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TRANSCENDING BORDERS: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FILIPINO ENGLISH TEACHERS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Jay Anthony T. Lanoy, LPT, Melody M. IDUL, PhD
Graduate School Department, Assumption College of Nabunturan Poblacion, Nabunturan, Davao de Oro

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of Filipino English teachers in the United States of America. Purposive sampling technique was used, which included 7 Filipino English Teachers with at least 2 years of teaching experience in the Philippines and who are currently teaching in the USA for not more than five years. This study utilized a qualitative research design through in-depth interviews, specifically phenomenological, using a validated interview questionnaire. The findings revealed that while the transition was often rewarding, it was also marked by emotional strain, cultural disorientation, and instructional shifts. Participants encountered significant differences in student behavior, classroom management, communication styles, and educational expectations. Despite these challenges, they demonstrated resilience by adopting student-centered approaches, integrating technology, embracing differentiated instruction, and developing coping strategies such as building relationships, seeking collegial support, and maintaining emotional well-being. Cultural values such as adaptability, patience, and empathy played a central role in their adjustment process.

KEYWORDS - *Filipino English Teachers, Challenges, Lived Experiences, Coping Mechanisms, Insights, Best Practices, United States of America, Phenomenology*

INTRODUCTION

Teacher migration has grown as global education evolves and English remains the dominant international language. The United States has actively recruited teachers from countries such as the Philippines, India, Jamaica, and South Africa to address shortages in subjects like math, science, and special education while also benefiting from their cultural perspectives (OECD, 2019; Schmidt et al., 2010; Santoro, 2014). Filipino teachers, known for strong English training and solid academic backgrounds, are increasingly part of this workforce, yet they face challenges adapting to new teaching methods, certification processes, classroom management styles, and cultural expectations (Bista, 2015).

Beyond professional hurdles, many also experience emotional stress, limited institutional support, and systemic barriers, which affect their confidence and performance (Hutchison & Jazzar, 2007; Dunn, 2011; Adams & Kirova, 2007). Despite these struggles, their adaptability and insights contribute greatly to classroom engagement and culturally responsive practices. Their experiences offer lessons that can guide improvements in both U.S. and Philippine education systems (Gonzalez, 2018).

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The worldwide demand for qualified English teachers has led many educators from countries like the Philippines to pursue teaching jobs abroad. Filipino English teachers are highly regarded for their strong English skills and solid teacher training, which has made them a key part of the global teaching workforce. In the United States, ongoing shortages of educators in subjects like ESL, special education, science, and math have driven the recruitment of teachers from other countries, including the Philippines (Hutchison & Jazzar, 2007).

Research shows that Filipino teachers working overseas often face complex challenges. They must adjust to new cultural contexts, go through strict licensure processes, and reshape their professional identity to meet new expectations (Schmidt et al., 2010; Dunn, 2011). On top of proving their competence, they must also adapt to classroom dynamics and teaching styles that differ from those in the Philippines. Despite these obstacles, they are often recognized for their strong work ethic, flexibility, and creativity in bridging educational gaps (Ronquillo, 2014; Nuñez, 2020).

Many Filipino teachers encounter considerable challenges when adjusting to the U.S. educational system despite being well trained and adaptable. Unlike the more centralized system in the Philippines, the United States has a decentralized structure in which each state sets its own curriculum, certification rules, and evaluation procedures, creating confusion and additional steps for foreign-trained educators (Darling-Hammond, 2000). The process of obtaining certification often involves credential evaluations, extra coursework, or state exams like the Praxis, which can cause delays, financial strain, and emotional stress (Carroll, 2011; Larsen, 2012).

Filipino teachers need to adapt to very different classroom practices and expectations. U.S. schools tend to favor student-centered learning, project-based tasks, and differentiated instruction, which contrast with the more structured, teacher-

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directed methods common in the Philippines (Gonzales, 2006; Pang & Sablan, 2013). Classroom management can be difficult due to cultural differences in student behavior and the diversity present in many American classrooms.

Teachers also face pressure to meet standardized testing goals, integrate technology effectively, and follow data-driven instruction (Moir, 2010). Although some districts provide mentoring and training, others offer little support, leaving teachers to cope on their own (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). Despite these obstacles, Filipino educators often show resilience and a strong work ethic, underscoring the need for more consistent and culturally responsive support systems.

