

From Mountains to Metropolis: Perception on Stress, Adaptation and Growth of Indigenous Students in Urban-Based Schools

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous learners often encounter significant stress as they transition into unfamiliar urban-based school environments, where differences in culture, language, and academic expectations create multiple challenges. This study aimed to explore the perceived stress, cultural adaptations, and personal growth of Indigenous Peoples (IP) learners who migrated from rural to urban schools, using a qualitative descriptive research design to capture their lived experiences in depth. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with twelve purposively selected participants, ensuring that the information gathered was both relevant and meaningful. Through thematic analysis, the findings revealed that IP learners experienced various forms of stress, including financial constraints, academic adjustments, social pressures, and emotional struggles while studying in urban-based schools. Despite these challenges, the learners demonstrated resilience by employing adaptive strategies such as building peer connections and engaging in self-regulated learning to manage their academic and social demands. These adaptation strategies played a crucial role in helping them navigate their new environment more effectively. Over time, such coping mechanisms contributed to meaningful personal growth, particularly in the development of academic confidence, strengthened resilience, and a greater sense of autonomy in their learning. Based on these findings, the study proposes the use of mediation analysis to examine cultural adaptation as a mediating factor between stress and personal growth. Additionally, exploratory factor analysis is recommended to develop and validate survey instruments grounded in the identified themes, thereby supporting future research and educational interventions designed to enhance the academic experiences and overall well-being of Indigenous learners.

Keywords: From mountains to metropolis, perception on stress, adaptation, growth of indigenous students, urban-based schools

INTRODUCTION

The Problem and Its Setting

I have come to understand that in recent decades; the migration of Indigenous Peoples from rural to urban areas has increased due to the pursuit of better education. As more Indigenous learners enter urban schools, many experience difficulty adjusting to new environments. (Nesterova, 2023). I also realized that they are often expected to quickly adapt and assimilate into the dominant culture despite these challenges (Nesterova & Jackson, 2022).

Through my exploration of studies from different countries, I learned that challenges are widely experienced. In Botswana, IP students face culture shock, psychosocial difficulties, and conflicts due to differences in culture, language, and academic demands (Pheko et al., 2023). In Colombia, Indigenous students often feel underrepresented and face financial struggles that affect their academic performance (Álvarez & Miranda, 2023). In Pakistan, social adjustment is also a major challenge, with students experiencing difficulty in communication, relationships, and adapting to school culture (Ahmed et al., 2024).

In the Philippine context, I found that similar experiences exist. In Pampanga, Aeta students reported discrimination, which contributes to school dropout and limits educational opportunities (Supan & Mendoza, 2023). In Bukidnon, Indigenous students face academic, financial, and emotional challenges, often influenced

by fear of discrimination. Despite these, many develop resilience and coping strategies to continue their education (Gaite, 2025).

From these insights, I realized that transitioning from rural to urban schools involves not only physical movement but also emotional, social, and cultural adaptation. These experiences significantly affect Indigenous students' journey and personal development, which encouraged me to conduct this study to better understand their experiences.

Significance of the Study

This study is closely aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education for all. By examining the experiences of Indigenous Peoples (IP) students in Davao City, it sheds light on the stress they face in accessing education and adapting to urban-based schools. The study also reflects Holy Cross of Davao College's mission of transformative and values-driven education by emphasizing social justice, cultural respect, and inclusivity, offering insights that support educators and institutions in developing culturally responsive and compassionate educational practices.

Statement of the Problem

In this research, I aimed to understand the experiences of Indigenous students who migrated from rural areas to urban-based schools. Specifically, I sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the forms of stress encountered by the IP learners from rural areas upon transferring to urban-based schools?
2. What are the cultural adaptations carried out by IP learners from rural areas while studying in urban-based schools?
3. What are the personal growths developed by the IP learners from rural areas after their cultural adaptations?

Assumptions

I assumed that the responses of indigenous students reflect their firsthand experiences as they transition from rural to urban-based schools. These experiences may involve shared cultural, academic, and social stress that shapes their learning experience. I further assumed that insights emerging from their narratives could deepen understanding of their situation and help inform more inclusive and supportive educational policies and interventions.

