



## Learning English as Second Language (ESL): The Experiences of Tagakaulo Students in Focus

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### *Authors' contributions*

Author ATS formulated the design of the study. She also designed the research questions, facilitated the conduct of the focus group and transcribed the information. Author MPA reviewed and served as the editor of the entire paper. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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### ABSTRACT

**Aims:** To investigate the struggles, coping mechanisms, and significant experiences of Grade 10 Tagakaulo students, an Indigenous Peoples (IP) group, in learning English.

**Study Design:** Qualitative method specifically phenomenological approach.

**Place and Duration of Study:** The study was conducted in Dalamuan Integrated School in Lutay, Malungon, Sarangani Province. It was conducted during the school year 2019-2020.

**Methodology:** The Tagakaulo students were purposively chosen. Twelve Grade 10 Tagakaulo students participated in the focus group discussions. Validated researcher-made questionnaire was used to obtain information from the participants. Information obtained were data analyzed.

**Results:** Seven themes emerged from the data analysis: Consideration in learning English; considerations of good experiences; complication in learning English; dealing with difficulties; combination of teaching strategies; variations of preferred strategies; and meaningful experiences. In particular, all the participants believed that learning English was difficult but interesting; majority found encountering difficult words to be a good experience; having no academic resource such as library added to their difficulties; they developed different learning styles and coping mechanisms; they preferred performance, group activities, and discovery learning; and they realized that what

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might be a meaningful experience to one might not be essential to others. Each theme was discussed thoroughly.

**Conclusion:** Based on the findings of this study, several concepts are formulated. First, Tagakaulo students' struggles in learning English are not different from other non-tribal learners. It implies that in learning second language, indigenous and non-indigenous students experience similar difficulties. This may due to the similarity of their native languages and the target language they want to learn. Second, culture and upbringing of learners may affect students' motivation in learning English. Filipino students have the drive to learn English because it will give them more opportunities than not learning it. Third, English teachers need to enhance and strengthen their corrective feedback knowledge and skills in order for them to practice the concept effectively. Fourth, students remember those teaching strategies which challenge them more. Fifth, the students' prefer teaching strategies which are outcomes and performance-based. Sixth, students find meaningful experiences in learning English in spite of their challenges conditions.

**Keywords:** *Struggles; Tagakaulo learners; learning English; linguistic inquiry.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Learning a second language has many challenges. It is never easy especially for those students who always use their native language in their daily communication at home, at school, and at play. This is particularly the situation experienced by the Indigenous People (IP) students. These IP students only read, write, and speak at school. Hence, understanding their experiences in learning English would add to the new knowledge of second language acquisition.

Globalization transforms the educational milieu and makes English language stands at the very center of the global language system. While this give rise to the existence of linguistic pluralism environment, millions of school-aged children do not have access to education in their mother-tongues just like the case of the Tagakaulo learners, a tribal group, who speak their varied local languages at home and in their communities, but these languages are not used for instruction in the education system. As a result, [1] opined that students at a disadvantage paving to a declined academic achievement and making them feel unwelcome in school, because of the exclusion of minority languages.

The role of the teacher is obviously significant in learning a second language, in this case English. The task of teaching is not only speaking inside classrooms, guiding students and providing a friendly atmosphere for the learners, but also to determine the learners' difficulties in learning the target language. In Dalamuan Integrated School, the locale of the study, it was observed that many IP Tagaka-ulo students struggled in learning English. It was in this ground that the

researcher's dire interest to conduct a study to explore the experiences of the IP-Tagakaulo learners, their coping mechanisms, and their significant experiences in learning English.

### 1.1 Research Questions

The following questions were particularly sought:

1. How do the Tagakaulo students find learning English?
2. What are the good experiences of Tagakaulo students in learning English?
3. What are the difficulties of the Tagakaulo students in learning English?
4. What strategies are used by the English teacher in teaching English?
5. What significant experiences the Tagakaulo students can share to others who are also in learning English?

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1 Research Instrument

The instrument used in the collection of information from the participants was the validated researchers-made interview guide. The questions were based on the research questions. To ensure the validity and reliability of the questions, the researchers subjected the same for experts' validation using [2] Interview Questions Validation Sheet (see Appendix A). All validators rated the interview guide with 16-18 Yeses, which indicated that questions were very satisfactory. [3] mentioned that validation of the questionnaire is very significant to determine the reliability and concurrent validity of the questions. Similarly, [4] opined that validation of questionnaire significantly affected the efficiency

of the findings. On the part of the researchers, validators' constructive comments on the interview guides allowed them to re-formulate the questions to gain sturdy findings.

