

## Educational support system for Aeta indigenous students in Zambales, Philippines: A descriptive study



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### ABSTRACT

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The support system is essential to Aeta's educational success. Self-determination is a very important factor in attaining success in finishing tertiary education. Nevertheless, this dream will not become a reality without the support of the family, peers, school, and community. The study aimed to examine the importance of the support system in enabling Aeta individuals to pursue education as a pathway to success. It discusses the support received from school, family, peers, and the Indigenous community. This quantitative descriptive research investigated the extent of support from these groups among 143 Aeta from different ethnolinguistic groups in Zambales. The researchers employed a researcher-made questionnaire to assess the level of support, utilizing a 5-point Likert scale to interpret the data. The collected data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, and weighted mean to interpret respondents' perceptions of the support system's role. The analysis revealed a moderate level of support from the school. The findings also demonstrated support from peers and family. However, support from the Indigenous community was minimal, indicating limited involvement in Aeta educational initiatives. The results also highlight the insufficient integration of Indigenous cultural values and practices into the academic framework. Therefore, improving the level of support within the system could foster a sense of belonging and empowerment. This, in turn, would help transform the Aeta's insights on education as a pathway to success into a tangible reality.

**Contribution/ Originality:** This study is one of the few that focus on the educational support system for Aeta students in the Philippines. This article considers and synthesizes local circumstances to illuminate educational issues overlooked by most studies on Indigenous education in the Philippines in the mainstream.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups, especially in developing countries, Indigenous Peoples (IPs) comprise more than 300 million individuals worldwide. They have diverse cultures and traditions but are often found in remote, isolated regions, suffering from poverty and exclusion from socio-economic and political processes. These barriers prevent them from enjoying fundamental rights such as education, land ownership, and access to resources. Local and international frameworks, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), have been introduced in response to these inequities. UNDRIP is a universal framework aimed at addressing issues of survival, dignity, and well-being for [Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines \[1\]](#). The IPRA Law recognizes and promotes the rights of Indigenous Cultural Communities (ICCs) while preserving their culture and

ensuring equal protection [1, 2]. One IP group embodying this fight and resilience in the country is the Aeta Sambal of Zambales, Philippines. Settlers at the foot of Mt. Pinatubo, the Aetas, were forced to resettle after the 1991 volcanic eruption and were relocated to government-designated resettlements. This displacement upended their traditional lifestyle and left many relying on outside aid. Others have returned to their original lands, but those who stayed in the resettled areas experience challenges similar to unfriendly farming and weather. These modifications have been profoundly impactful on their rich cultural heritage and traditions.

Education remains one of the most significant areas of injustice faced by Indigenous Peoples. As reported by UNESCO (October 2021), Indigenous Peoples are within the poorest strata in the Philippines, which means that systemic challenges in accessing education are present. Regaspi [3] also mentioned that Aeta students face technological and financial obstacles: they cannot afford computers, internet connectivity, and electricity in remote areas. These problems directly hinder efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), which focus on the social, economic, and political inclusion of all, regardless of their status. In the Philippines, the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program, implemented by the Department of Education (DepEd), aims to promote inclusive education. This initiative provides a culturally embedded K-12 curriculum that reflects the culture, values, and aspirations of Indigenous Peoples communities, emphasizing culture-based teaching and learning. Additionally, teachers are trained to develop positive and culturally sensitive dispositions among IP students, inherently supporting SDG 5, which seeks to eliminate disparities. Although only a few studies have been published showing promising results, gaps remain, particularly in technology access and financial support [4, 5], while the IPEd program has made significant progress. These efforts face ongoing challenges, especially regarding inadequate technological resources such as computers, internet connection, and electricity, which are essential for effective education [3].

Furthermore, poverty makes it impossible for some to receive tertiary or higher education, which further serves as a means to escape poverty. The Philippine government and LGUs in Zambales enacted a free tuition policy for IP students in tertiary education in response to these gaps. Education is centered on economic empowerment, work, and sustainable development, making these initiatives relevant to Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 8.

The importance of this study lies in the understanding and contribution towards the barriers that the Aeta still experience as they pursue higher education, which has been proven to be one of the effective ways to break the cycle of poverty and open the door for sustainable development within their community. The study's findings can guide efforts in creating policies, programs, and interventions that empower Indigenous Peoples through education by highlighting specific challenges and opportunities. In the end, addressing these issues aligns with our global commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, ensuring that no one is left behind, especially marginalized groups in society.

