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Navigating Language Learning Challenges: A Phenomenological Study of Iranun Idal'm'n Students' Lived Experiences

0*, Maira S. Mawarao[2], Pia A. Villareal[3], Zuhaidah C. Usman[4]
Illana Bay Integrated Computer College Inc.
Corresponding Author: Johana U. Caka cakajohana24@gmail.com

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A B S T R A C T

This study explored the lived experiences of Iranun Idal'm'n students in learning the English language, focusing on the challenges they encountered, the coping mechanisms they employed, and their insights in overcoming language learning barriers. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with six (6) Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English students and analyzed it using thematic analysis. The findings revealed difficulties in vocabulary comprehension, grammar, pronunciation, and language anxiety. Participants addressed these challenges through self-directed learning, regular practice, digital resources, and support from peers and teachers. The results of this study revealed the need for inclusive, culturally responsive instruction and supportive learning environments to enhance language development among multilingual learners

INTRODUCTION

Language plays an important role in communication, learning, and social interaction. In Second Language Acquisition (SLA), learners develop skills in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and language use to communicate effectively. However, learning an additional language can be difficult, especially for students from multilingual and minority-language backgrounds. Factors such as the influence of the first language (L1), limited exposure to the target language, and social and emotional challenges may affect the language learning process.

These difficulties are often experienced by minority and indigenous learners who use their mother tongue at home while learning other languages in school. Pérez-Izaguirrea and Cenoz (2020) found that minority-language learners faced challenges in learning additional languages because of limited opportunities to use the language, language-related beliefs, and issues connected to their identity. This suggests that language learning is influenced not only by linguistic ability but also by learners' social and cultural experiences.

In the Philippines, similar challenges have been reported among language-minority learners. Abellana (2025) found that Filipino learners experienced pronunciation difficulties due to the influence of their first language and local dialects. Similarly, Leaño et al. (2019) reported that indigenous learners had difficulty developing English vocabulary because of limited exposure to the language and the influence of their mother tongue. In the Bangsamoro context, Kayog et al. (2024) found that learners had few opportunities to practice English both in school and at home. Likewise, Udat and Kunso (2021) reported that Bangsamoro learners faced difficulties in phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics, which affected their confidence and ability to use the language effectively.

Although previous studies have examined the language learning challenges of indigenous and Bangsamoro learners, limited research has focused on the experiences of Iranun Idal'm'n learners in learning English. As members of a distinct ethnolinguistic group in the Bangsamoro region, their experiences can provide a better understanding of how cultural, linguistic, and educational factors influence language learning in multilingual settings.

Using a phenomenological approach, this study explored the lived experiences of Iranun Idal'm'n students in learning the English language. Specifically, it sought to understand the challenges they encounter, the coping strategies they use, and the insights they can share in overcoming language learning barriers. By giving attention to the experiences of this group, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of language learning among minority learners and may help educators develop more inclusive and culturally responsive language teaching practices in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) and other multilingual communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several theories that explain how students acquire a new language and how their experiences, social interactions, and cultural background influence this process. This study is guided by Experiential Learning Theory, Social Interaction Theory, and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. These theories provide a clear framework for understanding the challenges faced by Iranun Idal'm'n students and the strategies they use to overcome them in learning the English language.

Experiential Learning Theory

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory explains that learning occurs through a continuous cycle of concrete experience, reflection, conceptualization, and active experimentation. This means that students learn better when they are actively involved in experiences and reflect on them to improve their understanding. In language learning, students develop their skills by using the language in real-life situations and adjusting their strategies based on their experiences. This theory is relevant to the study because it helps explain how Iranun Idal'm'n students interact with the English language in their daily lives. Through reflection and repeated practice, they are able to manage and overcome language difficulties (Kong, 2021).

Social Interaction Theory

This study is also grounded in Vygotsky's Social Interaction Theory, which emphasizes that learning takes place through interaction with others. According to Vygotsky, cognitive development is influenced by social communication and support from more knowledgeable individuals. In the context of second language learning, interaction plays an important role in helping learners construct meaning and improve their skills. Alkhudiry (2022) applied this theory in L2 learning and found that students develop language abilities through collaboration, scaffolding, and guided support within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This theory is important in the study because it explains how Iranun Idal'm'n students rely on teachers, peers, and their environment in learning English, especially when facing challenges.

Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory further explains that language learning is sha ped by social context, cultural practices, and interaction with others. Learning does not happen in isolation but through engagement with the community and the use of cultural tools such as language itself. As discussed by Manipol et al. (2022), learners acquire knowledge more effectively when they participate in meaningful social activities and receive guidance from others. In this study, the theory helps explain how the cultural background and community of Iranun Idal'm'n students influence their experiences in learning English, including both their difficulties and coping strategies.

Overall, these interconnected theories provide a strong foundation for examining the language acquisition experiences of Iranun Idal'm'n students.