Theoretical Lens

This study is anchored on the Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory, which explains how individuals adjust when exposed to new cultural environments (Kim, 2001). According to this theory, stress is a natural and important part of adjusting. It pushes people to learn new ways of thinking and behaving to fit into the new culture. Over time, as they face challenges, adapt, and grow, the stress becomes less intense. They become more comfortable and capable in the new environment. Eventually, their identity starts to change, becoming more open and flexible, blending parts of both their original and new cultures. At the heart of this theory is the Stress–Adaptation–Growth dynamic process, which describes the recurring process individuals go through when adapting to a new cultural environment.

Conceptual Paradigm

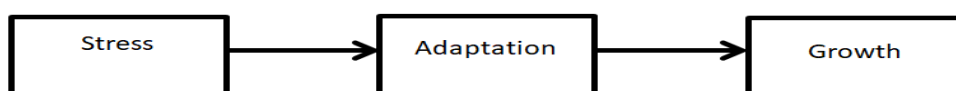


Figure 1. Conceptual Paradigm of the Study

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I presented the research design, locale of the study, sample and sampling technique, data gathering technique, data analysis technique, and trustworthiness of the study.

Research Design

On this study, I employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the stress, adaptation, and growth of Indigenous students who transferred to urban-based schools. This approach allowed me to gather a clear and straightforward account of their experiences and perspectives without imposing complex theoretical interpretation (Doyle et al., 2020). Descriptive qualitative research is ideal for understanding underexplored phenomena and generating practical insights, offering clarity, methodological flexibility, and applicability for stakeholders (Ayton, 2023).

Locale of the Study

I conducted this study in Barangay Tawantawan and Barangay Tambobong, Davao City. These have significant presence of Indigenous Peoples (IP) communities. Many members of these communities have increasingly transferred to urban-based school.

Sample and Sampling Technique

This study involved twelve (12) Indigenous students who transferred to urban-based schools. Six (6) participants took part in in-depth interviews, while six (6) participated in a focus group discussion.

In this study I utilized Purposive sampling technique which researchers intentionally select individuals that are most relevant to the research question rather than randomly choosing from a broader population (Tajik et al., 2025). Purposive sampling was utilized in this study because of its ability to target relevant participants efficiently, provide rich, detailed data that offer flexibility. It was used in this study to deliberately select participants who could provide rich accounts of their experiences about the stress, adaptation and growth.

Data Gathering Technique

In this study, I employed in-depth interviews as the primary data gathering technique. In-Depth Interviews are qualitative data-collection method involving one-on-one, open-ended, and conversational interviews. I utilized this technique because of its ability to generate rich, detailed, and nuanced data that goes beyond surface-level responses (Xu et al., 2025). In this study interviews were conducted with twelve (12) Indigenous student participants to explore their viewpoints in urban-based schools. The interview guide was translated into local dialects to ensure clarity and allow participants to express themselves freely. I secured an informed consent prior to data collection, participants voluntarily shared their narratives, which were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and richness of data.

Data Analysis Technique

In this study, I used thematic analysis to examine the data gathered from in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used to systematically report themes within a set of qualitative data (Ahmed, 2025). I utilized thematic analysis to identify, analyze, and interpret themes within the data I collected from the participants. I utilized this data analysis technique because of its clarity in identifying themes that illuminate participants' perspectives, and its accessibility and practicality for researchers.

Trustworthiness of the Study

This study ensured trustworthiness by adhering to Ahmed's (2024) criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility refers to the confidence that the research findings accurately represent the participants' experiences and realities, often achieved through techniques that ensure truthful

depiction of data. To ensure this, I issued informed consent to ensure that participants voluntarily provide honest and accurate accounts, I fully informed them about the purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and their rights in this study. I also, maintained confidentiality by protecting participants' private information through Pseudonyms.

Dependability addresses the consistency and stability of the research process over time, demonstrated by clear, systematic documentation of how data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted. To accomplish this, I systematically documented the responses of my study participants, to make accurate accounts of their responses.

Confirmability focuses on ensuring that the findings are shaped by the participants' responses rather than researcher bias or personal influence. To realize this, I provided evidence from the data collection through direct quotes or excerpts from participants to illustrate findings, demonstrating that themes emerge from the data itself.

Transferability pertains to the extent to which the findings can be applied to other contexts or settings. To guarantee this, I provided rich and detailed descriptions of the research setting, participants, and processes, allowing readers to determine whether the findings are relevant and meaningful in similar contexts.

These measures enabled the study to obtain ethical clearance from the Society for Moral Integrity and Legal Ethics (SMILE), ensuring the protection, privacy, and well-being of the Indigenous student participants.