## 2.2 Research Design

This research employed the qualitative research design. This design was appropriate to this study because it looked into each IP student's encounter in learning English not their level of satisfaction. Thus, presentations of results were more on narration rather than statistical presentation. On the other hand, phenomenology was used because this study developed a composite description of the phenomenon [5], in this case, the learning of English by the Tagakaulo students. The description consisted of what they experienced and how they experienced it.

## 2.3 Data Collection

Before the gathering of information, a letter of approval to conduct the study was sent to the Schools Division Superintendent (SDS). Upon the receipt of the approval, another similar letter of permission was sent to the Public Schools District Supervisor (PSDS) and School Head. Immediately after, the researchers secured informed consents to the identified Tagakaulo students.

In the second phase, after the consent forms were retrieved, the researchers scheduled the focus groups in-depth interviews. Using the validated researcher-made interview guide questions, the researchers determined the participants' experiences in learning English. The researchers used smartphone to record each focus group's answers and proceedings.

In the third phase, after all focus groups were interviewed, the obtained information were transcribed verbatimly. After, the researchers gave the verbatim to the participants for self-verification. They were asked to expunge information which were sensitive. After which, the participants certified the gathered information by signing the verbatim transcriptions.

## 2.4 Research Participants

Twelve Grade 10 purposely selected Tagakaulo students were the participants of this study.

These students were chosen because they were observed as enthusiastic in learning English language; they were not fluent English speakers; they were willing to participate in the study; and they agreed to the consent. They were enrolled at Dalamuan Integrated School in Lutay, Malungon, Sarangani Province during the school year 2019-2020. Other students who were not Tagakaulo tribe were not considered as participants in this study.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In presenting the information obtained from the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) conducted, the researcher presented the Table 1 patterned after [6]. The table was divided into three parts: the themes, frequency of response, and core ideas. The emerging themes were formulated after the memoing was performed. The frequency of response was considered General if the occurrence of the responses was 50% or more; Typical if 21% to 49%; and Variant if the responses was 20% and below. Lastly, the core ideas were the occurring concepts which support the emerging themes.

### 3.1 Consideration in Learning English

Generally, all the participants believed that learning a language like English was difficult but interesting. They were particularly challenged in understand new and unfamiliar words; however, they found it interesting because they were able to explore new information about syntax and rules on spelling, and knowing other cultures through reading poems and short stories. Moreover, they found no difference between English with that of the other languages because they used English as means of communication in their day to day conversation with their colleagues and at home.

This result on difficulty with new English words coincides with [7] who found that majority of their Arab respondents believed that learning English vocabulary was a difficult task. However, [8] believed that motivation of students is an essential factor for them to learn English vocabulary continuously and effectively. Likewise, [9] mentioned that creativity of teachers could make the learning of English vocabulary more interesting and enjoyable. [10] suggested that English vocabulary can be learned through stories.

**Table 1. Themes and core ideas on**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Frequency of response</b>	<b>Core ideas</b>
Consideration in learning English	General	- challenging but interesting - exploring information - means of communication in daily interaction
Consideration of good experiences	General Variant	- encountering difficult words - encouraging comments - motivating to be a good reader - developing personality/confidence - helping build knowledge
Complication in learning English	General	- finding meaning of unfamiliar words - memorizing poems
Dealing with difficulties	Variant	- making engaged - participating & looking for answers - finding another way by asking teachers
Combination of teaching strategies	General	- group study - brainstorming - discovery learning - lecture - memorization - lecture
Variations of preferred strategies	Variant	- performance based - group activities - discovery learning
Meaningful experiences	Variant	- teaching appropriate concepts - recognizing students' outcomes - expanding students' skills & abilities - sharing what was learned - making self as example for peers - making confident and motivated

### 3.2 Consideration of Good Experiences

It was an irony that majority of the participants found encountering difficult words to be a good experience. They explained that having encountered unfamiliar English vocabulary words proved that there still many words in English that they need to learn; that it tested their mental capabilities; and that it challenged their determination to learn.