They allow the researchers to understand not only the students' individual learning experiences but also the social and cultural factors that shape their development. This theoretical framework supports a deeper understanding of how students experience challenges and how they actively respond to them, which can help in developing more effective and culturally responsive language teaching practices.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of Iranun Idal'm'n students in acquiring the English language. The participants consisted of six (6) Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English students from Parang Foundation College Incorporated and Illana Bay Integrated Computer College Inc., selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance to the study.

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews using a validated interview guide. The responses were transcribed and analyzed using Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method, which involved identifying significant statements, coding, clustering themes, and developing interpretations of the participants' experiences. Ethical standards were observed by ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality of all participants.

RESEARCH RESULT

This section presents the findings of the study based on the data gathered from the participants. The analysis focused on identifying common patterns, experiences, and responses related to the participants' language learning. The data were carefully reviewed, coded, and organized into meaningful categories to highlight significant insights.

The process involved examining participants' responses, grouping similar ideas, and developing themes that represent their shared experiences. From this analysis, key themes emerged that reflect the challenges encountered by learners, the coping mechanisms they employ, and the motivational factors that influence their language acquisition.

The results are presented thematically, supported by selected participant statements to provide direct evidence of the findings. Tables are also used to summarize each theme, making the presentation more concise and accessible for readers.

1. The Challenges of Iranun Idal'm'n Students When Learning and Using English Language

The findings of the study revealed that learners encounter several challenges in language acquisition, which affect their ability to effectively understand and use the English language. Based on the responses gathered from the participants, four major themes emerged: limited vocabulary, difficulty in comprehension, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence. Participants shared that their limited vocabulary often prevents them from fully understanding lessons, especially when unfamiliar words are used during discussions. This difficulty makes it challenging for them to express their

thoughts clearly and participate actively in class. Furthermore, learners experience difficulty in comprehension, particularly when dealing with complex topics, which affects their overall learning process.

In addition to cognitive challenges, emotional factors were also evident in the findings. Many participants reported a fear of making mistakes when speaking in English, which leads to hesitation and reduced participation during class activities. Feelings of embarrassment and anxiety further contribute to their lack of confidence, making it difficult for them to practice and improve their language skills. These challenges show that language learning is not only influenced by intellectual abilities but also by emotional and psychological experiences. Moreover, factors such as the influence of teachers, peers, family, and the school environment also contribute to these difficulties, as they shape how learners perceive and engage with the language.

2. The Coping Mechanism of Iranun Idal'm'n Students in Adapting to Difficulties of Studying English Language

Despite the challenges encountered, the participants demonstrated various coping mechanisms to improve their language skills. The findings revealed that learners engage in different self-directed strategies to better understand the language. These include watching videos, reading learning materials, and using digital tools such as translation applications to help them understand unfamiliar words and concepts. These strategies allow learners to independently support their learning beyond the classroom.

In addition, participants emphasized the importance of practice and repetition in improving their fluency and confidence in using the English language. Regular exposure and continuous use of the language help them become more comfortable in communication. Seeking help from peers and teachers was also identified as a common coping strategy, as it allows learners to clarify misunderstandings and receive guidance. Some participants also practice note-taking to help them remember new vocabulary and reinforce their learning. These coping mechanisms reflect that learners are proactive in addressing their challenges and are willing to adapt strategies that support their language development.

3. The Recommendations of Iranun Idal'm'n Students in Overcoming Language Learning Barriers

Based on the findings of the study, several insights were identified regarding the language learning experiences of the participants. It is evident that language acquisition is influenced by both cognitive and emotional factors, as well as by the support system surrounding the learners, including teachers, peers, family, and the school environment. The presence of challenges such as limited vocabulary, difficulty in comprehension, and lack of confidence highlights the need for a more supportive and encouraging learning environment that promotes active participation and reduces fear of making mistakes.

Furthermore, the coping mechanisms used by the participants show that learners are capable of developing strategies to improve their language skills

when given proper guidance and resources. This suggests that teachers play a significant role in facilitating learning by providing clear instruction, encouraging practice, and creating a safe space for communication. Peer support is also important, as it helps learners feel more comfortable and confident in expressing themselves.

In terms of recommendations, it is suggested that educators continue to implement teaching strategies that enhance vocabulary development and comprehension skills. Activities that encourage participation, such as group discussions and interactive tasks, may help reduce anxiety and build confidence among learners. The integration of digital tools and learning resources can also support independent learning. Additionally, families and schools should provide encouragement and support to learners to strengthen their motivation and engagement in language learning. These efforts can contribute to improving learners' overall language acquisition and help them become more confident and effective communicators.

