

# Challenges among Indigenous People Learners in Understanding English as Second Language

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## **Abstract**

Understanding English is essential in second language learning. However, Indigenous People learners challenge to learn English as their second language. This study was conducted to determine the level of challenges among Indigenous People learners in understanding English as Second Language in select schools of Valencia City Division during the School Year 2025-2026. Specifically, it aimed to describe the respondents' characteristics in terms of sex, tribal affiliation, parents' occupation, parents' highest educational attainment, parental support, and attitude toward English; find out the respondent's level of challenges in understanding English as a second language based on language barriers, pronunciation struggles, vocabulary overload, grammar woes, cultural differences, and fear of making mistakes; and determine the significant relationship between the respondents' challenges in understanding English as a second language and each of their characteristics. This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design and universal sampling, wherein 150 Grade 7 Indigenous People learners in select schools of Valencia City Division were surveyed using a researcher-made questionnaire. Statistical tools such as mean, standard deviation, Pearson's  $r$ , Kruskal-Wallis test, and t-test were used to analyze the data.

Findings revealed that most of the respondents were females from farming families with low educational attainment, high parental support and positive attitude toward English. Indigenous People learners were found to be slightly challenged across all the dependent variables, with fear of making mistakes having the highest mean and language barriers the lowest mean. The variable sex showed a significant relationship with the vocabulary overload while parental support and attitude towards English showed negative correlations with all the challenges. It concludes that fear of mistakes as the highest challenge among IP learners in understanding English as their second language. This study recommends teachers to conduct monthly consultations with parents to demonstrate simple ways parents can assist their children. Teachers should include pronunciation drills, vocabulary development exercises and sentence construction into daily lessons. Schools should conduct parent orientations and workshops on easy ways to use English at home.

**Keywords:** challenges, Indigenous people learners, English as a second language

## 1. Introduction

Learning English is essential for Indigenous People learners as it enables them to communicate effectively and gain access to wider educational, social, and economic opportunities. In Valencia City, Bukidnon, many learners face difficulty in understanding English because it is often their second or even third language after their mother tongue and Filipino. These challenges are evident in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension, and are further influenced by cultural differences and limited exposure to English in their communities. As a result, learners often experience low confidence, hesitation in speaking, and reduced participation in classroom discussions, which can affect their overall learning experience.

Research indicates that these difficulties are not only linguistic but also shaped by socio cultural and economic conditions such as limited practice, lack of resources, parental educational background, and varying levels of support at home. Even with the implementation of different teaching strategies and interventions, many learners continue to struggle due to language barriers and minimal English immersion. Personal and demographic factors also influence their performance and attitude toward learning the language. Addressing these challenges is crucial not only for improving academic outcomes but also for promoting equity and empowerment, as strengthening English proficiency can help Indigenous learners access better opportunities while preserving and respecting their cultural identity.

## Research Questions

This study aimed to determine the level of challenges among Indigenous People learners in understanding English as a Second Language in select schools of Valencia City Division during the School Year 2025-2026.

It specifically answered the following questions:

1. How are the respondents characterized in terms of sex, tribal affiliation, parents' occupation, parents' highest educational attainment, parental support, and attitude towards English?
2. What is the respondents' level of challenges in understanding English as a second language, based on language barriers, pronunciation struggles, vocabulary overload, grammar woes, cultural differences, and fear of making mistakes?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the respondents' challenges in understanding English as a second language and each of their characteristics?

## Significance

The study provides valuable insights for school administrators, teachers, learners, parents, and researchers by highlighting the challenges Indigenous learners face in learning English. It helps administrators design programs, policies, and interventions that create a more supportive and inclusive learning environment through teacher training, curriculum improvement, and the use of indigenous languages. For teachers, it offers a deeper understanding of linguistic and cultural barriers, enabling them to apply more effective, inclusive, and culturally responsive teaching strategies. Indigenous learners gain awareness of their own learning challenges, which can lead to more targeted support and guidance from educators. The study also emphasizes the important role of parents and guardians, encouraging them to be more involved in their children's learning by providing motivation and support at home. Finally, the findings serve as a useful

reference for future researchers, offering a foundation for further studies on language acquisition, coping strategies, and policy development to better support Indigenous learners.