This result was contrary to many available findings in learning vocabulary. [11] pointed out those students with the difficulty learning difficult words results to their lack of interest in English; thus, [12] added, learning English became tiring for the students. Usually, [13] opined students who lacked vocabulary had hard time in writing, reading, telling stories, and listening. This result implies that culture and upbringing of learners may affect their learning of English. It can be

noted that in the Philippines English, though a second language, has become a dominant medium in all types of media, books, and magazines.

Variantly, others found that teacher's positive and constructive comments on their performances after a speech boosted their self-esteem and confidence. Also, their teacher's provoking comments on their poor vocabulary motivated them to strive harder to become better readers. Likewise, untying the meaning of those difficult words helped them develop and enrich their knowledge of English. This result favored [14,15] who found in their studies that teacher's encouraging comments promoted students' willingness and motivation, and developed self-confidence. In this context, it is necessary for the English teachers to enhance and strengthen their corrective feedback knowledge and skills in order for them to practice the concept effectively.

### 3.3 Complication in learning English

Although majority of the participants considered encountering unfamiliar words to be good experience, they also found it to be a challenge. Their responses corroborated with the first theme that in learning English, finding meaning of difficult words was challenging. What made it more difficult was their teacher called them individually to give meaning of the unfamiliar words. Moreover, the school lacked resources and didn't have library.

The giving of meaning of unfamiliar words for the students to find meaning is a commonly practiced strategy in learning vocabulary by many English teachers. This kind of strategy according to [16] is a ripple effect. It means that teachers imitate only the strategy of their English teachers when they were still students. [17] suggested that instead of looking for meanings of words in isolation, meanings may be best defined in the context of the text. On the other hand, [18] observed that excessive looking up for word meaning prolong reading time and less likely to recognize a word. This result further supported the previous study of [19] who found that limited proficiency, vocabulary, and poor comprehension were among the topped struggles of indigenous students who study second language.

With regards to the availability of academic resource such as library, it a sad reality that many public schools in the Philippines do not have library. In a research conducted by [20] on the evaluation of school reading program among local schools, they observed the lack of school facilities and academic resources such library; thus, school heads resort to ask support from the parents-teachers association and local government officials for donations.

Another difficulty the participants found in learning English was when their teachers required them to memorize poems and essays to be recited in front of the class. For them, this pushed them to their limits. [12] pointed out that memorization is very difficult for students. However, for [21] in his essay in "*In defense of memorization*" pointed out that memorization had unique cognitive relevance for those learners who had scarce academic resources and had poor level of literacy. Although memorization caused difficulties, tensions, nervousness, and worry to the students, [22] found that those didn't affect students' oral performance in class.

### 3.4 Dealing with Difficulties

The participants didn't have general views on how they addressed the difficulty they had in learning English. This is an indication that they have different learning styles and coping mechanisms. Those students who were made to memorize poems and essays mentioned that they had no choice but to deal with their weakness and be engaged on the task and be good at it. For those participants who were called to find the meaning of the new English words had no options but to participate; moreover, others were motivated to ask their teachers to enlighten them of those unfamiliar words. This implies that students have positive attitudes and willingness to learn; they have the drive and motivation to look for new knowledge and experience. These findings corroborated with other researches on factors which motivated learner in learning English. [23,24,25] mentioned that teachers' influence, students' personal attitude, and parental influence great affected the learning of second language. In the study conducted by [19] among indigenous students, they found that drove these learners to learn English was their belief that learning English would give light to their future careers. Further, [26] mentioned that knowledge of English would open job and employment opportunities and [27] an instrument to meet different people.

### 3.5 Combination of Different Teaching Strategies

Generally, the participants identified seven various teaching strategies used by their teacher. This indicates that the teacher well-rounded because she was able to combine student-centered such as group study, brainstorming, discovery learning and performance tasks and teacher-centered such as memorization and lecture. However, it can be noted from the previous themes that the discovery learning and memorization were mentioned by the participants. This implies that the participants remember those strategies which challenge them more.

According to [28] teaching strategies were used to address the different learning skills of the students. Moreover, [29] opined that utilization of various teaching strategies revealed teacher's intentions. On the other hand, [30] averred that different teaching strategies are extremely important in language teaching.