RESULTS

In this chapter, I presented the results of my study about the forms of stress encountered by IP learners from rural areas upon transferring to urban-based schools, their cultural adaptation and the personal growth they acquire after their cultural adaptation. I also provided the summary of the findings along with the modified paradigm.

Forms of Stress Encountered by the IP learners from Rural Areas upon Transferring to Urban-based Schools

My conversations with my study participants led me to identify four forms of stress: Stress with Financial Constraints, Stress with Academic Adjustments, Stress caused by Discrimination, and Stress caused by Emotional Struggles.

Stress with Financial Constraints. I was deeply struck by how financial difficulties shape the experiences of IP students in urban schools. One of them shared:

Marember nako nga naay time, first year ko adto nga ulahi ko kapalit ug uniform kay wala pa mi kwarta, kay kuan to, nagsakit si mama. Ahm, maulaw pud ko adto kay feeling nako ako nalang jud wala naka uniform (.I remember there was a time when I was in first year that I was late in buying a uniform because we didn't have money yet, since my mother was sick. I felt shy back then because I felt like I was the only one who didn't have a uniform.)-FGD-2

As the participant spoke, I could see the tears she was holding back. I can imagine the discomfort of standing out in a place where belonging often depends on fitting in. Her experiences revealed how financial limitations can shape not only access to education but also confidence. Another participant stated:

Kuan, usahay wala koy plete o kanang naa man pero magproblema ko what if, or unsaon nalang sunod adlaw. Usahay maglisod mi ug bayad sa projects or miscellaneous fees (Sometimes I don't have fare, or even if I do, I worry about what will happen the next day. There are also times when we have difficulty paying for projects or miscellaneous fees). -FGD-1

Listening to this, I can sense the pain her voice and I realized that it was not only about attending school, but about sustaining the means to continue. As she spoke, I can see her quiet resilience even with limited resources.

Stress with Academic Adjustments. During my interview with the participants, I was deeply moved by the challenges they face in adapting to the academic demands of urban schools. One participant mentioned:

So maglisud ko kay kadtong naa pa ko dire sa bukid kay hinungitan gud mi, pag-abot didto kay like hala! You're on your own na ba, magstudy naka, like motabang gud gihapon ang mga subject teachers pero lahi na jud. Daghan kaayo og mga topic nga unfamiliar kaayo sa imo tapos need nimo maningkamot (So I struggled because when I was still in the mountains, everything was guided for us. But when I got here, it was like, "Hala! You're on your own now." You have to study by yourself. The subject teachers still help, but it's really different. There are so many topics that are very unfamiliar, and you really need to work hard)-IDI-4

As he spoke, I could notice the panic in his voice. This made me reflect on how overwhelming the transition must feel for the participant, as if he were placed in a new environment without preparation. Another participant expressed:

Hmmm, at first lisod gyud siya. Kay sa city school mas paspas ang pacing ug mas independent ang learning. Kanang mura'g dali gud tanan. Labi na UM nga every after two weeks kay exam (Hmmm, at first it was really difficult. In the city school, the pacing is faster and learning is more independent. Everything feels like it happens quickly, especially at UM, where there's an exam every two weeks) -IDI-1

Hearing this, I discovered how the fast-paced system can intensify the stress the he is experiencing and it is visible in the vivid descriptions of his experiences. One participant shared:

very lisud gyud. Aaa, paspas kaayo ang lessons ug murag expected nga kabalo na ka daan, common kaayo moingon nga human ani during your senior High school tapos naa baya mga subject nga wala ginatudlo sa among skwelahan sa bukid (It's really very difficult. Aaah, the lessons are very fast, and it feels like they expect you to already know things. They often say, "You should have learned this in senior high school," but there are subjects that weren't even taught in our school in the mountains.)-IDI-2

Stress on dealing with Discrimination. During my dialogue with the participants, I realized how harmless jokes can carry deeper meanings that affect their sense of belonging and lead to discrimination. One participant shared:

Uhm, naa gamay. usahay naay comments nga murag nag-generalize sa mga taga-bukid, labi na if paspas ka molakaw, like i-joke ka (.Uhm, a little. Sometimes there are comments that seem to generalize people from the mountains, especially if you walk fast it can be made into a joke). -IDI-1

As the participant spoke, I sensed a quiet acceptance, yet it has an unspoken discomfort. Another participant shared:

Minor ra. Hmmm, naa lang jokes usahay nga makasakit gamay, kanang mamali og pronounce sa words ba, tapos sundugan unya kataw-an pero dili man kaayo grabe (It's minor. Hmmm, there are just jokes sometimes that can hurt a little, like when you mispronounce words and they tease you but it's not that serious). -IDI-3

While the participant was sharing, I could sense the pain in her voice. Listening to this, I felt the subtle pain hidden in her words. Their experience revealed how small moments of ridicule can slowly affect confidence.