### **Scope and Limitations**

This study focused on the challenges among Indigenous People learners in understanding English as a second language in select schools in the Division of Valencia City. The respondents were the one hundred fifty (150) Grade 7 Indigenous People learners who were studying in the Junior High School Department. The independent variables were limited only to the respondents' characteristics in terms of sex, parents' occupation, parents' highest educational attainment, parental support, and attitude towards English. Moreover, the dependent variables were also limited to language barriers, pronunciation struggles, vocabulary overload, grammar woes, cultural differences, and fear of making mistakes.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **Respondents' Characteristics**

The awareness of Indigenous People learners' characteristics is important in understanding the factors that influence their ability to learn English as a second language. These factors include sex, tribal affiliation, parents' occupation, parents' highest educational attainment, parental support, and attitude toward English. Baracheta (2024) found that male and female learners experience different challenges in English learning, where females often struggle in pronunciation and fluency due to low self-confidence, while males encounter difficulties in grammar and vocabulary. This shows that gender plays a role in shaping language learning experiences and suggests the need for differentiated instructional support. In terms of tribal affiliation, Demetrio and Gonzales (2022) emphasized that learners perform better when lessons reflect their sociocultural context, while Condeza and Mongas (2025) supported that integrating cultural elements in instruction strengthens engagement and preserves identity among Indigenous learners.

Family background also significantly affects English learning. Enteria and Tangyam (2020) found that many Indigenous parents have low educational attainment and low-income occupations, which limits their capacity to support their children academically despite strong aspirations for their education. Garcia and de Guzman (2020) further explained that limited parental education reduces the ability of parents to assist in English related tasks and communicate with teachers, creating additional learning barriers at home. In terms of parental support, Chavez et al. (2023) highlighted that active parental encouragement and home-based language practices such as guided reading and correction improve learners' confidence and exposure to English. Lastly, Mendoza and Quijano (2023) emphasized that a positive attitude toward English helps learners remain motivated and persistent despite limited resources, leading to better language learning outcomes among Indigenous learners.

### **Challenges in Understanding English as a Second Language**

Indigenous People learners in the Philippines face challenges in learning English as a second language such as language barriers, pronunciation difficulties, vocabulary overload, grammar issues, cultural differences, and fear of making mistakes. Papastefanou et al. (2021) and Marinis and Powell (2021) found that limited exposure to English significantly affects comprehension, while Reynolds et al. (2022) emphasized that multimedia tools such as subtitles improve vocabulary learning and retention. Peters

(2022) further explained that repeated exposure to academic English strengthens vocabulary development and supports better understanding among learners.

In addition, Leaño, Rabi, and Piragasam (2019) reported that Indigenous learners experience pronunciation difficulties due to weak phonological awareness, while Lee and Ahn (2021) stressed that limited speaking practice and feedback hinder accurate pronunciation development. Bastida, Saysi, and Batuctoc (2022) also found that exposure to multiple dialects creates confusion in grammar usage, affecting learners' mastery of English structures. Moreover, Cheng and Zhou (2023) highlighted the importance of parental emotional support in building learner confidence, while Vallejo (2023) noted that Indigenous learners often struggle with complex language tasks and need stronger instructional support systems.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

This study utilized a descriptive-correlational method of research design that aimed to determine the challenges among Indigenous People learners in understanding English as a second language and its characteristics. Data on respondents' characteristics and the level of challenges they face during language learning were collected with the help of a survey questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondents' characteristics and challenges, Pearson correlation identified the relationship between challenges and respondents' characteristics. This research also allowed the challenges of English language among the Indigenous People learners to be studied. The study's findings offered important insights for teachers on how to implement culturally responsive language teaching, which contributed towards the effectiveness of English language instruction across different contexts.

