

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Empowering Indigenous Youth Through Education: The Role of TIPSFI in Countering CPP-NPA Recruitment in Talaingod, Davao del Norte

Bismark D. Gumela<sup>1\*</sup>, Osmalik D. Tayaban<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>56<sup>th</sup> Infantry (Tatag) Battalion, Philippine Army, Talaingod, Davao del Norte, Philippines. ORCID: Bismark D. Gumela: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-0000-430X>  
<sup>2</sup>OJ2, AFP, Camp General Emilio Aguinaldo, Quezon City, Philippines, ORCID: Osmalik D. Tayaban: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2462-7798>

\*Corresponding author: [bgumela@gmail.com](mailto:bgumela@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of the TATAG IP Students Foundation Incorporated (TIPSFI), a community-based initiative established by the 56th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army to counter CPP-NPA recruitment of Indigenous youth in Talaingod, Davao del Norte. For years, the absence of public education enabled left-leaning groups to establish Salugpungan Schools, which became recruitment hubs for insurgents. Launched in 2022, TIPSFI supports former Salugpungan students through scholarships, livelihood assistance, and leadership programs, aiming to develop productive, pro-government citizens. Using a descriptive-correlational design, the study involved 127 purposively selected respondents: 28 TIPSFI scholars and 99 tribal datus. Data were gathered through a validated bilingual questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and non-parametric tests in SPSS. Findings reveal that TIPSFI was highly effective in protecting youth from recruitment and strengthening ideological resilience, with an overall average weighted mean (AWM) of 4.30, rated “Very High.” Its most notable impacts were in preventing CPP-NPA recruitment and radicalization while expanding access to formal education. Challenges encountered by scholars were minimal (overall AWM = 1.53), though limited access to digital learning tools was noted. Statistical results showed significant correlations between perceived effectiveness and respondents’ role and educational attainment, with tribal leaders and direct beneficiaries giving higher ratings. Age also influenced perceptions of challenge seriousness, with younger and older scholars reporting greater difficulties. Overall, the study affirms that TIPSFI provides an inclusive model for countering insurgency through education, cultural integration, and community engagement, offering insights for sustaining peace in conflict-affected areas.

**Keywords:** Community-based education, CPP-NPA recruitment, Indigenous youth, TIPSFI

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## INTRODUCTION

The protracted war of Communist Party of the Philippines–New People’s Army (CPP-NPA) against the Government of the Philippines for almost six decades have even systematically exploited the lack of education, specifically the Indigenous youth in the Philippines as one of the primary tool in recruiting members and supporters as desperation to sustain their armed struggle (Engelbrecht, 2024; NCIP, 2021). This is evident in the remote ancestral domains of the municipality of Talaingod, Davao del Norte, where the absence of DepEd schools created a vacuum that resulted in low literacy levels among the Indigenous youth. The dire need for schools was exploited by the left-leaning organizations and established alternative community learning centers called Salugpungan Schools as a guise and indoctrinated the illiterate students to discredit and undermine the government efforts while introducing revolutionary ideology. These 20 Salugpungan Schools in Talaingod, Davao del Norte, became the main pipeline for the recruitment of NPA units and the creation of underground mass

organizations (Cervantes, 2019; Nepomuceno, 2024; Palicte, 2019).

As a result, the Talaingod Manobo youth became the primary victims of this exploitation due to limited access to basic education, geographic disadvantage, and economic deprivation. This vulnerability is compounded by the erosion of trust in the government’s efforts and the glorification of the revolutionary rhetoric introduced by the alternative school. As a result, most of the recruited NPAs in the Southern Mindanao Region are from these Salugpungan Schools (Bajo, 2020; Parrocha, 2021; Sy Egco, 2024). Notably, some students from the Salugpungan Schools were exploited by left-leaning organizations annually during the “*Manilakbayan*” event by being sent to the streets of Metro Manila to participate in rallies or demonstrations in Davao City, often without a complete understanding of their rights and the cause they were fighting for. Thus, these oblivious IP youths were able to capture the sympathy of unwary individuals, rally public support for the organizers’ cause, which sowed resentment toward the military and the government (Luczon and Rosete, 2021; Cabalza and Aurelio, 2021; Calayag, 2018).