Stress on Dealing with Emotional Struggles. In my conversations with the participants, I was deeply touched by the emotional struggles they experience as they adjust to urban life. Their stories reflected feelings of loneliness, pressure, and a sense of not belonging. One participant shared:

Ay kadtong naa nako sa JMC kay naka experience ko og emotional struggle pero kadtong first week ra nako to didto. Ma home sick ka, Ma-culture shock jud ka didto kanang unsa gane tawag ana, kanang wala kay mapangutan-an didto, kanang mura'g mabag-ohan imong utok kanang mga ka-bonding sa bukid kay ginooangita nimo didto sa syudad kanang imong kabarkada (Ah, when I was at JMC, I experienced an emotional struggle, but that was only during my first week there. I felt homesick, and I really had culture shock—like, I

didn't know who to ask for help, and it felt like my mind was overwhelmed. I kept missing the bonding moments with my friends back in the mountains while I was in the city).-IDI-4

While the participant was speaking, I could see the worry in him. This made me reflect on the emotional distance he carry, even when surrounded by many people, the longing for connection, shows that is not only physical but also emotional. Another participant expressed:

Uhm, naka-feel ko ug pressure ug anxiety. Hmmm, tungod kay lain na ang environment, layo mo ilaha mama ug papa ug mas daghan bright students sa among bukid sa una kay pirme jud ko marecognized pero dire sa city school kay daghan na kaayo og bright labi na tong gikan sa big cities(Uhm, I felt pressure and anxiety. Hmmm, it's because the environment is different, I'm far from my parents, and there are more bright students. Back in the mountains, I was often recognized, but here in the city school, there are so many bright students especially those from big cities)-IDI-1

As the participant was talking, I noticed his anxiety. This made me realized that culture shock is not just about unfamiliar surroundings but also the feeling of being different. One participant shared:

culture shock gyud, ma'am ay. Kuan, lahi ilang humor didto kay pang sosyal ilang mga jokes, lahi ilang lifestyle, mag klase magdala og milk tea, nagdala og fries so murag naa koy feeling nga outsider ko(It was really culture shock, ma'am. Their humor is different—they make posh-style jokes. Their lifestyle is different too; in class they bring milk tea or fries. It made me feel like an outsider.)-FGD-5

Hearing this, I witness a feeling of inferiority coming from her. I felt how comparison shapes her sense of self. Her response shows a change from confidence to self-doubt, as she tries to find her place in a more competitive environment.

Cultural Adaptations Carried Out by IP Learners from Rural Areas While Studying in Urban-based Schools

Through interactions with my participants, I was able to identify two cultural adaptations: Adaptation by connecting with Classmates and adaptation by developing self-regulated learning.

On Adaptation by Connecting with classmates to fit in. In my interviews with the participants, I noticed how they gradually learned to reach out and build friendships despite their initial shyness. One participant stated:

Sa sugod kay mahadlok jud ko makigstorya sa uban tungod sa background sa, sa culture pero kadugayan tungod ra sad sa agda-agda, lag, mangutana dira nag start nga nagka-friends (At first, I was really afraid to talk to others because of our different backgrounds and culture. But over time, just by chatting, joking around, and asking questions, that's when I started making friends) .-IDI-5

As she speaks, I noticed the smile in her face on how gradually she learned to make friends and adjust in a new and unfamiliar environment. Her experience allows her to connect with classmates more confidently. One participant shared:

At first lisod gyud, first time is always difficult baya jud diba, te no. Aaa, pero ni-try ko makig-storya sa classmates labi na sa group works kay ako man gud mag initiate usahay kay man ang mag lead. Uhm, I think through sa shared activities ug projects, naka-build ko ug friendships slowly (At first, it was really difficult first times are always hard, right? Aaah, but I tried to talk to my classmates, especially during group works, because I sometimes have to take the initiative and lead. Uhm, I think through shared activities and projects, I slowly built friendships..-IDI-1

As the participant talked, I noticed the confidence in him as he crossed his arms and described his experience. His Active participation in group activities helped him feel more connected and comfortable with his classmates. One participant stated:

Aaa, usually maghulat ra ko nga duolon ko before. Uhm, naka-build ra ko ug connections pinaagi sa group activities mas na close ko sa akong mga classmates (Aaah, usually I used to just wait for others to approach me. Uhm, I was able to build connections through group activities, and I became closer to my classmates).-IDI-2

As the participant was speaking, I noticed her uneasiness gradually fading as she smiles. Hearing this, made me reflect on how small efforts to engage, can gradually create a sense of belonging.