#### **Participants**

The respondents of this study consisted of one hundred fifty (150) Grade 7 Indigenous People learners enrolled in the select schools in the Division of Valencia City, namely: Bulacao Integrated School, Concepcion Integrated School, Sugod Integrated School, San Carlos Integrated School, and Barobo Integrated School. These learners were chosen because they share the same socio-cultural and educational background which provide common basis in analyzing their challenges in understanding English as a second language.

#### **Data Collection**

The instrument used in gathering the necessary data was a questionnaire composed of two parts. Part I elicited the respondents' characteristics such as sex, tribal affiliation, parents' occupation, parents' highest educational attainment, parental support and attitude towards English. Moreover, the variables were adapted and modified from various studies, which were mentioned in the related Literature and studies section. However, the questionnaire on the parental support and attitude towards English was researcher-made.

Part II inquired about the respondents' challenges among Indigenous People learners in understanding English as a second language based on language barriers, pronunciation struggles, vocabulary overload, grammar woes, cultural differences and fear of making mistakes. The variables were adapted from the

Excel English Institute, titled “ Common Challenges for ESL Students and How to Overcome Them” posted on September 26, 2024. However, the indicators were also researcher-made.

### Data Analysis

After collecting and recording the data gathered from the study, the researcher used the following statistical tools: Descriptive statistics, such as frequency and percentage, were utilized to describe the respondents’ characteristics such as sex, tribal affiliation, parents’ occupation, and parent’s highest educational attainment. On the other hand, mean and standard deviation were utilized for parental support and attitude towards English. Meanwhile, mean and standard deviation were employed on the level of challenges in understanding English as a second language, such as language barriers, pronunciation struggles, vocabulary overload, grammar woes, cultural differences, and fear of making mistakes. Furthermore, Statistical tools, included Pearson’s R Correlation, Kruskal-Wallis test, and independent samples t-test were utilized to determine the significant relationship between the respondents’ challenges in understanding English as a second language and their characteristics.

## 4. Results and Discussions

**Problem 1. How are the respondents characterized in terms of sex, tribal affiliation, parents’ occupation, parents’ highest educational attainment, parental support, and attitude towards English?**

**Table 1**  
**Distribution of Respondents' Characteristics in terms of Sex and Tribal Affiliation**

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	74	49
	Female	76	51
	<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>
Tribal Affiliation	Bukidnon	87	58
	Higaanon	10	7
	Manobo	23	15
	Matigsalug	2	1
	Talaandig	25	17
	Tigwahanon	2	1
	Umayamnon	0	0
	Others: Bagobo	1	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents’ characteristics in terms of sex and tribal affiliation, revealing that females slightly outnumber males, indicating stronger female representation and influence

in the study, likely shaped by increasing access to education and gender equality initiatives while both groups still reflect sociocultural differences in participation and learning preferences. In terms of tribal affiliation, the Bukidnon group has the highest representation, showing that their cultural context greatly influenced the results and highlighting the importance of integrating their traditions into teaching practices to improve relevance and engagement. On the other hand, groups such as Bagobo and Umayamnon have very low or no representation, suggesting possible barriers such as geographic isolation, limited access to education, and cultural or economic constraints, which underscores the need for more inclusive and culturally responsive educational approaches for all Indigenous groups.

