus (Williams, 2020).

Addressing these curriculum-related challenges requires reforms that cater to indigenous learners. Contextualizing assessments, providing language support, and creating culturally relevant materials could bridge the gap for Batak children. The literature emphasizes culturally sustaining pedagogy, which incorporates students' cultural backgrounds into learning (Miole, 2024).

Training teachers to understand the needs of indigenous communities can promote a more inclusive learning environment. Professional development focusing on cultural competency has been shown to improve outcomes for indigenous students (Chen, 2024). Such training can help educators comprehend the culture of their students, thus contributing to a more equitable educational experience. The challenges faced by Batak children reflect broader issues in indigenous education within the Philippines. The Indigenous Peoples' Education (IPEd) policy aims to address these challenges by promoting indigenous knowledge integration into the curriculum (Webb & Mashford-Pringle, 2022). However, obstacles such as a lack of resources and teacher training can impede effectiveness (Kadonsi, 2023).

Additionally, Ilagan's work stresses the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge systems and practices (IKSPs) into the K to 12 curricula, which suggests that IKSP enhances the relevance of education for indigenous students (Ukala & Agabi, 2017). This approach aligns with the need for contextualized learning experiences that reflect the cultural and linguistic realities of Batak children.

3.2. Aspirations of the Batak Parents

The aspirations of Batak parents for their children encompass a wide range of hopes, reflecting both personal and communal dreams for the future. Based on their responses, three central themes emerged: educational achievement, economic stability and empowerment, and community leadership and contribution [Table 3]. These themes illustrate parents' desires for their children to complete their education, achieve financial security, and contribute meaningfully to their community as leaders and role models

Table 3. Selected codes and emerging themes for aspirations.

Theme	Code	Sample Response
Educational achievement	Desire for children to graduate	*"We really dream that they will finish their studies so their lives can change"* -P1.
	Efforts to secure scholarships	*"I want them to finish their studies, so we are really looking for a scholarship for them"* -P3.
	Education as a tool for change	*"We really want them to finish their studies so they can help us rise from poverty"*-P5.
Economic stability and empowerment	Financial independence	*"We really want them to finish their studies so they can find good jobs"* -P2.
	Ability to support family financially	*"They are now helping us, especially in the education of their siblings"* -P10.
	Living a life free from struggles	*"No longer struggling and can now afford what they want"* -P7.
Community leadership and contribution	Aspiration for leadership roles	*"They are already a leader here and successful in life"* -P6.
	Desire for children to become teachers	*"They are now a teacher here, which is really our dream — that they become teachers so they won't leave us"* -P18.
	Inspiring other youth in the community	*"They are now successful and an inspiration here for the youth to strive in their studies"* -P11.
	Advocacy for community and cultural heritage	*"They have finished their studies and are now our defenders"* -P13.

3.2.1. *Theme 1: Educational achievement*

Batak parents emphasize education as essential for their children's future, aspiring for them to complete their studies to escape cycles of poverty. One parent (P1) expressed, *"We really dream that they will finish their studies so their lives can change and so they won't be like us who didn't go to school."* This sentiment stresses their recognition of education as a pathway to personal and economic development (Khanal, 2023). Many parents actively seek scholarships to overcome financial barriers; this demonstrates that parents are invested to their children's success. Research indicates that access to scholarships can significantly improve educational outcomes for marginalized communities (Heck et al., 2023).

Education equips Batak children with skills to navigate a changing world, offering economic benefits and social mobility (Schultz et al., 2018). This aligns with Khanal's findings on the transformative potential of educational attainment. The aspirations of Batak parents resonate with the Indigenous Peoples' Education (IPEd) policy in the Philippines, aimed at integrating indigenous culture into education (Schultz et al., 2018), though challenges remain, such as resource limitations (Hafid, 2023). Mulyana advocates for recognizing cultural identity within education, which aligns with Batak parents' hopes for their children to achieve success while maintaining cultural heritage (Mulyana, 2023).