**Figure 1.** A former Salugpungan student, prior to becoming a TIPSFI scholar, was involved in rallies in Metro Manila organized by activist groups (Photograph Copyright by Al Jazeera, 2018)

The situation changed upon the creation of NTF-ELCAC under the presidency of Rodrigo Roa Duterte in 2017, wherein the CPP-NPA structure was significantly diminished through community support programs and internal security operations

(Fabe and Toledo, 2024; Sumad-on, 2021). However, poverty and lack of education are still prevalent, especially in Talaingod, and addressing these root causes is imperative to deter NPA recruitment.



**Figure 2.** The TATAG IP students foundation incorporated (TIPSFI) scholars.

In response to these challenges, the 56th Infantry (TATAG) Battalion of the Philippine Army, under the leadership of COLONEL OSMALIK D. TAYABAN, created the community-based education initiative of TATAG IP Students Foundation Incorporated (TIPSFI) with the aid of various stakeholders on 30 June 2022 (Moreno, 2022). This strategy is long-term, with the primary goal of addressing the educational needs of Talaingod Manobo youth who were previously students of Salugpungan Schools. It also aims to develop them into leaders and productive members of society, enabling them to address and solve the prevailing socioeconomic challenges in their ancestral land of Talaingod. The TATAG IP Students Support Program has provided

a wide array of services to 30 Talaingod Manobo students, such as scholarships, board and lodging, livelihood projects, and vocational training (Francisquete, 2023; Padillo, 2023). To have a sustainable and dependable source of funds, COLONEL TAYABAN, in collaboration with the Local Government Units, Non-Government Organizations, and other stakeholders, launched the creation of the Tatag IP Students Tourism Center, which was inaugurated in August 2023 at a total project cost of Php 30 million (Mata, 2024). The tourism center features several amenities, including a swimming pool, a function hall, a restaurant, and cottage accommodations. The revenues collected from the tourism center provided comprehensive financial

assistance to scholars, including allowances and dormitory expenses. Additionally, the tourism center employed the Talaingod Manobos, which significantly helps them support their financial needs and boosts the tourism sector in the municipality (Palicte, 2023).

While numerous anecdotal evidence and testimonials suggest that TIPSFI has significantly helped and changed the lives of scholars who were previously students of Salugpungan, there is a need for empirical data backed by various research to understand the true significance and impact. Specifically, it remains unclear how the program became effective in protecting the Talaingod Manobo youth from the propaganda of left-leaning organizations and the CPP-NPA, while transforming their perspectives on the pro-government approach. Likewise, existing studies on counterinsurgency often overlook educational initiatives designed to deter radicalization, especially among indigenous populations.

Many international studies support the idea that peace education efforts have effectively countered insurgent forces, including a study by Sheikh (2023) in Pakistan, research by Manma (2021) in India, and a survey on UNICEF's efforts by Biswas (2018). However, there are limited studies in a localized Philippine setting, particularly in indigenous communities remain scarce. Therefore, this study addresses the gap by evaluating the effectiveness of TIPSFI in countering the recruitment of Talaingod Manobo youth from the perspectives of beneficiaries (scholars) and community leaders (datus). The generated findings contribute to researchers and AFP units in areas, tackling the same issue to inform strategies in peacebuilding and protecting vulnerable communities from ideological manipulation by left-leaning organizations and the CPP-NPA.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Research design

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design, aligned with Creswell's (2014) research approach, which