## 2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The aims of the study are to:

1. To measure the extent of support from students/peers, family, and community in the educational experience of Aeta students in the areas of family support, community support, and student/peer support.
2. To explore education as a pathway to educational success for Aeta Indigenous communities.
3. To explore barriers and challenges for Indigenous students accessing higher education and discuss solutions.
4. To ascertain the cultural bases that affect the academic aspiration and achievement of Aeta students.
5. To suggest how educational policies and support systems fit Aeta Indigenous students.
6. To create a more inclusive education framework that supports the empowerment of Aeta Indigenous Peoples through Indigenous-focused education scholarship program initiatives, Indigenous support/tutoring centers, and community-oriented educational opportunities.

### 3. RELATED THEORIES

The study is built on the foundation of Self-Determination Theory [6], which posits that individuals perform better when they feel autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Support from family, peers, the school, and the Indigenous community strengthens Aeta students' determination to finish tertiary education. Likewise, Social Support Theory [7] underscores the importance of external support systems in promoting well-being and academic persistence. It asserts that robust family, peer, and institutional support positively affects educational attainment. According to Cultural Capital Theory [8], students' access to cultural knowledge, skills, and resources directly affects their academic achievements. Even as this sentence highlights the minimal involvement of the Indigenous community in formal education, it further implies a deficit of cultural capital that might prevent Indigenous ways of knowing from being incorporated into formal education. Finally, Resilience Theory [9] posits that individuals can persevere in the face of adversity through the utilization of internal and external resources.

### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive research design to collect data on the perceptions of Aeta respondents using a researcher-made questionnaire. Statistical analysis, including frequency, percentage, and weighted mean, was used to interpret the respondents' views on the level of support systems in education. A 5-point Likert scale was utilized to measure the respondents' level of agreement with the provided statements. The study involved convenience sampling with 143 participants from various Aeta ethnolinguistic groups, including Aeta Abellen, Aeta Ambala, Aeta Sambal, and Aeta Mag-Indi, who reside in different municipalities in Zambales, Philippines. Table 1 presents the Likert scale used for interpreting the computed mean scores in this study. The scale ranges from 1.00 to 5.00, where higher values indicate stronger levels of support. A mean score between 4.50 and 5.00 is described as "Highly supported," 3.50 to 4.00 as "Supported," 2.50 to 3.49 as "Moderately supported," 1.50 to 2.49 as "Not supported," and 1.00 to 1.49 as "Strongly not supported."

**Table 1.** Likert scale for interpretation of the computed mean.

Arbitrary values	Statistical limits	Verbal description
5	4.50-5.00	Highly supported
4	3.50-4.00	Supported
3	2.50-3.49	Moderately supported
2	1.50-2.49	Not supported
1	1.00-1.49	Strongly not supported

The respondents were students who belonged to different ethno-linguistic groups (Table 2) of Aetas in four municipalities in the province of Zambales, Philippines.

**Table 2.** Distribution of the respondents as to ethno-linguistic group.

Ethno-linguistic group	Municipality	Frequency	Percent
Aeta Abellen	Cabangan, Zambales	38	26.57
Aeta Ambala	Subic, Zambales	35	24.48
Aeta Sambal	Botolan, Zambales	39	27.27
Aeta Mag-Indi	San Marcelino, Zambales	31	21.68
<b>Total</b>		<b>143</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents based on their ethno-linguistic group and reveals that the Aeta Sambal group from Botolan, Zambales, comprises the largest portion of the sample, with 39 respondents, or 27.27%. The Aeta Abellen group from Cabangan, Zambales, follows closely with 38 respondents, representing 26.57% of the total sample. The Aeta Ambala group from Subic, Zambales, includes 35 respondents, making up 24.48% of the sample. The Aeta Mag-Indi group from San Marcelino, Zambales, has the smallest representation

with 31 respondents, or 21.68%. These findings indicate a relatively balanced distribution of respondents from different Aeta groups, with the Aeta Sambal group being the most represented. This distribution reflects the diversity within the Aeta communities in Zambales, providing a comprehensive understanding of the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples in the study.

## 5. PARADIGM OF THE STUDY

The researcher used the Input-Process-Output framework in elucidating the process of how the research was conducted. Figure 1 illustrates the Input, Process and Output framework of the study.