Overall, the findings of the study indicate that language acquisition is shaped by the interaction of challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights drawn from learners' experiences. While learners face difficulties related to vocabulary, comprehension, and confidence, they actively apply strategies to overcome these challenges. At the same time, the support of teachers, peers, family, and the school environment plays an important role in their development. These results highlight the importance of creating a supportive and effective learning environment to enhance language acquisition among learners.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the lived experiences of Iranun Idal'm'n students in learning the English language. The findings showed that the participants faced challenges related to vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and language anxiety. These findings suggest that learning English is influenced not only by language skills but also by learners' personal experiences, emotions, and learning environment.

One of the main challenges experienced by the participants was difficulty understanding unfamiliar words. Limited vocabulary affected their ability to understand texts, follow classroom discussions, and express their ideas clearly. This finding supports Sun et al. (2023), who emphasized that vocabulary knowledge is important for language comprehension and classroom participation. For Iranun Idal'm'n students, limited exposure to English may contribute to vocabulary difficulties, making it harder for them to understand and use the language confidently. This finding highlights the need to provide students with more opportunities to encounter and use English vocabulary in meaningful situations.

Another challenge identified in the study was difficulty constructing sentences because of English grammar rules. The participants shared that they often became confused when applying grammar rules while speaking or writing. This finding is consistent with Widianingsih and Gulö (2016), who explained that grammar is one of the common difficulties faced by second-language learners.

Differences between English and the learners' mother tongue may also contribute to these challenges. As a result, grammar difficulties can affect learners' confidence and make it harder for them to communicate their ideas accurately.

Pronunciation was also a common challenge among the participants. Many reported that they worried about pronouncing words incorrectly and being misunderstood by others. This finding supports Liu (2024), who found that pronunciation difficulties can reduce learners' confidence and willingness to speak. Since speaking is an important part of language learning, difficulties in pronunciation may limit students' participation in classroom discussions and other speaking activities. This suggests the need for more opportunities to practice speaking and pronunciation in supportive learning environments.

Language anxiety also emerged as a major challenge. The participants described feeling nervous, shy, and afraid of making mistakes when speaking English. These feelings often prevented them from participating actively in class. This finding agrees with Manan et al. (2023), who noted that language anxiety can negatively affect learners' willingness to communicate and their overall language performance. For Iranun Idal'm'n students, fear of making mistakes and being judged by others may contribute to this anxiety. Therefore, creating a classroom environment where students feel safe and supported is important in helping them gain confidence in using English.

Despite these challenges, the participants showed determination in finding ways to improve their English skills. One of the strategies they used was self-directed learning. They spent time reading, reviewing lessons, and practicing English on their own. This finding supports Etürk (2016), who explained that independent learning helps students take an active role in improving their language skills. Regular practice outside the classroom allows learners to strengthen their vocabulary, grammar, and communication skills over time.

The findings also showed that digital and multimedia resources played an important role in language learning. Participants frequently watched English movies, videos, and used language learning applications to improve their listening, speaking, and comprehension skills. This supports Alkhudiry (2022), who highlighted the benefits of technology in providing accessible learning opportunities. Through digital resources, students were able to learn at their own pace and gain exposure to authentic language use.

Another important finding was the value of social support. Participants relied on classmates, friends, and teachers when they encountered difficulties in learning English. This finding supports Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which explains that learning develops through interaction with others. The support they received helped them better understand lessons, overcome difficulties, and become more confident in using the language. This suggests that positive relationships with teachers and peers play an important role in language learning.

The findings also revealed that career goals served as a source of motivation for many participants. As future educators, they recognized the importance of developing strong English language skills. This finding is consistent with Ushioda (2016), who stated that learners are more likely to stay committed to

language learning when it is connected to their personal goals and future aspirations. Their desire to become effective teachers encouraged them to continue improving despite the challenges they experienced.

The participants also shared several recommendations for overcoming language learning barriers. These included regular language practice, supportive learning environments, institutional support, the use of technology, and constructive feedback from teachers. These recommendations suggest that students learn more effectively when they are given opportunities to practice English, receive encouragement, and access resources that support their learning. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of creating inclusive and supportive language learning environments that address the needs and experiences of Iranun Idal'm'n learners.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that Iranun Idal'm'n students face multiple challenges in learning the English language, particularly in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and confidence. However, with the use of effective coping strategies and support from their environment, they are able to improve their language skills over time.

It is recommended that teachers create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment that encourages active participation and reduces language anxiety. Schools may also implement language enrichment programs, such as speaking activities, workshops, or English-focused events, to provide students with more opportunities to practice. In addition, the use of digital tools and resources should be integrated into teaching to enhance learning. Providing constructive feedback and continuous guidance can also help students improve their performance and confidence.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This study is limited by its small sample size of six participants and its focus on a specific group of learners, which may not represent all language learners. Future researchers may consider involving a larger number of participants and including learners from different backgrounds to gain broader insights. They may also explore other factors that affect language learning, such as motivation, learning styles, or the use of technology, and consider using mixed methods to strengthen the findings.

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