**Table 2**  
**Distribution of Respondents' Characteristics in terms of Parents' Occupation**

Category	Father		Mother	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Carpenter	1	1	3	2
Driver	18	11	0	0
Farmer	85	57	47	31
Labor	11	7	14	9
Vendor	7	5	9	7
Others: Unemployed	28	19	77	51
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents' characteristics in terms of parents' occupation, revealing that most fathers are farmers, indicating that Indigenous learners largely come from agrarian households where seasonal farm work affects attendance, study time, and access to learning resources, which may also limit exposure to English and shape low academic motivation due to economic constraints and farming as a primary livelihood. The lowest number of fathers are carpenters, suggesting limited exposure to skilled trades and fewer opportunities for learners to develop broader career awareness beyond farming, which may also reflect a lack of vocational training in the community. For mothers, the majority are unemployed and mainly engaged in home-based roles, allowing more time for guidance and emotional support but also limiting financial capacity to provide educational needs, while very few are involved in carpentry and none are drivers, showing minimal participation in technical or nontraditional work for women. Overall, these patterns highlight how parental occupation strongly influences learners' educational experiences, resources, motivation, and career perspectives within Indigenous communities.

**Table 3**  
**Distribution of Respondents' Characteristics in terms of Parents' Highest Educational Attainment**

Category	Father		Mother	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
College Graduate	20	13	21	14
College Level	11	7	17	11
High School Graduate	28	19	35	23
High School Level	24	16	22	15
Elementary Graduate	20	13	23	15
Elementary Level	47	31	32	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3 shows the distribution of respondents' characteristics in terms of parents' highest educational attainment, revealing that most fathers reached only the elementary level, indicating limited formal education that may affect their ability to support children's academic tasks, especially in English, and reduce access to learning resources at home, leading learners to rely mainly on school instruction while still receiving moral encouragement from parents. In contrast, only a small number of fathers reached college level, which suggests limited exposure to advanced learning environments and fewer academic role models, potentially affecting learners' motivation and aspirations for higher education due to the economic realities that often prioritize work over schooling. For mothers, most are high school graduates, showing basic educational attainment that allows them to provide some academic support, guidance, and motivation, although limited knowledge may restrict assistance in higher level subjects. Meanwhile, very few mothers reached college level, which may reduce opportunities for advanced learning support at home, but still highlights the importance of maternal encouragement and involvement in shaping learners' study habits, confidence, and literacy development.

**Table 4**  
**Distribution of the Respondents' Characteristics in terms of Parental Support**

Indicator	Mean	SD	Description
I am encouraged by my parents to speak English at home.	2.07	1.02	Sometimes
I received help from my parents in explaining grammar rules in my English homework.	2.69	0.93	Most of the Time
I have access to English books, dictionaries, and other learning materials provided by my parents.	2.67	0.99	Most of the Time
I am reminded by my parents to practice English outside school.	2.47	1.07	Sometimes
I see my parents attend school events related to the English subject.	2.39	0.98	Sometimes

I understand that my parents value learning English because it can help me succeed in my future career.	2.90	1.00	Most of the Time
I hear my parents speaking positively about learning English.	2.45	1.02	Sometimes
I am reminded by my parents to study English lessons regularly.	2.79	1.01	Most of the Time
I feel supported when my parents attend school events about my English progress.	2.80	0.89	Most of the Time
I receive positive support from my parents that helps me learn English effectively.	2.76	0.97	Most of the Time
<b>Overall</b>	<b>2.60</b>	<b>0.51</b>	<b>Most of the Time</b>

Table 4 shows the distribution of respondents' characteristics in terms of parental support, with an overall mean of 2.60 interpreted as High, indicating that parents generally provide consistent emotional and financial support that fosters a positive home environment for learning, motivation, and confidence despite limited English proficiency. This support is reflected in parents' belief in the importance of English for future success, which strengthens learners' motivation and effort in learning the language, as students tend to value English more when they see it as essential for academic and career opportunities. However, while parents are supportive in general, encouragement to speak English at home is less frequent, suggesting that many households prefer the mother tongue due to cultural preservation, limited English proficiency, or lack of confidence in using the language, which reduces learners' opportunities for daily practice and fluency development. Overall, parental support remains strong in terms of encouragement and values formation, but limited use of English at home highlights a gap in language exposure that may affect learners' communicative competence.