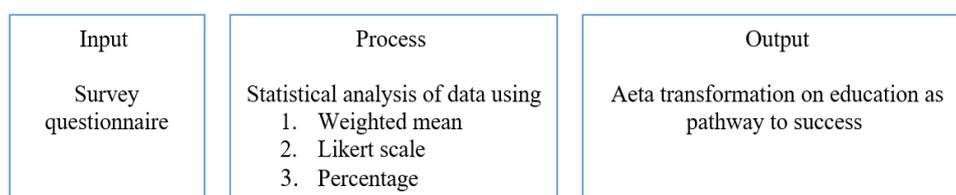


Figure 1. The Paradigm/Framework of the study.

The first frame shows the study's input, which is to determine the perspective of Indigenous Peoples (IPs), as education is a key to success. The process, as seen in the second frame, involves analyzing data vital to this research. The output in the third frame would be the educational success of IPs in completing tertiary education in the Philippines.

## 6. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 3. School Support of Aeta as Pathway to Success in Education.

Parameter No.	Parameter	Weighted Mean	Descriptive interpretation	Rank
1	The school community members actively support the acceptance and equal treatment of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) within the school environment.	4.32	Moderately supported	1
2	The institution offers tailored programs and services that specifically support the needs of Indigenous Peoples (IP) students.	3.73	Moderately supported	5
3	The school community supports a friendly and approachable atmosphere for Indigenous students, encouraging positive interactions.	3.51	Moderately supported	9
4	The curriculum supports the provisions of the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) Law, ensuring relevance to IP students' rights and welfare.	3.57	Moderately supported	6.5
5	The institution actively supports cultural awareness and sensitivity among faculty and staff, fostering an inclusive educational environment.	3.57	Moderately supported	6.5
6	Indigenous culture and traditions are supported and thoughtfully integrated into specialized social science subjects, enhancing cultural understanding.	3.57	Moderately supported	6.5
7	The institution allocates significant resources to support services for Indigenous students, ensuring their academic success and well-being.	3.23	Supported	10
8	The institution cultivates a positive social and organizational environment that supports the overall development of all students, including Indigenous students.	4.11	Moderately supported	4
9	The institution provides consistent and adequate support and guidance for Indigenous students through faculty and academic staff.	4.13	Moderately supported	3
10	Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students are equally supported by the institution's programs, promoting inclusivity and equal opportunities.	4.29	Moderately supported	2
	Overall weighted mean	3.80	Moderately supported	

Table 3 shows that the study results reveal that the school community moderately supports Indigenous Peoples (IPs) in various aspects of the educational environment, with an overall weighted mean of 3.80. The highest-rated element is the active support for Indigenous students' acceptance and equal treatment, with a mean score of 4.32, ranked first. The result is consistent with the study of Dumlao and Agbayani [10]: "Inclusive policies and active community engagement greatly enhance Indigenous students' sense of belonging and acceptance within the school environment."

Programs regarding inclusivity of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students: mean score 4.29, second place. The result is in line with Peters and Waterman [11] who identified the role of equitable institutional programs in promoting inclusion as an agent of change, demonstrating that our institution is growing in terms of equal opportunity. Equally important are the actions of faculty and academic staff to support Indigenous students, with consistent guidance and support, who receive a mean rank of 4.13 and place third. According to UNESCO [12] teachers of all levels must be actively involved in promoting inclusive education.

The sixth-ranked aspect that obtained a mean score of 3.57 was a moderate agreement for (3.57) cultural awareness and sensitivity of faculty/staff, the integration of Indigenous culture into specialized subjects, and the alignment of the curriculum to the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) Law. The results resonate with the works of Smith [13] who stressed that the need for adequate integration of Indigenous culture and alignment of curricula with Indigenous rights necessitates a long-term engagement of an institution for this process to be effective. Ranked 10th, with a mean score of 3.23, the lowest-rated was the allocation of significant resources to support Indigenous students. This finding aligns with Hall and Patrinos [14] who reported low funding as a general barrier to the achievement of Indigenous students. Besides, creating a friendly and approachable atmosphere for Indigenous students was also noted with a mean score of 3.51, which ranked ninth, suggesting that efforts to foster a welcoming school environment may need to be improved.

Overall, these findings point to ways that, while there is moderate support for Indigenous students in the school community, schools should create a supportive and welcoming environment, including more resources and cultural sensitivity training. These initiatives reflect what is best globally and further fortify the pathway towards higher education opportunities for Indigenous students.

Table 4 reveals the peer support Indigenous students received, with a weighted mean of 5 overall and categorized as 'Supported,' as shown in Table 4. It is a promising sign. It underscores the positive influence of student/staff and student/student interactions in fostering Indigenous students' success in the school context.