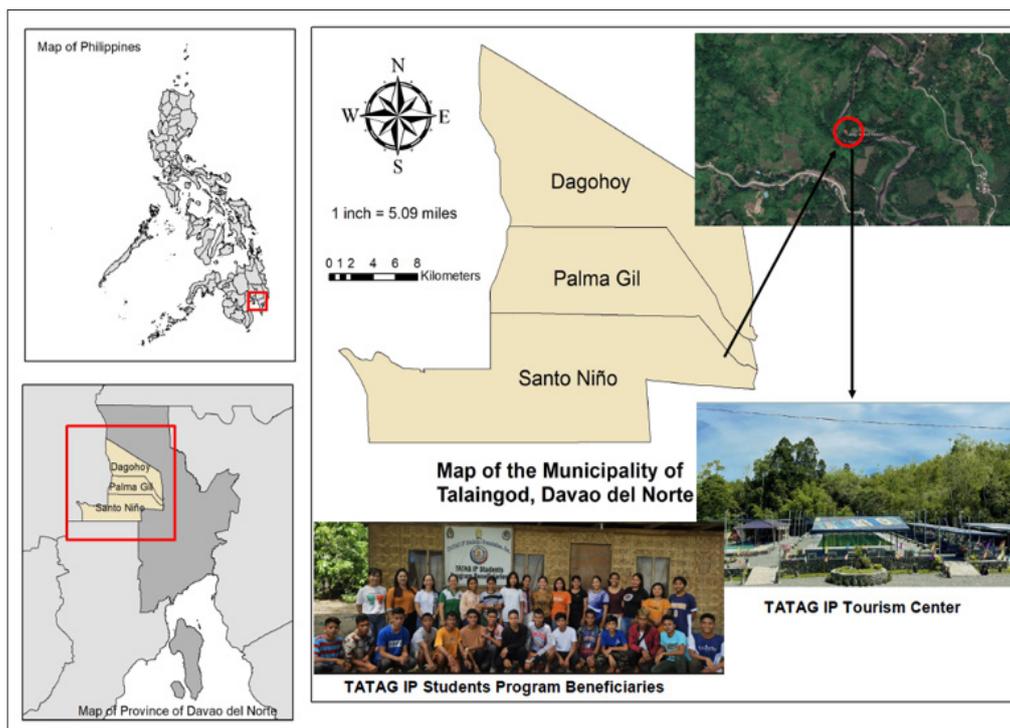
is deemed appropriate for describing existing phenomena and investigating relationships between independent and dependent variables without experimental manipulation. This design is suitable for assessing the effects of TATAG IP Students Foundation Incorporated (TIPSFI) on countering CPP-NPA recruitment and the radicalization of Talaingod Manobo youth. Moreover, it allowed the researchers to describe the perceived effectiveness of the TIPSFI's educational initiatives and to explore possible correlations between the respondents' profiles and the effectiveness of these initiatives, as well as the challenges encountered.

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### Participants and sampling technique

The study employed purposive sampling, selecting 127 key informants who were directly involved in or impacted by the implementation of TIPSFI in Talaingod, Davao del Norte. The municipality of Talaingod, Davao del Norte, is a geographically isolated and disadvantaged area (GIDA) in the Davao Region of Southern Mindanao (Camilo, 2024). The municipality is composed of three (3) main barangays—Sto. Niño, Palma Gil, and Dagohoy—which encompass 99 remote sitios accessible only through unpaved roads and trails.



**Figure 3.** Site of the study area showing the location of TATAG IP tourism center and the beneficiaries of TATAG IP students program.

## Research instrument

The researcher developed a bilingual questionnaire in English and Cebuano to assess the effectiveness and problems encountered with the TIPSFI. Additionally, the instrument was designed to capture the perspectives of both beneficiaries and the community regarding its impact and relevance.

The questionnaire is divided into three parts. The first part gathered the respondent's profile. It has six items, including the group affiliation, age, gender, marital status, educational background, and monthly household income. The second part of the questionnaire consists of ten items rated on a five-point Likert scale to assess the effectiveness of TIPSFI initiatives in countering CPP-NPA influence in Talaingod, Davao del Norte. Part 3 of the questionnaire includes 10 items on a five-point Likert scale to be rated exclusively by the scholars to identify the challenges that they faced during the implementation of the program. To ensure the validity of the instrument, three experts were sought for face and content validation. The expert's comments and advice were taken into consideration during the refinement of the questions, structure, and relevance. Also, to ensure the instrument's validity, it underwent face and content validation by a panel of five experts in Indigenous education, community development, and counterinsurgency. Their comments guided the refinement of item phrasing, structure, and cultural appropriateness. The bilingual format was intentionally adopted to accommodate the linguistic preferences of the respondents, ensuring clarity, accessibility, and accurate responses from both TIPSFI scholars and tribal leaders.

## Data gathering procedure

After ensuring the content validity of the questionnaire, approval was sought from the Municipal Tribal Office to ensure adherence to the cultural sensitivity of the Talaingod Manobos.

Likewise, the researchers also sought approval from the three Barangay Chairmen of Sto. Nino, Palma Gil, and Dagohoy to have access and coordination of the sitios under their jurisdiction. Additionally, the researchers coordinated with the Operations Officer of the 56th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army and the Chief of Police of the Talaingod Municipal Police Station to submit a formal request for approval, as well as to secure security forces to accompany them when heading towards the perilous sitios. This ensured that the researchers and respondents were safe during the data-gathering process.

During the data collection process, the researchers used paper-based surveys with a consent form that explained the study's purpose in the Manobo language. Additionally, a translator was employed to assist tribal *datus* who had difficulty understanding the Cebuano language, thereby maintaining the integrity and accuracy while respecting the respondents' preferred language.