Culturally responsive pedagogy is vital in supporting indigenous students, as it incorporates their backgrounds into the curriculum, which then helps bridge the gap between traditional practices and cultural realities (Adeoye et al., 2024). Thus, the educational aspirations of Batak parents reflect a commitment to breaking the cycle of poverty through academic success which indicates the need for policies that value indigenous knowledge and culture to promote inclusive educational environment.

3.2.2. *Theme 2: Economic stability and empowerment*

Economic security is a key aspiration for Batak parents, closely linked to their hopes for their children's educational success. They believe that completing school will lead to stable, well-paying jobs that will break their families' financial struggles. One parent (P2) noted, *"We really want them to finish their studies so they can find good jobs,"* this shows that they associate education with stable employment. Literature supports this, that educational attainment is correlated with better socio-economic status and quality of life (Chowdhury, 2018). Parents desire for their children to achieve a standard of living that alleviates financial struggle. One parent (P7) expressed, *"No longer struggling and can now afford what they want,"* which shows their wish for their children to enjoy lives free from hardship. Economic stability significantly influences individual well-being, which later affects health, happiness, and community cohesion (Markidis & Papageorgiou, 2017).

Furthermore, Batak parents' economic aspirations involve expectations of reciprocity, where children support their families financially upon achieving stability. One respondent (P10) shared, *"They are now helping us, especially in the education of their siblings,"* which illustrates the link between individual success and family responsibility. This phenomenon is well-documented in various cultures, where familial obligations shape educational and career aspirations (Hutahaean & Agustina, 2020). Economic empowerment also extends to community contributions, as parents hope their children will support community projects and assist other Batak families. This reflects a 'collectivist mindset', where individual achievements contribute to collective progress. Community-oriented economic development approaches indicate that empowering individuals leads to broader societal benefits (Dasopang et al., 2022).

In the Batak community, aspirations for economic stability align with cultural values like "Dalihan Natolu," which symbolizes mutual support and cooperation. This framework encourages contributions to family and community welfare which reinforces the link between personal success and collective well-being (Sagala et al., 2022). Batak parents' goals resonate with narratives in local Philippine literature, where the Indigenous Peoples' Education (IPEd) policy aims to enhance indigenous student relevance within education (Tanjung, 2024). However, it faces challenges, including insufficient resources and educator training that impede effectiveness (Markidis & Papageorgiou, 2017).

Moreover, the need to recognize and preserve indigenous cultures within educational systems. He argues for education that balances academic success with cultural identity and community resilience (Sagala et al., 2022). This approach aligns with Batak parents' aspirations for their children to achieve educational success while maintaining strong cultural ties. Lastly, community empowerment through education is vital for addressing the economic aspirations of indigenous communities, advocating for inclusive curricula that consider students' cultural backgrounds (Hutahaean & Agustina, 2020). By acknowledging the experiences and knowledge of Batak children, educators can bridge traditional educational practices with indigenous realities.

3.2.3. Theme 3: Community leadership and contribution

Many Batak parents aspire for their children to contribute to the well-being and development of their community. They view education as a means not only for personal success but also for strengthening the Batak cultural and social fabric. This perspective aligns with studies that emphasize education's role in enhancing community engagement and leadership among indigenous groups (Bada, 2024). Parents expressed hopes that their children would assume leadership roles, with one (P6) stating, "*They are already a leader here and successful in life.*" This illustrates the belief that, education prepares children to advocate for their community and address systemic challenges. Sarong (2023) indicated that higher educational attainment is linked to greater civic engagement and leadership among marginalized communities. By equipping their children with skills and knowledge, parents aim to cultivate leaders committed to their cultural heritage.

Teaching emerged as a highly valued profession, with two parents aspiring for their children to become educators. One (P18) parent remarked, "*They are now a teacher here, which is really our dream — that they become teachers so they won't leave us.*" This expresses a desire for their children to gain opportunities while remaining connected to their cultural identity. Culturally relevant education is crucial, as it enhances learning outcomes and builds community pride (Messmore & Davis, 2020).