Adaptation by Developing Self-regulated Learning. In my dialogue with the participants, I noticed how they learned to manage their time and study independently to cope with the demands of the urban school environment. One participant shared:

Hmmm, akong strategy kay magresearch kasagaran jud kay naa naman sa internet, pwede na ma google, usahay pud kay mangutana ko kung dili ko kasabot. Aaa, naga-review ko sa notes ug naga-group study pud usaha y (my strategy is mostly doing research since it's available on the internet and can be Googled. Sometimes I also ask questions if I don't understand. Aaah, I review my notes and sometimes do group study as well).-IDI-3

While the participant was sharing, I noticed her joy as her eyes lit up and realized that delaying work only piles up stress, so she takes action early to stay on top of their responsibilities. As one participant quoted:

Isa akong strategy kay foresight, kana ganeng layo palang buhaton na nako para mahinay hinay na nako og human. Ako pud mga classmate kay makigstorya na sad akoo, communication is the key lang jud (One of my strategies is foresight starting tasks early so I can finish them little by little. I also talk to my classmates; communication is really the key)-IDI-5

During the conversation, I could see the growing confidence in her face as she laughs and proves that she can adapt and thrive, demonstrating her resilience in a challenging urban environment.

Personal Growths Developed by the IP Learners from Rural Areas after their Cultural Adaptations

Through my interviews with my participants, I was able to identify with my study participants led me to identify four personal growths developed by IP learners from rural areas after their cultural adaptation: growth in academic confidence, growth in overcoming learning challenges, growth in emotional and mental resilience and growth in gain personal autonomy.

Growth in Academic Confidence. During my conversation with the participants, I noticed how they gradually learned to stay calm and composed even when academic demands became overwhelming. One participant shared:

Uhm, mas confident na gyud ko karon. Hmmm, dili pa perfect pero kabalo na ko unsaon pag-handle sa pressure ug academic demands sa city school (I'm really more confident now. Hmmm, it's not perfect yet, but I already know how to handle the pressure and academic demands of a city school).-IDI-1

This made me reflect on how confidence is built through experience. As he shared, I sensed a quiet strength on him which is no longer easily shaken, but learning to stay strong despite challenges. Another participant shared:

Mas confident nako karon, compare sauna kay mas better rna jud akong participation sa klase karon (I'm more confident now compared before, and my participation in class is much better) -IDI-6

While I was listening to him, I could sense how his confidence slowly took shape over time as he sits and lean on the chair. What was once his hesitation turned into courage to speak, ask, and participate. One participant shared:

Hmmm, yes, naka-improve pud gamay. Aaa, mas stable na akong performance kumpara sa sugod. Dati man gud kay maulaw ko mangutana, mataha ko mangayo og tabang pero karon kay vocal na kaayo, comfortable na sad ko. Uhm, fairly confident na. Hmmm, naanad na ko sa pacing ug style sa lessons (yes, I've improved a little. Aaah, my performance is more stable compared to the beginning. Before, I felt shy to ask questions and hesitant

to ask for help, but now I'm more vocal and comfortable. Uhm, I'm fairly confident now. Hmmm, I've gotten used to the pacing and style of the lessons). -IDI-3

Hearing this, I felt a sense of growth unfolding on her as she spoke with her firm voice. Her words carried a change from her fear to familiarity, proving that her confidence is not automatically achieved, but she built through consistency. One participant shared:

Uhm, mas confident na gyud ko karon. Hmmm, dili pa perfect pero kabalo na ko unsaon pag-handle sa pressure ug academic demands sa city school (I'm really more confident now. Hmmm, it's not perfect yet, but I already know how to handle the pressure and academic demands of a city school). -IDI-1

As I listen to on her, I noticed her strength was no longer measured by perfection as she responded in a tone with finality, but by her ability to endure and keep going. Her resilience to learn allows her to gain control and confidence. As one of the participants quoted:

Mas confident nako karon, compare sauna kay mas better na jud akong participation sa klase karon (I'm more confident now compared before, and my participation in class is much better) -IDI-6

Listening to this, I saw how his confidence opened doors for him that was once closed by his fear. His Participation was no longer something to avoid, but something he embraced. His journey showed that growth is not only about improving academically, but about believing that he belong in the space he once struggled to enter.