## Data analysis procedure

For statistical analysis, the researchers utilized the SPSS software for different methods in each research aspect. The respondent profiles utilized descriptive statistics through frequency and percentage. Meanwhile, the average weighted mean (AWM) was used to assess the effectiveness of TIPSFI's initiatives in counteracting CPP-NPA recruitment propaganda among Talaingod Manobos and the severity of the problems faced by the scholars. The AWM model used is based on the research of (Sözen and Güven, 2019). For the relationship between profile variables and effectiveness, the researchers used the chi-square test for categorical variables and Spearman's rho for ordinal variables. Finally, the Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H tests were used to demonstrate significant differences at a 0.05 significance level among the variables of scholar profiles in terms of problem severity.

**Table 1.** The five-point likert scale was adopted from the study of Sözen and Guven (2019).

Scale	Scale limits	Description	Verbal interpretation
5	4.21 - 5.00	Strongly Agree	Very High
4	3.41 - 4.20	Agree	High
3	2.61 - 3.40	Neutral	Moderate
2	1.81 - 2.60	Disagree	Low
1	1.00 - 1.80	Strongly Disagree	Very Low

## RESULTS

### 1. Profile of Respondents

#### In terms of TIPSFI Scholars

As shown in Table 2, the respondents are 28 TIPSFI scholars who were former Salugpungan students and the direct beneficiaries of the initiative. Most respondents (82.14%) were aged 19–25, and according to a study by Akinyetun (2023), this age bracket is highly vulnerable to insurgent recruitment. Only 7.14% were 18 years old and below, and 10.71% were 26 years old and above. In terms of sex, males outnumber females (57.14%

vs. 42.86%), indicating that the initiative is inclusive of both sexes.

For the marital status, the majority were single (78.57%), indicating that they were focusing on their prospective career and rebuilding their lives from previous exploitation by left-leaning organizations. For educational attainment, 71.43% were enrolled in college, while 28.57% were currently pursuing secondary education. This indicates that TIPSFI's role is to prioritize the needs of beneficiaries in advancing their status and well-being through education. For the economic profile of the scholars, nearly all respondents (96.43%) came from families with an income of less than Php 5,000 per month, which highlights their financial deprivation status.

**Table 2.** Profile of TIPSFI Scholars.

Variables	Categories	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Age	18 and below	2	7.14
	19–25	23	82.14
	26 and above	3	10.71
Sex	Male	16	57.14
	Female	12	42.86

Marital status	Single	22	78.57
	Married	6	21.43
	Widowed	0	0.00
	Separated	0	0.00
Educational Attainment	High school level (undergoing)	8	28.57
	College (undergoing)	20	71.43
Average family income	Below Php 5,000	27	96.43
	Php 5,001 to Php 10,000	1	3.57

### In terms of tribal *datus*

As depicted in Table 3, the study included 99 tribal data points that represent the entire sitios in three barangays of Davao del Norte, providing a comprehensive insight into the effectiveness and problems encountered during the program's implementation. In terms of age, the majority (76.77%) were 56 years old and above, while 23.23% were aged 46–55. This suggests that leadership was traditionally vested in the Manobo elders, who were highly respected for their wisdom, experience, and authority (Diansig et al., 2024). Likewise, all tribal *datus* were male, which is consistent with the traditional Manobo culture wherein the role of *datu* was predominantly acquired by men (Lagman et al., 2022). Also, most of the tribal *datus* were married

(89.90%), with a few identified as polygamous (7.07%) and widowed (3.03%). This emphasizes their role as leaders of large and extended families and clans (Añolga, 2023). Most of the tribal *datus* had limited education: 60.61% had no formal education, 28.28% had reached the elementary level, and only 1.01% had some high school education. This suggests that even tribal leaders experienced a gap in educational access due to the scarcity of DepEd schools in Talaingod, Davao del Norte (Algonos et al., 2024). In terms of income, the majority (54.55%) had a monthly family income between Php5,001 and Php 10,000, while 30.30% earned below Php5,000. These figures suggest that even community leaders in the municipality of Talaingod experience economic hardship, which is one of the poorest municipalities in Davao del Norte Province (Law-ay et al., 2022).