Some parents envision their children inspiring others within the community. A parent (P11) noted, "*They are now successful and an inspiration here for the youth to strive in their studies.*" This perspective reflects a belief that their children's achievements can motivate other Batak youth to pursue education, which then eventually create a ripple effect of progress. Research indicates that role models significantly influence the aspirations of young people in underrepresented communities (Andriansyah, 2024).

Community contribution extends beyond teaching and leadership. Some parents see their children as protectors of cultural heritage. A participant (P13) stated, "*They have finished their studies and are now our defenders,*" which tells us that they are also expecting educated individuals to advocate for indigenous rights and preserve Batak traditions. Literature emphasizes cultural advocacy among indigenous leaders as vital for bridging communities with external entities (Igcasama, 2023).

The aspirations of Batak parents resonate with broader narratives in indigenous education in the Philippines. The Indigenous Peoples' Education (IPEd) policy seeks to integrate indigenous knowledge into the educational system, to enhance educational relevance for indigenous students (Graham, 2024). However, its implementation faces challenges such as insufficient resources and educator training, which may impede fulfilling the aspirations of indigenous families (Sabol, 2014).

Mulyana's work emphasizes the need for respecting and preserving indigenous cultures within educational frameworks, arguing that education must encompass cultural identity and community resilience. This viewpoint mirrors Batak parents' hopes for their children to achieve academic success while maintaining a strong cultural connection. Furthermore, community empowerment through education is essential in addressing the aspirations of indigenous communities, to promote the incorporation of students' cultural backgrounds into the curriculum for a more inclusive learning environment (Noopila & Pichon, 2020).

3.3. Insights for Educational Policies and Practices for Batak IPs

Responses from Batak parents show a strong connection between education, economic stability, and community leadership, which emphasized the need for culturally relevant policies that address the specific needs of the Batak indigenous people community [Figure 1].
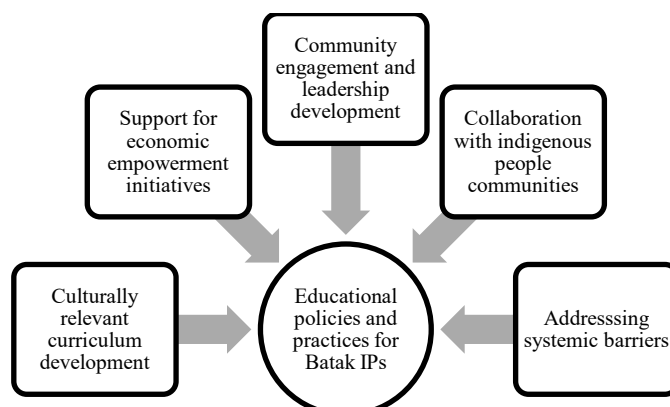

Figure 1. Emerged educational policies and practices for Batak IPs

3.3.1. Culturally relevant curriculum development

A key finding is the necessity for a curriculum that reflects the cultural heritage and values of the Batak community. Parents want their children to receive an education that prepares them for employment while preserving their cultural identity. This aligns with Jacob et al. (2018), who argue that educational policies should include indigenous languages and cultural content to promote belonging for indigenous students. Integrating local knowledge into the curriculum can create a more engaging and relevant learning environment for Batak children.

3.3.2. Support for economic empowerment initiatives

The aspirations of Batak parents for economic stability indicate the need for educational policies that create pathways to employment. This includes scholarships, vocational training, and partnerships with local industries to facilitate job placements for graduates. Kohl and Hopkins (2020) suggest that educational systems should equip students with both academic and practical skills to enhance employability. Policies that promote economic empowerment through education can help break the cycle of poverty.