The item with the highest rating (with a mean rank of 4.49, ranked first) was "Student peers assist in developing and enhancing the social skills in Indigenous students by providing assistance." Indigenous students appear to experience social connection and personal growth due to peers, further supporting the findings of Sreckovic, et al. [15]. They emphasized the role of peer assistance in the formation of vital social skills and confidence to learn in students in their schools.

Table 4. Peer support of Aeta as pathway to success in education.

Parameter No.	Parameter	Weighted mean	Descriptive interpretation	Rank
1	Student peers actively support Indigenous students in academics and social interactions.	3.75	Supported	8
2	Indigenous students are highly supported by non-Indigenous peers through respectful and nondiscriminatory treatment.	4.19	Supported	5
3	Indigenous students receive consistent support from school friends when assistance is needed.	3.46	Supported	10
4	Non-Indigenous peers demonstrate support by respecting cultural diversity and differences.	3.73	Supported	9
5	Student peers provide strong support and encouragement for Indigenous students to participate in school activities.	3.89	Supported	7

Parameter No.	Parameter	Weighted mean	Descriptive interpretation	Rank
6	Indigenous students' peer groups offer alternative sources of support when needed.	3.94	Supported	6
7	Student peers highly support Indigenous students by understanding and considering their unique needs.	4.30	Supported	4
8	Indigenous students receive supportive treatment from non-Indigenous peers, fostering better relationships and maturity.	4.46	Supported	2
9	Student peers actively support Indigenous students by appreciating and acknowledging their unique cultural practices, rites, and rituals.	4.31	Supported	3
10	Student peers contribute to the development and enhancement of Indigenous students' social skills through their support.	4.49	Supported	1
	<b>Overall weighted mean</b>	<b>4.05</b>	Supported	

Similarly, the item 'Indigenous students are claimed to receive supportive treatment from non-Indigenous peers, leading to better relationships and maturity' received a mean score of 4.46, ranked second. The result aligns with the findings of Harris and Harris [16] which showed that respectful and supportive peer interactions can mutually enhance the health and growth of Native students.

Student peers actively support Indigenous students with a mean score of 4.31 (rank-3) while appreciating and acknowledging their unique cultural practices, rites, and rituals. The result highlights how peer recognition and respect for culture play a significant role in peer interactions and aligns with the idea that peers with cultural awareness and sensitivity will create a safe space. Prehn, et al. [17] noted that many Indigenous students lack adequate support for their cultural identity in school, emphasizing the need for greater cultural visibility, recognition, and encouragement within educational spaces. Similarly, Ryan, et al. [18] found that Indigenous researcher peers play a crucial role in providing inspiration, moral support, and a sense of community in academic settings. Together, these insights highlight how culturally grounded peer relationships enrich educational experiences and foster shared aspirations for meaningful change.

Equally noteworthy, other items, such as "Indigenous students' peer groups offer alternative sources of support when needed" (3.94, ranked sixth) and "Student peers provide strong support and encouragement for Indigenous students to participate in school activities" (3.89, ranked seventh), also garnered strong support, reinforcing the belief that peer groups provide a network of support and encouragement. "Indigenous students receive ongoing support from friends at school when assistance is required" (3.46, ranked tenth) scored the lowest. This result underscores the potential for improvement in ensuring that Indigenous students continue receiving ongoing support when required.

Overall, the findings emphasize the importance of student and peer support in the educational success of Indigenous students. Developing social skills that promote respect and embrace cultural diversity, establishing appropriate peer relationships that support Indigenous students, and fostering mutual respect are essential. Nonetheless, the need for more effective, reliable support from school friends and classmates remains along with the opportunity to address areas lacking peer support.

The data presented in Table 5 was obtained through collation and highlights the significance of family support in the educational attainment of Indigenous students. The overall weighted mean score of 4.23, categorized as "Supported," indicates that Indigenous families strongly endorse their children's education across multiple dimensions. This support is rooted in the belief that education can help overcome ignorance and poverty, reflected in a mean score of 4.47. Such perceptions suggest that Indigenous families view education as an effective strategy to address socio-economic challenges they face.