**Table 3.** Profile of tribal *datus*.

Variables	Categories	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Age	46–55	23	23.23
	56 and above	76	76.77
Gender	Male	99	100.00
Marital status	Single	0	0.00
	Married	89	89.90
	Polygamous (multiple wives)	7	7.07
	Widowed	3	3.03
Educational attainment	No formal education	60	60.61
	Elementary level (undergrad)	28	28.28
	Elementary graduate	10	10.10
	High school (undergrad)	1	1.01
Average family income	Below ind5,000	30	30.30
	Php5,001 to Php 10,000	54	54.55
	Php10,001 to Php 15,000	15	15.15

## 2. Level of Effectiveness of TIPSFI as perceived by the respondents

The study investigates the perspectives of 127 respondents on their stance regarding the effectiveness of TIPSFI as presented in Table 4. The results show consistent positive ratings across all ten indicators, with an overall AWM of 4.30, which falls under the category of “Strongly Agree” on the 5-point Likert Scale. Moreover, all the items received a rating of above 4.20, indicating a very high level of perceived effectiveness across the groups of scholars and tribal *datus*. Among these ten indicators, three have been identified as having a significant impact. The highest rating belongs to the role of TIPSFI in protecting the youth from CPP-NPA recruitment, with an AWM of 4.51, which reflects the initiative's success in deterring and preventing the CPP-NPA influence among the Talaingod youth. The second highest item is the effectiveness in preventing radicalization with AWM of 4.45 and the provision of access to education for former Salugpugan students with AWM of 4.41, both of which indicate that the program has succeeded in fulfilling its core strengths, which are education and ideological resistance.

A notable insight can be observed in the convergence and divergence of perspectives of the two respondent groups. The first group, comprising scholars and direct beneficiaries of the TIPSFI initiatives, has emphasized their personal benefits, including providing safe learning spaces, fostering values, facilitating effective transition, and offering educational opportunities. On the other hand, the tribal *datus* have valued the TIPSFI for preserving the unique cultural traits of the Talaingod Manobos and guiding scholars towards the right path, away from the manipulative propaganda of communist groups. Therefore, both groups have equally validated their claims that scholars' testimonies of personal growth through education match the tribal *datu's* observations at the community level, which indicate a reduction in the recruitment of the CPP-NPA in the countryside sitios, both of which were aims and objectives of the TIPSFI. Hence, this dual perspective has strengthened the results and credibility of the findings that, according to the study of Nesterova et al (2022) that the educational programs, such as TIPSFI's inclusive approach, which combines education with the preservation of IP culture, facilitated by community, government, and stakeholder support, are instrumental in successfully repelling insurgent recruitment among IP youths.

**Table 4.** Level of Effectiveness of TIPSFI.

Item	Average Weighted Mean (AWM)	Description
1 TIPSFI helped protect Indigenous youth from CPP-NPA recruitment.	4.51	Strongly agree
2 The program promoted cultural identity and Indigenous pride.	4.27	Strongly agree
3 TIPSFI provided access to quality education for former Salugpungan students.	4.41	Strongly agree
4 The activities of TIPSFI reduced the influence of CPP-NPA ideologies.	4.36	Strongly agree
5 The program strengthened trust between the Indigenous community and the government.	4.33	Strongly agree
6 TIPSFI's livelihood and skills activities empowered youth.	4.28	Strongly agree
7 TIPSFI offered effective psychosocial support for its scholars.	4.26	Strongly agree
8 I observed positive changes in scholars' values and attitudes.	4.22	Strongly agree
9 The program is responsive to the needs of Indigenous youth.	4.25	Strongly agree
10 TIPSFI is effective in preventing the radicalization of Manobo youth.	4.45	Strongly agree
<b>Overall AWM</b>	<b>4.30</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>

### 3. Level of seriousness of problems encountered during TIPSFI's initiative implementation

The survey of 28 TIPSFI scholars reveals the challenges they encountered during the implementation of TIPSFI to date. Notably, the problems were generally minimal, with an overall AWM of 1.53, which fell into the “Not Serious” bracket. However, there is one slight concern: the lack of proper school supplies and materials, such as computers and printers, with an AWM of 2.18, which places it at the level of Slightly Serious. This suggests that scholars, like other students, face gaps in materials and require ongoing support, particularly to access basic devices in the competitive digital knowledge landscape, which can improve their academic performance and alleviate the burden of submitting projects (Kunjiapu et al., 2025).

It is also duly noted that there is a significant difference, “slightly serious and “not serious”. The problems under the “not serious” category are the main objectives of the TIPSFI, which want to address, reflecting the psychosocial and security issues

that the TIPSFI aims to address, such as safety from CPP-NPA members, and reducing discrimination. Meanwhile, the “slightly serious” problems reflect the persistent gaps in resources and materials needed in mainstream education to succeed. Therefore, the project demonstrated its effectiveness in addressing the study's objectives. However, it also indicates that, despite safety and other psychological stressors, such as discrimination and threats, not being considered significant barriers, resource gaps still pose an obstacle to academic performance.

