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Lived Experiences of Teachers in Learning Ginselugen Subanen Orthography Instruction

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ABSTRACT

This study explored teachers' lived experiences, challenges, and strategies in learning Ginselugen Subanen orthography instruction in Tudela District, Division of Misamis Occidental, during School Year 2025–2026. Teachers directly involved in Indigenous language instruction were purposively selected and interviewed using a semi-structured guide. Thematic analysis identified five themes concerning lived experiences: cultural identity and meaning-making, emotional learning journeys, experiential and collaborative learning, developing orthographic competence, and understanding the writing system. Five challenge themes involved linguistic interference, insufficient resources, learner-related difficulties, gaps in professional support, and effects on instructional confidence. Five strategy themes highlighted community and expert collaboration, professional development, independent practice, instructional-material innovation, and classroom-based reinforcement. Findings indicate that teachers' learning is simultaneously linguistic, cultural, emotional, and instructional. Sustained partnerships with Indigenous language bearers, accessible reference materials, and contextualized professional learning are recommended to strengthen orthographic accuracy and culturally responsive instruction.

Keywords: *Ginselugen Subanen; Indigenous Peoples Education; orthography; teacher learning; phenomenology; cultural identity.*

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Introduction

Indigenous language instruction serves both educational and cultural purposes. A language's orthography provides conventions for representing spoken sounds in writing and enables learners to develop reading and writing skills while engaging with community knowledge. For teachers of Ginselugen Subanen, learning these conventions entails more than memorizing spelling rules: it also requires cultural understanding, pedagogical adaptation, and collaboration with those who know the language.

Teachers' professional competence is especially important where Indigenous language instruction is implemented amid limited instructional materials and varying levels of linguistic preparation. The thesis situates this concern in the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) context of Tudela District, Division of Misamis Occidental. Teachers are expected to apply orthographic rules accurately while supporting learners who may differ in their familiarity with spoken and written Subanen. In this setting, teacher learning becomes an ongoing process of interpreting unfamiliar sound–symbol relationships, checking usage, and translating knowledge into lessons.

The study draws on three complementary perspectives. Social Constructivist Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) explains learning through dialogue and shared meaning-making; Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) emphasizes competence developed through participation in authentic contexts; and Adult Learning Theory (Knowles, 1984) recognizes teachers as self-directed learners whose prior experiences and immediate instructional needs shape their learning. These perspectives help explain why collaborative exchanges with peers, Indigenous elders, and language experts may be integral to orthography learning.

The thesis identifies a localized research gap: limited documentation of how teachers themselves experience learning and implementing Ginselugen Subanen orthography. Rather than assessing learners' achievement or comparing writing systems, the investigation foregrounded teachers' perceptions, difficulties, and adaptive responses. Its three research questions examined (1) teachers' lived experiences in learning orthography instruction, (2) challenges in learning and classroom implementation, and (3) strategies used to strengthen competence.

Understanding these experiences is significant for school leaders, IPEd coordinators, curriculum developers, and Indigenous communities. The findings may inform the development of reference materials, mentoring arrangements, collaborative learning sessions, and classroom practices that respect linguistic and cultural knowledge. They also provide a contextual account of how professional identity and instructional confidence develop when teachers must simultaneously learn and teach an Indigenous writing system.

Methods

The study used a qualitative phenomenological design in Tudela District, Division of Misamis Occidental, during School Year 2025–2026. Teachers with direct experience learning and applying Ginselugen Subanen orthography in classroom instruction were selected purposively according to their involvement in Indigenous language teaching, prior learning experiences, and willingness to participate. Data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews, with informed consent and confidentiality measures, and analyzed thematically to identify patterns across teachers' accounts. The thesis's Methods chapter specifies eight participants, whereas its abstract states fifteen; this discrepancy requires author confirmation before journal submission. The study sought contextual understanding of lived experience rather than statistical generalization.

Results and Discussions

1. Lived Experiences in Learning Ginselugen Subanen Orthography

Emergent Themes	Sub-Themes
Cultural Identity and Meaning-Making	Learning as reclaiming identity and preserving culture; Sense of pride, fulfillment, and responsibility in language preservation
Emotional Journey in Learning	Initial feelings of intimidation, confusion, and uncertainty; Experiences of excitement, motivation, and eventual confidence
Experiential and Collaborative Learning	Participation in trainings, workshops, and IPEd

	programs; Engagement with tribal elders, linguists, and peers
Development of Orthographic Competence	Gradual mastery of spelling rules and sound-symbol relationships; Improved confidence in reading, writing, and teaching
Understanding of Orthographic System and Structure	Recognition of differences from Filipino and English systems; Awareness of phonological features, diacritics, and unique sounds