**Table 5.** Family support of Aeta as a pathway to success in education.

Parameter No.	Parameter	Weighted mean	Descriptive interpretation	Rank
1	The Indigenous family supports the decision of the student to pursue higher education.	3.60	Supported	10
2	Other family members provide support by completing college or pursuing a college degree.	4.35	Supported	3
3	The family provides financial support for the student's college education.	4.25	Supported	6.5
4	The family offers moral support for the student's college education.	4.22	Supported	8
5	The family believes that education will support them in overcoming ignorance and poverty.	4.47	Supported	1
6	Parents regularly provide support by monitoring or checking the academic performance of the Indigenous student.	4.20	Supported	9
7	Parents actively support the planning of policies and school procedures.	4.25	Supported	6.5
8	Family members work diligently to provide financial support for the student's education.	4.28	Supported	4
9	The Indigenous student receives support by participating in and leading extracurricular and co-curricular activities.	4.42	Supported	2
10	Parents dedicate time and support to assist with the academic-related activities of the student.	4.26	Supported	5
	<b>Overall Weighted Mean</b>	<b>4.23</b>	<b>Supported</b>	

This finding aligns with the research of [Smith and Wilson \[19\]](#) who found that education can elevate individuals out of poverty and empower Indigenous communities. The item, "The other family members support the student to graduate or obtain a college degree" (4.35, ranked third), underscores the importance of family members beyond parents in shaping the educational culture within Indigenous families. Additionally, the support for extracurricular and co-curricular activities, as indicated by the item, "The Indigenous student receives support by participating in and leading extracurricular and co-curricular activities" (4.42, ranked second), plays a vital role in the holistic development of students.

These findings strengthen earlier research highlighting the multidimensional nature of family support. High ratings for statements such as "*The family provides financial support for the student's college education,*" "*The family offers moral support for the student's college education*" (4.22, ranked eighth), and "*Parents dedicate time and support to assist with academic-related activities*" (4.26, ranked fifth) illustrate the significant role that Indigenous families play in sustaining both the financial and emotional needs of learners. This is similar with [Patle \[20\]](#) who emphasized that family involvement—including support for extracurricular engagement—helps develop vital life skills such as teamwork, leadership, time management, and communication. Furthermore, [Prabhakar, et al. \[21\]](#) stressed that the family environment often extends beyond the nuclear structure; extended family members contribute to students' academic success, social development, and emotional well-being through intergenerational knowledge sharing and stress-buffering mechanisms.

Conversely, the item, "The Indigenous family supports the decision of the student to pursue higher education" (3.60, ranked tenth), indicates some hesitation or challenges within certain Indigenous families regarding higher education pursuits. This aligns with the study by [Martinez, et al. \[22\]](#) which suggests that although some parents value education highly, barriers such as financial constraints or cultural factors may limit full family support. In conclusion, these results indicate that family support plays a significant role in achieving the educational success of Aeta students.

**Table 6** reveals the analysis of individuals from Indigenous cultural communities on how they perceive community support for education in their community. The results show that the overall mean ( $M = 2.09$ ) for

community support for education in Indigenous cultural communities is perceived as "Not Supported." The data indicate that Indigenous people are under-involved in supporting educational outcomes for the youth, with the gaps in the communities being clearly visible.

Items with the lowest overall scores—such as “*Indigenous professionals actively support the Indigenous Cultural Community by contributing to its development*” (1.13, rank 1), “*The Indigenous Cultural Community provides a supportive environment conducive to mainstream education*” (1.12, rank 2), and “*The members of the Indigenous Cultural Communities support the awareness of the educational needs of Indigenous youth*” (1.18, rank 3)—indicate notably limited direct engagement from the communities. This pattern aligns with the findings of Sianturi, et al. [23] who demonstrated that in school settings, cultural factors significantly shape parental involvement, with participation often constrained by culturally inappropriate practices and unsafe institutional regulations.

**Table 6.** Community support of Aeta as a pathway to success in education.

Parameter No.	Parameter	Weighted mean	Descriptive interpretation	Rank
1	Indigenous professionals actively support the indigenous cultural community by contributing to its development.	1.13	Strongly not supported	9
2	The indigenous cultural community provides a supportive environment conducive to mainstream education.	1.12	Strongly not supported	10
3	The members of the indigenous cultural communities support the awareness of the educational needs of Indigenous youth.	1.18	Strongly not supported	6.5
4	Leaders in indigenous cultural communities make efforts to support sending indigenous youth to school.	2.11	Not supported	4
5	Indigenous institutions within the Indigenous cultural communities support learning opportunities for the youth.	1.96	Not supported	5
6	Strong communication and collaboration among indigenous support centers to support educational initiatives exist.	1.18	Not supported	6.5
7	The indigenous cultural communities support the accessibility of indigenous knowledge and cultures to the community.	2.29	Not supported	3
8	The communication between the indigenous cultural communities and educational institutions is supportive and adequate.	1.54	Not supported	8
9	The indigenous cultural communities are open to supporting extension programs offered by educational institutions.	4.39	Supported	1
10	The indigenous cultural communities actively seek and accept support for the educational development of indigenous youth.	3.99	Supported	2
<b>Overall weighted mean</b>		<b>2.09</b>	<b>Not supported</b>	