Moreover, all nine other items fell below the range of 1.50, which highlights that the scholars did not view the financial constraints, discrimination, stress, and safety as major impediments that would hinder their studies. The least serious problem the scholars encountered is the threat from their former affiliates in left-leaning organizations, with an AWM of 1.40. These show that TIPSFI is highly effective in reassuring the scholars of their safety as well as the security mechanism.

**Table 5.** Evaluation of problems affecting TIPSFI implementation.

Item	Average Weighted Mean (AWM)	Description
1 I experienced financial difficulties in sustaining my daily school needs.	1.46	Not serious
2 My family was threatened or discouraged by a leaning organization	1.40	Not serious
3 I was affected emotionally or psychologically due to my past experiences.	1.44	Not serious
4 I struggled to adjust to formal education after attending Salugpungan schools.	1.42	Not serious
5 Transportation to and from school was difficult.	1.49	Not serious
6 I lacked proper school supplies or materials, such as computers and printers.	2.18	Slightly serious
7 There was limited food or allowance support during my studies.	1.48	Not serious
8 I felt discrimination or misunderstanding because I am an IP.	1.50	Not serious
9 I had difficulty balancing responsibilities in school and at home.	1.47	Not serious
10 I was worried about my safety due to past connections.	1.45	Not serious
<b>Overall AWM</b>	<b>1.53</b>	<b>Not serious</b>

#### 4. Relationship between the level of effectiveness of TIPSFI and the profile of respondents

As shown in Table 6 below, the study identified two significant relationships between the effectiveness of TIPSFI and the respondent's profile. First is the educational attainment ( $r = -0.215$ ,  $p = 0.014$ ), which indicates that respondents with lower levels of formal education, specifically the tribal datu, rated the program as more effective. This finding is supported by research from Saavedra et al. (2025) in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan, who found that individuals, despite having no formal schooling, appreciated the program's opportunities for IP youths under their respective communities who want to pursue their future dreams and careers. They were real witnesses to the change that transpired in their respective communities, such as the emergence of scholars and the decline in youth recruitment into armed groups. Therefore, these individuals, who typically come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, strongly recognized

and valued the program's effectiveness.

Meanwhile, the variable of role ( $r = -0.178$ ,  $p = 0.020$ ) also showed a significant relationship, indicating that scholars who are direct beneficiaries have tended to evaluate the program positively. This suggests that their initial perspective on the program, with the TIPSFI's educational, psychosocial, financial, and livelihood support, led to a higher level of satisfaction. These beneficiaries gain a clearer understanding of the program's impact, having personally experienced the TIPSFI's programs, particularly its core strengths, such as transitioning from the risk of exploitation by the CPP-NPA recruitment to scholars receiving structured support and safe learning environments. On the other hand, other variables, such as average family income, gender, age, and marital status, were found to have no significant relationship with the program's effectiveness. This suggests that the program was inclusive of all demographic profiles, regardless of gender, age, income, or marital status.

**Table 6.** Statistical relationship between TIPSFI's effectiveness and demographics.

Profile	Correlation coefficient (r)	Sig. (p-value)	Decision
Role	-0.18	<b>0.02</b>	Reject the null hypothesis.
Gender	0.06	0.46	Do not reject the null hypothesis.
Marital status	-0.02	0.78	Do not reject the null hypothesis.
Age	-0.04	0.57	Do not reject the null hypothesis.
Educational attainment	-0.22	<b>0.01</b>	Reject the null hypothesis.
Average family income	-0.08	0.32	Do not reject the null hypothesis.

#### 5. Difference in the level of seriousness of the problems encountered in the TIPSFI across the profile of scholars

As shown in Table 7 below, among the variables examined in the TIPSFI scholars, age was the only factor that had a significant effect on how seriously they perceived the problems they faced ( $p = 0.03$ ). The deeper reasons are twofold. Those older scholars aged 26 years and above had the highest rank (56.83), followed by those scholars aged 18 and below (54.00). The scholars aged 19 to 25, who comprised the majority of the scholars, had the lowest rank (39.61). This means that older and younger scholars perceived the challenges as more serious than those in the 19 to 25-year age group.