The findings revealed that teachers' lived experiences in learning Ginselugen Subanen orthography involved cultural identity formation, emotional adjustment, experiential and collaborative learning, and the gradual development of orthographic competence. Participants perceived learning the orthographic system not merely as acquiring technical knowledge of spelling conventions but also as an important responsibility in preserving indigenous language, cultural identity, and community heritage. Their experiences reflected feelings of pride, fulfillment, and commitment to transmitting linguistic knowledge to future generations. However, teachers initially encountered intimidation, confusion, and uncertainty, particularly when distinguishing the unique sounds, phonological features, diacritics, and spelling conventions of Ginselugen Subanen from those of Filipino and English. Through continuous practice, participation in workshops, and engagement with tribal elders, linguists, and fellow teachers, participants gradually developed confidence in reading, writing, and applying the orthographic system. These findings are supported by McCarty (2003), who emphasized the importance of indigenous language education in sustaining cultural identity and supporting language revitalization. Similarly, Vygotsky (1978) highlighted that knowledge and competencies develop through social interaction, guided participation, and collaborative learning. These perspectives suggest that learning indigenous orthography involves both linguistic development and meaningful engagement with the cultural community.

Furthermore, participants emphasized that repeated exposure to orthographic rules, practical writing exercises, collaborative discussions, and guidance from knowledgeable community members strengthened their understanding of the language's writing system. Their experiences demonstrated that orthographic competence developed progressively through the recognition of sound–symbol relationships, accurate spelling, and the application of learned conventions in authentic instructional situations. Ehri (2005) explained that understanding connections between phonemes and written symbols is fundamental to developing word-reading and spelling abilities, providing a relevant perspective on the linguistic demands of orthographic learning. Likewise, Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasized that learning occurs through meaningful participation in social and cultural practices, while Battiste (2002) underscored the importance of recognizing indigenous knowledge systems and cultural contexts in educational processes. Overall, the findings suggest that teachers' experiences in learning Ginselugen Subanen orthography reflect an interconnected process of cultural affirmation, emotional development, collaborative engagement, and linguistic competence. The findings further highlight the importance of culturally responsive training, sustained community participation, and practical learning opportunities in strengthening teachers' preparedness to teach and contribute to the preservation of indigenous languages.

2. Challenges in Learning and Implementing Orthography Instruction

Emergent Themes	Sub-Themes
Linguistic Interference and Complexity	Difficulty unlearning Filipino and English phonetic patterns; Confusion with unique sounds, diacritics, and sound-symbol relationships
Scarcity of Instructional Resources	Lack of standardized textbooks and reference materials; Limited availability of age-appropriate and printed learning materials
Learner-Related Challenges	Learners' difficulty connecting spoken and written forms; Limited exposure to the language at home
Gaps in Training and Professional Support	Limited training opportunities and inconsistent

	support systems; Need for continuous mentoring from elders and experts
Impact on Teacher Confidence and Instruction	Hesitation in teaching complex words and rules; Difficulty explaining rules clearly and ensuring accuracy

The findings revealed that teachers encountered various challenges in learning and implementing Ginselugen Subanen orthography instruction, particularly linguistic interference, orthographic complexity, limited instructional resources, and learner-related difficulties. Participants reported challenges in distinguishing the unique phonological features, diacritics, pronunciation patterns, and sound–symbol relationships of Ginselugen Subanen from those of Filipino and English. Their familiarity with previously learned writing systems sometimes created confusion when applying indigenous orthographic conventions. Furthermore, the scarcity of standardized textbooks, reference materials, and age-appropriate instructional resources complicated lesson preparation and classroom implementation. Teachers also observed that learners experienced difficulties connecting spoken language with written symbols, particularly when exposure to Ginselugen Subanen at home was limited. These findings are supported by Cummins (1979), who emphasized the relationship between linguistic experiences and second-language learning, and Ehri (2005), who highlighted the importance of developing accurate phoneme–grapheme connections in acquiring reading and spelling competencies. Similarly, McCarty (2003) underscored the challenges associated with indigenous language education and revitalization, particularly the need for appropriate educational resources and culturally grounded instructional practices. These perspectives suggest that effective indigenous orthography instruction requires linguistic understanding, adequate learning materials, and meaningful opportunities for language exposure and practice.

Moreover, participants identified insufficient professional training, inconsistent mentoring opportunities, and limited institutional support as significant barriers to developing confidence and competence in orthography instruction. Teachers expressed hesitation when explaining unfamiliar spelling conventions, modeling pronunciation, and teaching complex orthographic rules because of concerns about instructional accuracy. The absence of sustained guidance from language specialists, tribal elders, and experienced educators further increased their dependence on personal preparation and available resources. These findings are consistent with Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), who emphasized that effective professional development requires sustained learning opportunities, expert support, collaboration, and practical application to strengthen teachers' instructional competencies. Likewise, Vygotsky (1978) highlighted the importance of guided assistance and social interaction in developing knowledge and skills, while Battiste (2002) emphasized the significance of integrating indigenous knowledge and community participation into educational processes. Overall, the findings suggest that challenges in learning and implementing Ginselugen Subanen orthography are interconnected, as linguistic complexity, inadequate instructional materials, limited professional preparation, and insufficient institutional support collectively influence teachers' instructional confidence and classroom practices. Addressing these challenges requires continuous capacity-building programs, culturally appropriate and validated learning resources, sustained collaboration with indigenous language experts and community elders, and stronger institutional support for indigenous language education.