Although leaders within the Indigenous Cultural Communities show some initiative in supporting youth education—such as efforts to send Indigenous youth to school (2.11, rank 4) and the presence of Indigenous institutions that offer learning pathways (1.96, rank 5)—these remain among the lowest-rated indicators, reflecting limited leadership engagement and insufficient educational support within the communities. This supports with the findings of Queupil and Álvarez-Figueroa [24] whose systematic review revealed that multicultural educational leadership involving Indigenous communities occurs mainly within formal K–12 settings, where community leaders collaborate with students, principals, and teachers. However, Lowe, et al. [25] highlighted persistent barriers—including indifference, resource limitations, and leadership challenges—that continue to constrain Indigenous students’ access to cultural programs, even as families consistently advocate for strong language and cultural education.

Strong communication and collaboration among Indigenous support centers to support educational initiatives exist (1.18, ranked 6), and the communication between the Indigenous Cultural Communities and educational

institutions is supportive and adequate (1.54, ranked 8). These findings are also strongly supportive of the notion that there is weak communication and collaboration between Indigenous communities and educational institutions. Johnson [26] notes that one of the main barriers to supporting Indigenous students in their academic journeys is the lack of communication between these two systems. However, higher scores were noted for two items as depicted through which areas received community regimes (4.39, ranked 9): "The Indigenous Cultural Communities are open to supporting extension programs offered by educational institutions" (3.99, ranked 10). "The Indigenous Cultural Communities actively seek and accept support for the educational development of Indigenous youth." Though there appeared to be a scarcity of active support in the community, these results suggested a readiness within the broader community to engage with outside educational programs that benefited Indigenous youth. The result aligns with Martinez and Garcia [27] who observed that Indigenous communities are generally receptive to outside educational initiatives that appreciate their cultural values and aid in advancing their children.

Overall results demonstrate the need for more community involvement and collaboration to support Indigenous youth in their education. Despite some interest in providing outside education, the absence of internal support and engagement in the community proves most concerning. Addressing these gaps and creating a more supportive environment for Indigenous students is critical and must be done with the efforts of community leaders and educational institutions.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The motives behind success were situated within how education was perceived by Aeta Indigenous Peoples (IPs), specifically examining the factors that mediate the educational success of Indigenous students in the Philippines. Aeta Indigenous Peoples perceived education as an effective tool to combat various issues, including poverty and ignorance. Aeta Indigenous students are often financially and morally supported by their families. Indigenous and non-Indigenous students also receive a lot of positive reinforcement towards academic and social success. However, the school community offers moderate support, and there is still room to grow in terms of more integration of Indigenous culture and greater resource allocation to create an inclusive environment. There is little community support, particularly none from Indigenous cultural communities supporting education in general. The findings show that positive aspects such as family, peer, and school support are tempered by weak community involvement, which poses a barrier to the educational success of Indigenous students. If the gap is resolved, the Aeta Indigenous Peoples will transform their insights on education as a pathway to success into a tangible reality.

## 8. RECOMMENDATION

It is suggested that academic institutions better support Aeta Indigenous learners by incorporating Indigenous worldviews into the curriculum and allocating resources to address their unique needs. Instead of shutting the door to diversity, schools can create a space that encourages peer mentorship programs, intercultural activities, and an understanding of each other out of mutual respect.

More effort must be made to engage the families, such as through workshops on the value of education and financial aid, so Aeta Indigenous students have the support they require at home. Schools should work with Indigenous cultural communities and encourage them to collaborate with schools to develop educational learning opportunities and resources.

Finally, empowerment programs, especially for Indigenous women, should include leadership education, digital literacy, and scholarships for post-secondary institutions, as points of entry into academia are a significant barrier to success. Aeta Indigenous Peoples are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of the educational system, and proper measures in place can help them widen access to further education.

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**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The Ethical Committee of the President Ramon Magsaysay State University, Philippines has granted approval for this study on 21 April 2022 (Ref. No. UREER202203-ED)

**Transparency:** The author states that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

**Competing Interests:** The author declares that there are no conflicts of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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