Since older scholars in TIPSFI are the majority who are parents with children, they struggle to balance their dual responsibilities, which include caring for their toddlers and pursuing their own studies. This dual burden creates stress not only in terms of time management but also financially, as they must divide or save their budgets from the TIPSFI that were intended for educational materials between their children's needs. In Manobo communities where family obligations are highly valued, parents are often expected to prioritize household and livelihood duties over personal development (Trinidad-Lagarto et al., 2024). Thus, older scholars may feel guilty or pressured when their education takes time away from their families, making their challenges more significant.

Meanwhile, younger scholars, most of whom are still in high school, face a different set of vulnerabilities from the

older ones. Having previously studied in Salugpungan Schools that were administered by left-leaning organizations, they encountered difficulty adjusting to the more structured and competitive learning environment of DepEd schools. Salugpungan schools followed an alternative curriculum that was often ideologically influenced and less academically rigorous, leaving gaps in basic competencies such as mathematics, science, and English. When these students shift to DepEd schools, they struggle to cope with higher academic expectations, formal assessments, and the use of standardized materials (Llemit, 2019). Moreover, these incompliances led to the complete termination and revocation of the permit to operate in 2019 by DepEd. Furthermore, because they are still in a formative stage of identity development, younger scholars may feel more insecure and vulnerable to peer pressure or stigma, especially in mixed school environments where IP students may face discrimination (Blanco, 2024). These factors combined make their perception of problems more serious compared to their peers aged 19–25, who are already more mature and better adjusted to the demands of higher education.

On the other hand, no significant differences were found in ( $p = 0.05$ ), marital status ( $p = 0.74$ ), educational attainment ( $p = 0.60$ ), or average monthly income ( $p = 0.12$ ). This indicates that the seriousness of problems did not vary across these factors. This suggests that scholars from diverse backgrounds share similar perspectives when encountering problems, showing the program was fairly implemented across all scholars, regardless of their background.

**Table 7.** Mean ranks and significance of problems by demographic variable.

Variable	Categories	Mean rank	Test statistic	Sig. (p-value)	Decision
Gender	Male	37.64	1.98	<b>0.05</b>	Do not reject the null hypothesis
	Female	49.68			
Marital status	Single	41.36	0.60	0.74	Do not reject the null hypothesis
	Married	40.17			
Age	18 and below	54.00	7.04	<b>0.03</b>	Reject the null hypothesis.
	19–25 years old	39.61			

Educational Attainment	26 and above	56.83	1.03	0.60	Do not reject the null hypothesis.
	High school (undergoing)	39.75			
Average Monthly income	College (undergoing)	44.50	1.54	0.12	Do not reject the null hypothesis.
	Below Php 5,000	40.05			
	Php 5,001 to Php 10,000	76.00			

## DISCUSSION

### Previous conflicts and deceit of left-leaning organizations

From the perspective of TIPSFI scholars, the initiative has not only provided them with access to quality education but also raised awareness about the deceit of left-leaning organizations. These scholars were exploited and brainwashed by the propaganda, including the idea that the government was neglecting them and that the government forces would seize their ancestral lands. It encouraged them to hold protest rallies and demonstrations in the streets of Metro Manila and Davao City, known colloquially as “*bakwits*” for evacuees. Upon rescuing and immersing them in this program, the scholars felt that they had been given a second chance at life through safe and values-based learning. This experience aligns with existing studies, which demonstrate that peace education programs in conflict-affected areas, particularly in indigenous communities, can help restore learners’ sense of dignity, cultural identity, rights, and security (Bacha, 2025; Lugo Miole, 2024). Moreover, the implementation of TIPSFI supports the findings of Elkhaili and Sempijja (2025) in their study on the life of ex-child soldiers in Sierra Leone, it was found that education rooted in cultural respect and community participation is a powerful tool for preventing radicalization and mitigating the effects of armed conflict.

### Raising quality education and culture preservation

In the eyes of the tribal *datus*, the program was viewed as a means to protect their younger generation from losing their distinct cultural identities and restore peace to their ancestral lands. Since they are the eyes and ears of their respective communities, they observed that fewer young people were being recruited into communist-terrorist groups upon the implementation of the TIPSFI program, and many were now focused on completing their education to have a brighter future. This reflects that the community-based educational program is not only effective in providing quality education to the young IPs of Talaingod but also in supporting the local peacebuilding and cultural preservation (Laltoog, 2024).