**Table 5**  
**Distribution of the Respondents' Characteristics in terms of Attitude towards English**

Indicator	Mean	SD	Description
I enjoy learning English.	3.01	0.96	Agree
I believe English is an important subject.	3.08	0.95	Agree
I feel motivated to improve my English skills.	2.61	0.86	Agree
I like watching English movies or listening to English music.	3.12	0.96	Agree
I believe English will help me get a good job in the future.	3.00	1.03	Agree
I feel proud when I speak in English.	2.90	1.00	Agree
I enjoy participating in English classroom activities.	2.77	0.90	Agree
I find English an interesting subject.	2.67	0.95	Agree
I believe I can become fluent in English with practice.	2.80	0.89	Agree
I believe English helps me communicate with people both locally and globally.	2.99	0.95	Agree

**Overall** **2.90**    **0.50**    **Agree**

Table 5 illustrates the distribution of respondents’ characteristics in terms of attitudes toward English, with an overall mean of 2.90 interpreted as Positive, indicating that Indigenous People learners generally show interest, appreciation, and favorable mindset toward learning English and recognize its importance for academic and future opportunities. This positive attitude contributes to greater motivation, participation, and effort in learning, especially when learners engage with English through enjoyable activities such as reading, group discussions, and using the language in real life situations, which helps build confidence and communication skills. In particular, learners show strong interest in watching English movies and listening to music, which provides meaningful exposure to authentic language use while making learning more engaging and natural. However, although learners agree that they are motivated to improve their English skills, the lowest mean suggests that motivation can still be affected by self doubt, lack of confidence, and limited practice opportunities, which may hinder active participation despite their positive outlook. Overall, the findings show that while Indigenous learners hold a positive attitude toward English and are motivated to learn, they still require continued support and encouragement to fully develop their language skills and confidence.

**Problem 2. What is the respondents’ level of challenges in understanding English as a second language based on language barriers, pronunciation struggles, vocabulary overload, grammar woes, cultural differences and fear of making mistakes?**

**Table 6**  
**Summary of the Respondents’ Level of Challenges in Understanding English as Second Language**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Language Barriers	2.69	0.42	Slightly Challenged
Pronunciation Struggles	2.72	0.47	Slightly Challenged
Vocabulary Overload	2.73	0.42	Slightly Challenged
Grammar Woes	2.70	0.46	Slightly Challenged
Cultural Differences	2.71	0.43	Slightly Challenged
Fear of Making Mistakes	2.79	0.50	Slightly Challenged
<b>Overall</b>	<b>2.73</b>	<b>0.39</b>	Slightly Challenged

Table 6 presents the summary of respondents’ level of challenges in understanding English as a second language with an overall mean of 2.73 interpreted as Slightly Challenged, indicating that Indigenous People learners can manage basic English communication but still experience noticeable difficulties in specific areas of language learning. These challenges are commonly linked to pronunciation, vocabulary retention, and grammatical structures, which are influenced by differences between their native language and English, often leading to hesitation, limited participation, and difficulty in expressing ideas clearly. Among the identified challenges, fear of making mistakes obtained the highest mean, showing that anxiety, lack of confidence, and fear of negative evaluation significantly affect learners’ willingness to speak and participate in class activities, which limits their opportunities to practice and improve. In

contrast, language barriers obtained the lowest mean, suggesting that while differences between native language and English still exist, learners have already developed basic familiarity through classroom exposure and media, making these barriers manageable rather than overwhelming. Overall, the findings show that although Indigenous learners face only slight challenges in understanding English, emotional factors such as anxiety remain a major obstacle to their full language development and confidence.