3.3.3. Community engagement and leadership development

The study stresses the importance of developing leadership skills among indigenous youth. Parents hope their children will take on leadership roles within the Batak community. Educational policies should include leadership training and community engagement initiatives that encourage active participation. Jacob et al. (2018) note that incorporating indigenous knowledges into educational frameworks can enhance self-determination and community resilience. Programs promoting civic engagement can cultivate a new generation of advocates for indigenous rights and cultural preservation.

3.3.4. Collaboration with indigenous communities

The findings emphasize the need for ongoing dialogue and collaboration between educational institutions and indigenous communities. Policies should be developed in partnership with community members to reflect Batak values and aspirations. This approach aligns with the Indigenous Peoples' Education (IPEd) policy in the Philippines, which aims to integrate indigenous knowledge into the educational system (Miole, 2024). Involving indigenous communities in policy-making can lead to more inclusive and effective educational frameworks.

3.3.5. Addressing systemic barriers

Finally, the study addresses systemic barriers that indigenous families face in accessing quality education. Policies must tackle issues such as economic disparities, geographic isolation, and language barriers that hinder educational attainment for Batak children. Cruz (2020) states that effective educational policies should consider the socio-economic status of indigenous communities and strive for equitable access to resources. This includes investments in infrastructure, transportation, and support services to facilitate educational access for remote communities.

4. DISCUSSION

The challenges and aspirations of Batak parents provide important perspectives into the systemic barriers their children face in accessing education and their deep-seated hopes for future opportunities. These findings stressed the intersection of socio-economic struggles, resource inequities, cultural resilience, and educational aspirations, which offers a foundation for policies and practices that can address these needs comprehensively.

The challenges faced by Batak parents emphasized the entrenched systemic inequities affecting indigenous communities. Economic barriers, resource deficiencies, and curriculum-related challenges emerged as primary themes, each interwoven with the broader socio-economic and educational landscape of marginalized groups.

Economic instability emerged as the most pervasive issue, where parents often prioritize survival over education. The reliance on subsistence activities and informal jobs limits their capacity to support their children's schooling. This aligns with findings by Zhang et al. (2020), which identified financial constraints as a significant predictor of low educational engagement among impoverished families. The study also revealed parents' aspirations to break this cycle of poverty, which reflects their resilience and determination to leverage education as a tool for socio-economic mobility. Addressing these economic challenges requires targeted interventions, such as scholarships, livelihood programs, and community-based income generation initiatives.

The lack of access to modern educational resources, such as computers and internet connectivity, compounds the disadvantages faced by Batak children. Geographic isolation further exacerbates this issue, limiting the availability of basic utilities like electricity and infrastructure for education. Baldezamo (2024) and Alqahtani and Alharbi (2021) both highlight the significant disparities in digital literacy and resource accessibility between rural and urban learners. Despite these challenges, parents' efforts to provide alternative resources, like mobile phones, demonstrate their commitment to their children's education. However, these measures are insufficient without systemic support. Partnerships with NGOs and government programs could bridge these gaps by providing essential resources and ensuring equitable access to technology and culturally relevant materials (Purba et al., 2017).

The curriculum's misalignment with the cultural and linguistic realities of Batak learners represents a significant barrier. Parents reported their children's struggles with standardized exams, language barriers, and overwhelming workloads, which resonate with global findings on the alienation of indigenous students in mainstream education systems (Sianturi et al., 2018; Wager et al., 2022). Contextualizing the curriculum to include indigenous knowledge and providing language support can help bridge this gap. Culturally sustaining pedagogies, as advocated by Miole (2024), have been shown to enhance engagement and academic success among indigenous learners. Furthermore, professional development for teachers to understand and address the needs of indigenous students is critical for creating inclusive and equitable educational environments (Chen, 2024).

Despite the significant challenges, Batak parents hold strong aspirations for their children, emphasizing the transformative potential of education. Their dreams align with three key themes: educational achievement, economic stability and empowerment, and community leadership and contribution.