### Education as a Path to Progress and Peacebuilding

A key finding of this study is that the researchers observed the success of the TIPSFI program, which varied based on participants’ level of education and their roles in the community. For example, scholars and tribal *datus* have different perspectives and insights within the program. Scholars viewed the program as a means to support their personal growth, specifically in terms of education. At the same time, tribal *datus* valued the program for its protection of their culture and guidance of the younger generations in the role of scholars, enabling them to achieve their dreams of becoming productive members of society. Although the two groups of respondents hold different views, both have concluded that programs such as TIPSFI were indeed helpful in deterring radicalized groups like CPP-NPA from their malicious propaganda

targeting vulnerable individuals like IP youths in Talaingod (Nesterova et al., 2022). On the other hand, the results also showed that the program’s success was not affected by the respondents’ variables, specifically their age, gender, and the average monthly income. This denotes that the TIPSFI program with holistic development worked well for different kinds of people, no matter their background or personality (Eden et al., 2024).

However, some minor problems have arisen, as reported by the respondents, including a lack of school supplies, such as computers and laptops, which pose a challenge to achieving the full educational growth of the scholars. Also, age played a role in how scholars saw these problems. Younger scholars were more worried about emotional support and materials, while older scholars were more focused on access to resources and future opportunities. This concept aligns with Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory, which posits that individuals’ needs and experiences evolve as they mature (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Uy and Garcia, 2021). Programs like TIPSFI need to recognize these differences in order to provide more effective support to each age group.

## CONCLUSION

The study on TIPSFI revealed that the initiative has been highly effective in countering CPP-NPA recruitment through a culturally grounded, education-centered approach that supports the basic needs of the Talaingod Manobo youth. With an overall strong agreement on the program’s impact, TIPSFI successfully provided educational access, promoted ideological resilience against manipulative propaganda, and maintained support from various government agencies and private stakeholders. The program was particularly appreciated by tribal leaders, who represent all sitios in Talaingod, as well as the scholars, who are the direct beneficiaries. This demonstrates its effectiveness in both the leadership and youth sectors. While minor logistical concerns—such as a lack of school supplies—were identified, the overwhelming consensus was that the program met its objectives and reassured respondents of their safety and inclusion.

Interestingly, while most problems were not perceived as serious, older and younger scholars reported slightly greater difficulties. Notably, the inclusive success of the program, across variables such as gender, income, and educational background, demonstrates that TIPSFI operates in an equitable manner. Ultimately, the initiative shows how education, when culturally grounded and community-supported, can be a powerful tool in preventing radicalization and restoring opportunities among historically marginalized groups that the CPP-NPA previously exploited.

Based on the findings above, future programs should continue and expand education-based efforts like TIPSFI that focus on helping Indigenous youth who are at risk of being recruited by armed groups or insurgents like the CPP-NPA. Additionally, more support should be provided to ensure that scholars have complete access to school supplies, learning materials, and digital tools, helping them succeed in their studies and strive to become future leaders. Notably, special attention should also be given to older and younger schol-

ars by providing extra support to meet their different needs.

It is also crucial to strengthen partnerships among local governments, private stakeholders, tribal leaders, and state forces (AFP/PNP) to ensure safety and foster community trust in the program. Moreover, training and support for tribal elders should be enhanced, as they play a crucial role in guiding their communities. Finally, future studies and education plans should use the lessons learned from TIPSFI to create long-term programs that prevent radicalization and support Indigenous youth in other conflict-affected areas.

Therefore, the researchers recommended that the TIPSFI program be sustainable by strengthening the partnerships among LGUs, private stakeholders, tribal leaders, and the security forces, including AFP and PNP units, to ensure safety and trust within the community. Moreover, future programs like this education-based initiative will be implemented in conflict-affected areas under the continuous threat of the CPP-NPA to protect the IP youths, while also providing them with support in the form of learning materials and digital tools to enable them to compete in this digital generation.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Bismark Gumela: Writing – original draft, Resource, Conceptualization, Methodology, Data gather and analysis, Presentation, review & editing, Osmalik Tayaban Validation, Conceptualization, Guidance, Supervision

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## DECLARATION

### Informed consent statement

Prior to the data gathering procedure, the researchers rendered a courtesy call to the Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative (IPMR) to seek advice and guidance on how to honor the Talaingod Manobos while adhering to the international research ethics. During the data gathering procedure, the researchers assigned alphanumeric codes and anonymized the participants to adhere strictly to the ethical and privacy protocols. The researchers and translators clearly explained to the respondents their explicit rights to decline or withdraw during the data-gathering procedure without any repercussions or consequences.

### Conflict of interest

None

### AI Disclosure

The authors declare that no Artificial Intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted technologies were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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