**Problem 3. Is there a significant relationship between the respondents’ challenges in understanding English as second language and each of their characteristics?**

**Table 7**

**Results of the Test on the Relationship Between the Respondents’ Level of Challenges in Understanding English as a Second Language and Each of their Characteristics**

Respondents' Characteristics	Challenges in Understanding English as Second Language							
	Statistical Test	Language Barriers	Pronunciation Struggles	Vocabulary Overload	Grammar Woes	Cultural Differences	Fear of Making Mistakes	Overall
Sex	Welch's t	1.18	-0.02	2.01	0.81	0.51	1.36	1.14
	p-value	0.24	0.98	0.042	0.42	0.61	0.18	0.26
		NS	NS	S	NS	NS	NS	NS
Tribal Affiliation	Kruskall-Wallis	4.01	5.08	4.54	9.78	7.94	8.1	7.27
	p-value	0.70	0.53	0.60	0.13	0.24	0.23	0.30
		NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Parent's Occupation	Kruskall-Wallis	2.15	8.12	6.18	6.84	6.07	7.15	6.25
	p-value	0.83	0.15	0.29	0.18	0.30	0.21	0.28
		NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Parent's Highest Educational Attainment	Kruskall-Wallis	2.11	8.32	2.8	5.86	5.56	2.78	3.93
	p-value	0.83	0.14	0.73	0.32	0.35	0.73	0.56
		NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS

Parental Support	Pearson's r	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
		0.44** *	-0.42***	-0.49***	0.46***	0.46***	0.38** *	0.51* **
	p-value	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
		<b>S</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>S</b>
Attitude towards English	Pearson's r	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
		0.46** *	-0.43***	-0.50***	0.41***	0.51***	0.57** *	0.53* *
	p-value	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
		<b>S</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>S</b>

Sig. at \*p-value<0.05, \*\*p-value<0.01,\*\*\*p-value<0.001

Legend: S-Significant NS-Not Significant

Table 7 shows the results of the test on the relationship between respondents' level of challenges in understanding English as a second language and their characteristics, revealing that there is no significant relationship between most variables and the learners' challenges, leading to the acceptance of the hypothesis. However, sex is significantly related to vocabulary overload, suggesting that male and female learners may experience differences in exposure, confidence, and learning opportunities that affect how they handle new vocabulary, while all other challenge areas show no significant association with sex. In addition, parental support and attitude toward English show strong negative correlations with all areas of challenges, indicating that learners who receive more encouragement and have positive attitudes toward English experience fewer difficulties in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension. Meanwhile, tribal affiliation, parents' occupation, and parents' educational attainment are not significantly related to language challenges, implying that learners experience similar levels of difficulty regardless of background due to limited English exposure at home and in the community. Overall, the findings suggest that English learning challenges among Indigenous learners are more influenced by emotional support and language environment rather than demographic and socioeconomic factors.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

### Conclusion

The findings of the study concludes that fear of making mistakes was the highest challenge among the Indigenous People learners in understanding English as a second language in the select schools of Valencia City Division. They are limited by their nervousness, anxiety, and lack of confidence. When communicating using English, they are doubtful in expressing their thoughts. They worry about being judged by others, being criticized and being embarrassed. Indeed, the fear of making mistakes is the highest challenge among the Grade 7 Indigenous People Learners in this study.

## 6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following are recommended:

1. Teachers should conduct monthly consultations with the parents. During the meeting, the teachers may present the upcoming English lessons and demonstrate simple ways parents can assist their children, even with limited English proficiency. In addition, the teacher may also employ positive reinforcement and confidence-building experiences that will offer praise, recognition, or small rewards for effort and participation among the learners.
2. Teachers should include pronunciation drills, vocabulary development exercises, and sentence construction activities into daily lessons to develop oral interaction and written skills that helps healthy learning environment to all the learners. This may help them practice English without fear of judgment.
3. Schools should conduct parent orientations and workshops on easy ways to use English at home, for example reading picture books aloud, practicing basic greetings or having short conversations. It will also improve the support of the parents and students' fear of misunderstanding English.

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