### 3.6 Variations of Preferred Strategies

This theme was in connection with the combination of different teaching strategies. Among those teaching strategies, the participants variably preferred performance based, group activities and discovery learning. It was noticeable that these teaching strategies were student-centered and involved cooperative and constructivist approaches. This implies that the participants are outcomes-based learners; want to be with others; and are inquisitive. No wonder in the theme meaningful experiences, the participants were able to see worthy insights in spite of the challenging situations.

Were the memorization of poems and essays to be presented in class outcomes based? Was the task to search for meaning of unfamiliar words student-centered? The answer is yes and no. Yes because the outcomes were clear, a performance and a written output. No because the criteria for evaluation were not discussed [31] and the process on how the learners accomplish task was not given importance [32]. Now, that the students had chosen what they preferred were; hence, teachers need to address their wants.

### 3.7 Meaningful Experiences

What is meaningful to one may not be to the others. This the dictum found in this theme. The participants elaborated different significant experiences they encountered which were worth sharing to other learners of English. Few found that their teacher's ability to teach them appropriate concepts was essential. This made them confident, motivated, and competent. They were able to facilitate in correcting their colleagues' mistakes. This developed peer interaction and sharing.

Others considered their teacher's ability to recognize their efforts on the task given as relevant. Appreciation of their performances made them boost their self-image. Still other participants realized that the struggles they had in learning English made them expand their skills and abilities. They became innovative in looking for answers of their questions; thus, they set examples for their classmates to follow.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, several concepts are formulated. First, Tagakaulo students' struggles in learning English are not

different from other non-tribal learners. It implies that in learning second language, indigenous and non-indigenous students experience similar difficulties. This may due to the similarity of their native languages and the target language they want to learn. Second, culture and upbringing of learners may affect students' motivation in learning English. Filipino students have the drive to learn English because it will give them more opportunities than not learning it. Third, English teachers need to enhance and strengthen their corrective feedback knowledge and skills in order for them to practice the concept effectively. Fourth, students remember those teaching strategies which challenge them more. Fifth, the students' prefer teaching strategies which are outcomes and performance-based. Sixth, student finds meaningful experiences in learning English in spite of their challenging situations.

## CONSENT AND ETHICAL APPROVAL

The researchers observed protocols in handle the privacy and confidentiality of the participants involved in the study. As mentioned in the gathering of information, consents were sought. Stipulated in the consent were the aim, length of the interviews, withdrawal clause and confidentiality clauses. Also, participants were assured that the information gathered through the focus groups were kept by the researchers and would be destroyed after two years. All information gathered were for research purposes only.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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## APPENDIX-A

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS VALIDATION SHEET

Name of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Degree Enrolled: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Research Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Evaluated: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Degree of Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Evaluation: \_\_\_\_\_

Rating: Number of YES marks

☐

16-18 Very Satisfactory  
 15-13 Satisfactory

☐

12-10 Fair  
 10 below Needs Re-validation

To the evaluator: Check the necessary documents and tick the columns which fit your evaluation of the item.

Items	Yes	No
<b>A. Ethical Consideration</b>		
1. The purpose of the study is stated well.		
2. A 'confidentiality clause is mentioned or stated.		
3. A 'choice clause is included.		
4. The procedures in the conduct of the study are stated.		
5. The participant(s) is informed of the duration of the study.		
6. Informed consent is included.		
<b>B. Construction of Questions</b>		
7. Introduction which allows the interviewer to introduce himself/herself is included.		
8. Questions are written in 5w and 1 h manner.		
9. Questions are short and can easily be understood by the participants.		
10. Questions are appropriate to the topic.		
11. Questions allow storytelling or narration of experiences.		
<b>C. Accuracy / Thoroughness of Questions</b>		
12. Questions are open-ended.		
13. Questions are positively stated.		
14. Follow-up questions are included.		
15. Questions are deductively arranged. They give highest priority to information questions than opinion questions.		
16. Questions are stated in clear/precise and simple words.		
17. Entire questions can be covered within an hour.		
18. Main questions are not more 10 items for every research question.		



**Remarks:**

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This validation sheet was constructed by Ariel E. San Jose, PhD  
San Jose, A. E. (2012). Linguistic experiences of adult dyslexic learners. *UIC Research Journal*, 18(1), 1-1.

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