Batak parents view education as a pathway out of poverty and a means to secure a better future for their children. Their emphasis on scholarships reflects a proactive approach to overcoming financial barriers. This finding aligns with research by Heck et al. (2023), which highlights the role of scholarships in improving educational access for marginalized communities. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives depends on addressing underlying resource limitations and integrating cultural identity into the educational framework (Schultz et al., 2018). Culturally responsive pedagogy is essential for bridging traditional practices and modern education, enabling indigenous learners to succeed academically while preserving their heritage (Adeoye et al., 2024).

The desire for economic independence and financial stability is central to Batak parents' aspirations. They hope education will equip their children with the skills needed to secure stable employment and break free from the cycle of poverty. Chowdhury (2018) emphasizes that educational attainment significantly improves socio-economic outcomes, which reinforces the need for policies that link education with vocational training and job placement opportunities. Parents also expect their children to contribute financially to the family; this reflects a collectivist cultural mindset. Programs that balance individual success with community empowerment, such as Dalihan Natolu (Sagala et al., 2022), can amplify the benefits of education for both families and the broader community.

Beyond personal success, Batak parents aspire for their children to assume leadership roles and contribute to their community's well-being. They envision their children as role models who inspire others, advocate for indigenous rights, and preserve their cultural heritage. This aligns with Sarong's (2023) findings on the connection between education, civic engagement, and leadership among marginalized groups. Educational policies should include leadership training and community engagement initiatives that prepare indigenous students to become advocates for their communities (Jacob et al., 2018). The emphasis on teaching as a valued profession further reflects the parents' hopes for their children to remain connected to their cultural roots while achieving professional success.

To implement the suggested policies effectively, specific strategies must be grounded in sustained community involvement, inter-agency collaboration, and resource allocation that reflects the unique needs of the Batak Indigenous People. First, culturally relevant curriculum development can begin with participatory workshops involving Batak elders, educators, and curriculum specialists to co-create modules that integrate Batak history, language, and livelihood practices. Second, local government units and education stakeholders should jointly design economic empowerment programs, such as scholarship schemes tied to academic performance and vocational training fitted to local industries like sustainable agriculture, handicrafts, or eco-tourism. Third, to improve community leadership, schools can establish student-led civic groups and mentorship programs that connect youth with Batak leaders and NGOs. Fourth, collaborative policy-making structures should be institutionalized through Indigenous Education Councils, so that Batak voices are represented in regional and national education planning. Lastly, infrastructure investments such as mobile classrooms, teacher housing, and community-based learning centers must be prioritized to overcome geographic and logistical barriers.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has revealed the complex challenges and aspirations of Batak parents concerning their children's education. The qualitative data collected point to an urgent need for strategic interventions that address the specific circumstances encountered by the Batak community. As noted, the absence of targeted livelihood programs and the geographic isolation of the Batak people significantly hinder educational opportunities; this prompts the need for community-based economic support and educational resources that respect local culture.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that Batak parents strongly believe education contributes to improved socio-economic status and quality of life. However, the pressure of immediate survival needs often forces families to prioritize work over education, which perpetuate cycles of poverty. This situation is made worse by the obstacles faced by Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) teachers, who find it difficult to develop students' skills due to limited resources and insufficient training in cultural competency. Future research should explore the development and impact of culturally responsive, community-driven education and livelihood programs that align with the Batak parents' aspirations and address the systemic barriers faced by indigenous learners and educators.

The study also stresses the importance of including local knowledge and cultural identity in educational systems, which can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment for Batak children. By revitalizing local folklore and involving community members in policy development, educational initiatives can better mirror the values and ambitions of the Batak people.

As we consider the aspirations of Batak parents, it becomes evident that education serves not just as a means for individual accomplishment, but also as a crucial instrument for breaking the cycle of poverty and strengthening community resilience. The time has come to turn these hopes into policies that not only uplift the Batak community but also serve as a model for overcoming the challenges faced by indigenous populations. In this effort, we must remember: the future of Batak children rests not only in their hands but also in ours.

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