Growth Overcoming Learning Challenges. As I listened to my participants, I realized that their struggles slowly transformed into strengths. What once felt difficult became something they learned to manage through effort and persistence. One participant mentioned:

Ni-improve akong reading comprehension dire kay more on self study na man gud dire sa college, mura'g kanang expected na ka nga maningkamot sa imoha lang, sige ra reporting so kailangan jud mag study (My reading comprehension has improved here because it's more on self-study in college. It feels like it's expected that you put in the effort on your own. Since there's constant reporting, you really need to study). -FGD2

Hearing this, I realized how his responsibility shaped his growth through his words that reflected a strong determination to rely on himself. It was a shift from guided learning to self-driven effort. Another participant expressed:

hmmm, analytical skills jud. Mas paspas na ko kasabot sa lessons kumpara sauna siguro kay mas broad na akong learnings, naa nay internet dire easy access nalang mag research, naana mga dagko nga library with free net pa jud (my analytical skills have really improved. I understand lessons faster compared to before, probably because my learning is broader now. There's internet here for easy research, and there are big libraries with free internet too). -FGD-4

As she stated this, I notice how her world had widened as she responded confidence and smile. Access to resources became more than convenient; it became her bridge that helped her understand lessons faster. Her growth in analytical skills showed how exposure and opportunity can reshape learning. A participant during FGD mentioned:

Ni-improve akong writing ug research skills kay murag ulaw kaayo mopasa nga mali mali ang grammar ay kulang pa jud ang punctuation, dati kay mopasa ra ko nga wala nga proof read sa akong output karon kay basahon sa ikapila (My writing and research skills have improved. I used to feel embarrassed submitting work with grammar mistakes and missing punctuation. Before, I would just submit without proofreading, but now I review my work several times) -FGD-5

As he spoke, I see a great willingness in him to improve not just in terms of academic but to gain a deeper understanding of his capacity and confidence in what he can achieve.

Growth On Developing Emotional and Mental Resilience. As I listened to my participants, I saw how their struggles slowly shaped their strength. One participant shared:

Kadtong naa nako dire sav city kay ahhm, nakat-on ko unsaon pag-handle sa stress ug setbacks nga akong ma experience. Like, dili na dayon ko mo-give up, dili na dayon ko easily ma disaapoint, pag nagfail, bounce back dayon, ky paspas baya ang pacing sa city life (When I was here in the city, ahhm, I learned how to handle stress and setbacks that I might experience. Like, I don't give up immediately anymore, I don't get easily disappointed, and when I fail, I bounce back right away because the pacing in city life is fast).-FGD1

Hearing this, I see a transformation in her, like she is learning to stand firm in the middle of a fast-moving world. Her words showed that resilience was not about avoiding failure, but about rising each time she fall. Another participant expressed:

Kadtong naa nako sa city, after pila ka years nako dire kay mas resilient na jud ko karon. Hmmm, makaatubang na ko sa challenges nga mas kalmado nako mag dala, kanang maratol gud gihapon usahay pero dili na kaayo mawala sa passing, under control na nako (When I was in the city, after a few years here, I've become much more resilient. Hmmm, I can face challenges more calmly now. Sometimes I still get stressed, but it doesn't overwhelm me anymore; I've learned to keep it under control).-FGD-2

As I reflected on this, I realized that the fear and confusion she once felt did not disappear, but she learned manage it. Her strength now lies in staying composed even in difficult moments. One participant shared that:

Ako kay kadtong naa nako sa city mas kabalo na ko mo-manage sa akong frustration ug anxiety unlike before kadtong naa pako sa bukid kay hilak jud og taman, mang hubag nalang ako mata og hinilak pero karon dire sa city kay dili na pwede hilak, gamay, tulog tapos padayon, ana gane siya kaganina nga bounce back dayon uy (When I was in the city, I've learned to manage my frustration and anxiety better. Unlike before, back in the mountains, I would just cry a lot, my eyes would swell from crying. But now here in the city, I can't do that—I just rest a little, then keep going. That's what they meant earlier by "bounce back right away).-FGD-3

Listening to this, I sensed a deeper kind of resilience in him. He learned that it is okay to pause, to feel, but also to continue. His journey reflects not just survival, but the strength to move forward with balance, control, and quiet determination.