3. Strategies for Strengthening Orthographic Competence

Emergent Themes	Sub-Themes
Community and Expert Collaboration	Collaboration with tribal elders and native speakers for accuracy; Seeking guidance from linguists, mentors, and experienced teachers
Continuous Professional Development	Attendance in trainings, workshops, and IPEd programs; Participation in LAC sessions and seminars
Independent Learning and Practice	Regular practice in writing, reading, and reviewing orthographic rules; Studying guides, references, and developing personal mastery
Instructional Material Development and Innovation	Creation of localized visual aids and instructional materials; Adapting and contextualizing teaching resources

Classroom-Based Reinforcement Strategies	Integration of orthography in daily classroom activities; Use of interactive methods (chants, songs, guided writing, drills)

The findings revealed that teachers employed various strategies to strengthen their competence in learning and teaching Ginselugen Subanen orthography, particularly through community and expert collaboration, continuous professional development, independent learning, and instructional material development. Participants emphasized the importance of consulting tribal elders, native speakers, linguists, mentors, and experienced teachers to ensure the accuracy of pronunciation, spelling conventions, and orthographic applications. Collaborative discussions, peer coaching, and shared problem-solving provided opportunities to clarify linguistic uncertainties and strengthen teachers' confidence in using the indigenous writing system. Furthermore, participation in Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) programs, workshops, Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, and professional seminars enabled teachers to acquire additional knowledge and improve their instructional practices. These findings are supported by Vygotsky (1978), who emphasized the importance of social interaction and guided learning in developing knowledge and competencies, and Lave and Wenger (1991), who explained that learning occurs through meaningful participation in communities of practice. Similarly, McCarty (2003) highlighted the importance of community involvement and culturally grounded educational practices in supporting indigenous language revitalization. Moreover, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) emphasized that sustained professional development, collaborative learning, and expert guidance contribute to strengthening teachers' instructional knowledge and practices. These perspectives suggest that developing orthographic competence requires continuous interaction between teachers, language specialists, and indigenous knowledge holders.

Furthermore, participants strengthened their orthographic competence through independent study, repeated reading and writing exercises, the development of localized instructional materials, and the integration of orthographic learning into daily classroom activities. Teachers utilized contextualized visual aids, word walls, charts, songs, chants, guided writing, drills, and explicit demonstrations to reinforce learners' understanding of sound–symbol relationships and spelling conventions. These practices reflected teachers' resourcefulness in addressing instructional limitations while making indigenous language learning more accessible and culturally meaningful. Ehri (2005) emphasized that repeated engagement with phoneme–grapheme relationships supports the development of word recognition and spelling knowledge, while Rosenshine (2012) highlighted the importance of explicit instruction, guided practice, systematic review, and immediate feedback in strengthening learning. Likewise, Battiste (2002) underscored the importance of incorporating indigenous knowledge and cultural experiences into educational practices. Overall, the findings suggest that strengthening Ginselugen Subanen orthographic competence involves an interconnected process of community collaboration, sustained professional learning, independent practice, culturally responsive instructional innovation, and classroom-based reinforcement. Across the three research questions, participants' experiences demonstrated that initial linguistic uncertainty and instructional difficulties could be addressed through continuous learning and collaborative support. However, the findings also indicate that sustainable orthography instruction requires adequate learning resources, consistent institutional assistance, and meaningful partnerships with indigenous communities to support linguistic accuracy, teacher confidence, and the preservation of Ginselugen Subanen language and cultural heritage.

Conclusions

Learning Ginselugen Subanen orthography was experienced as a culturally meaningful and professionally demanding process. Teachers described developing linguistic knowledge, confidence, and appreciation of Indigenous identity through experiential learning and collaboration. At the same time, linguistic complexity, resource limitations, learner difficulties, and insufficient training hindered consistent classroom application. Teachers addressed these difficulties through community partnerships, continuous professional development, self-directed practice, localized instructional innovation, and repeated classroom reinforcement. The findings highlight the importance of culturally responsive and sustained support for Indigenous language instruction.

Recommendations

Schools and education officials may establish sustained, context-specific orthography training and mentoring in collaboration with Subanen elders, native speakers, and language specialists. Validated orthography guides,

localized reading materials, and accessible teaching resources should be prioritized. Learning Action Cells and professional learning communities may provide regular opportunities for peer coaching, collaborative material development, and reflection on classroom practice. Teachers may continue using guided writing, modeling, feedback, and culturally grounded activities to reinforce learning. Future research may examine similar experiences in other districts and explore classroom implementation and learner outcomes through additional methods.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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