Growth on Gaining Personal Autonomy. As I listened to my participants, I realized that being far from home pushed them to grow in ways they never expected. One participant shared:

Tungod kay layo ko sa among pamilya, nalearn gyud nako unsaon pag-atiman sa akong self.. Uhm, dili na ko magsalig nga naa si mama magready sa akong baon or manglaba, like ako na jud mismo mobuhat ana (Because I'm far from my family, I've really learned how to take care of myself. Uhm, I no longer rely on my mom to prepare my meals or do my laundry; I do those things myself now)- IDI-1

Hearing this, I realized how his responsibility slowly became part of his everyday life and became his lessons of independence. Another participant expressed:

napugos ko mahimong independent kay walay permi mutabang nako, layo si nanay. Uhm, kinahanglan nako mosalig sa akong kaugalingon(I was forced to become independent because no one is always there to help me—my mom is far away. Uhm, I have to rely on myself) -IDI-2

As he spoke, I noticed a sense of independence in him, reflected in the firmness of his tone. With no one constantly guiding him, he learned to stand on his own. What started as being forced became a realization of his own capability. One participant shared that:

Oo, mas nagging independent ko uy kay kaya na anko mabuhi sa syudad nga ako-ako lang, kaya sad nako maki-belong (Yes, I've become more independent because I can live on my own in the city, and I'm also able to belong and fit in).-IDI-5

Listening to this, I saw a quiet confidence emerged. Their journey showed that it was not just about being alone, but about trusting oneself in an unfamiliar world.

Summary of findings

1. Forms of stress of IP learners are Stress with Financial Constraints, Stress with Academic Adjustments, Stress caused by Discrimination, and Stress caused by Emotional Struggles.
2. Adaptations by IP learners include Adaptation by Connecting with Classmates and Adaptation by Developing Self-Regulated Learning.
3. IP learners developed personal growth after their cultural adaptation, including growth in academic confidence, growth in overcoming learning challenges, growth in emotional and mental resilience, and growth in gaining personal autonomy.

Modified Paradigm:

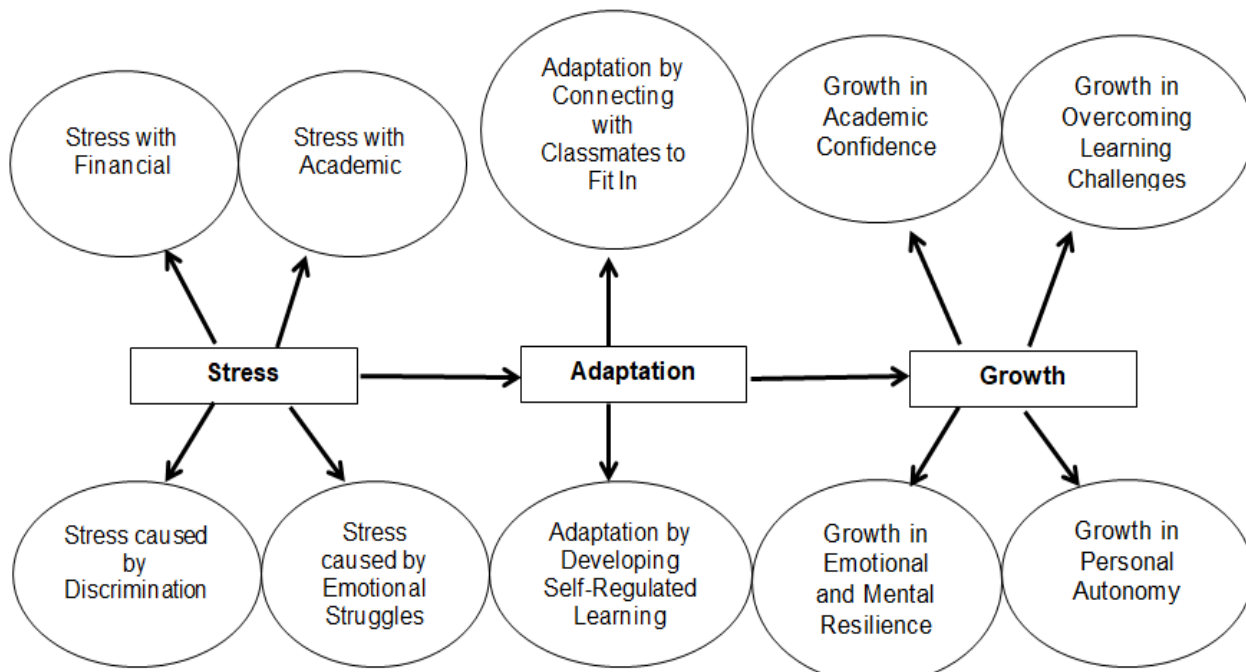


Figure 2. Modified Paradigm of the Study

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I discussed the findings based on the themes generated from the results of the study. I presented the implications for practice, and future direction of the study.

Forms of Stress Encountered by the IP learners from Rural Areas upon Transferring to Urban-based Schools

In this study I found that IP learners perceived financial stress, academic adjustment challenges, discrimination, and emotional struggles as stressors they encountered upon transferring to urban-based schools. With this, I support the claim of Gaité (2025), who reported that persistent academic challenges, financial limitations, and experiences of discrimination are stress encountered by IP learners that significantly affected their educational journey. Moreover, I also affirm the results of the study conducted by Casas and Quiambao (2023), that poverty and discrimination are key academic challenges encountered by Indigenous learners, indicating that socio-economic stress and bias continue to influence their educational outcomes. However, my finding

contradicts the claim of Phren et al., (2025) stating that in inclusive urban schools, IP students gain greater confidence, self-esteem, and positive relationships with peers and staff.

Cultural Adaptations Carried Out by IP Learners from Rural Areas While Studying in Urban-based Schools

Through this study, I discovered that IP learners adapted to the urban-based school by connecting with classmates and developing self-regulated learning. With that said, I also agree by the findings of Lorijn (2024), who reported that positive peer relationships and engagement with classmates help students navigate social adjustment and build a sense of belonging when transitioning to a new educational setting. Moreover, the results of the study conducted by She et al. (2023) align with these findings, as they found that learning adaptability promotes self-regulated learning, indicating that students who adjust their learning strategies independently are better equipped to cope with the academic demands of new school environments. In contrary, convinced with my finding, I negate the finding of Tuban and Postrano (2025) stating that good involvement and connection with school activities does not translate into successful adaptation through peer connection or self-regulated learning.

Personal Growths Developed by the IP Learners from Rural Areas after their Cultural Adaptations

Result of the study, helps me realized that IP learners developed significant personal growth after their cultural adaptation, including increase academic confidence, growth in overcoming learning challenges, growth in emotional and mental resilience, and growth in gaining personal autonomy. Hence, I concur with the study of Azpiazu et al. (2024), who reported that students who successfully adjust to new academic environments demonstrate greater resilience and social integration, showing that adaptation processes foster personal strengths such as confidence and resilience. Similarly, this is supported by She et al. (2023), who found that learning adaptability promotes self-regulated learning and academic motivation, suggesting that students who adapt effectively are more likely to develop personal strategies for managing academic demands and achieving growth in autonomy and resilience. However, backed-up with my finding, I disagree with Buenaflor (2023) who argued that systemic and structural challenges suggest that Indigenous learners do not automatically develop increased academic confidence, resilience, or autonomy through adaptation alone, as their educational outcomes and personal growth remain constrained by inequities rather than universally improved.

Implication for Practice

Based on the my findings of my study, I propose that educational leaders and teachers may provide targeted support such as scholarships, peer mentoring, academic tutoring, counselling services, and remedial classes. The adaptation strategies of connecting with classmates and developing self-regulated learning suggest that educators create learning communities, peer study groups, and time management workshops to support students. The observed growth in confidence, resilience, and autonomy also suggest the need for inclusive teaching, responsive curricula, and student leadership programs.

Future Directions

From the results of my study, future research may explore Mediation analysis using adaptation as a mediator on the correlation between stress and growth. Mediation analysis is a statistical method used in quantitative research to examine how variables like stress and growth are affects through a mediator like the adaptation. Additionally, exploratory factor analysis may be pursued to develop survey questionnaires for stress, adaptation and growth. The emerging subthemes may be utilized as indicators of the potential variables that will be identified.

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