OBJECTIVE

This study seeks to understand the lived experiences of Filipino English teachers in the United States through a phenomenological approach. It focuses on the challenges they encounter while transitioning into the U.S. education system and examines the strategies and coping mechanisms they use to overcome these difficulties. The research also explores their insights on teaching in American classrooms and highlights the best practices they have developed in their profession. By reflecting on these experiences, the study aims to provide lessons and practices that can help enhance English language instruction in the Philippine education system.

Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Filipino English teachers as they transition into teaching roles in the USA?
2. What are the challenges experienced by Filipino English teachers in teaching English in the USA?
3. What are the coping mechanisms of the participants in the challenges that they face while teaching in the USA?
4. What insights did the participants gain in their teaching transition from the Philippines to the USA?
5. What are the best practices of Filipino English Teachers in teaching English in the United States of America?

METHODS

This section describes the methodology used for the study as well as the collection and handling of the data.

Research Design

A qualitative phenomenological research design was used in this study, which thoroughly explored, understood, and interpreted a phenomenon. Creswell (2012) asserts that qualitative research aims to gather precise information about people's ideas and motives to gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of human behavior. Its goal is to document a thorough comprehension of the topic from a human standpoint.

Research Participants

This study used purposive sampling to select participants who fit the focus of the research. Seven Filipino English teachers were chosen based on specific criteria: they had at least two years of teaching experience in public or private schools in the Philippines and had been teaching in public or private schools in the United States for no more than five years. These criteria ensured that the participants brought solid teaching experience and cultural background from the Philippines while still being in the early stages of adapting and integrating into the U.S. education system.

Research Locale

This study was carried out in five U.S. states where the participants were employed during the conduct of this study: North Carolina, North Dakota, New Mexico, Mississippi, and Nevada. In North Carolina, one teacher works with grades 9 and 10 at Hertford County High School. Two participants in North Dakota teach grades 9–12 at Red River High School. In New Mexico, one participant teaches grades 8 and 9 at Española Valley High School, and the other handles grades 9 and 11 at Bloomfield High School. In Mississippi, one teacher instructs grade 4 at Isable Elementary School. In Nevada, another teaches grades 6–8 at Coral Academy of Science Las Vegas Centennial Hills Campus.

Research Instrument

The researchers utilized a validated, researcher-made interview guide. This instrument contained open-ended questions carefully structured to capture the lived experiences of Filipino English Teachers in the USA. In line with Creswell (2009), the development and use of the interview guide followed systematic procedures to ensure the accuracy, reliability, and depth of the data collected.

Data Collection

The study followed several steps to ensure proper data collection. Participants were first selected through purposive sampling. Signed consent forms outlining conditions and agreements were then secured. The researchers provided an orientation and overview of the study's flow and methods before preparing materials such as the interview guide and audio or video recording devices. Interview schedules and modalities were arranged in agreement with each participant. After the in-depth interviews, the recordings were transcribed to capture the participants' experiences. All recordings were then securely stored for safekeeping.

Data Analysis

Following Creswell's (2009) steps, the researcher first organized and prepared the data by transcribing interviews, arranging field notes, and categorizing information. After coding, thematic analysis was carried out to identify recurring themes, ideas, and patterns. Through this process, the researcher uncovered key insights into the participants' lived experiences, including the challenges they faced, the coping strategies they used, and the best practices they developed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The structured and emerging themes provided a basis for expanding the discussion of the study's findings. Each theme was carefully reviewed and evaluated in relation to existing literature and previous studies to assess its alignment and relevance.

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Overall Experience Transitioning from Teaching in the Philippines to Teaching in the USA. Filipino English teachers described their move to teaching in the United States as both rewarding and challenging. They highlighted five recurring themes: the process brought growth but also difficulty, prior international experience eased adjustment, the transition was long and daunting, it was not easy, and it often felt overwhelming. Many experienced personal and professional growth despite cultural and instructional hurdles, consistent with Santoro and Major's (2012) findings on migrant teachers. Those with previous exposure to international or U.S.-based systems adapted more readily, as noted by Peeler and Jane (2005). Many felt overwhelmed in the early stages, managing new strategies and norms, which reflects Bense's (2016) discussion on emotional labor.

Most Surprising Aspects of Teaching in the American Education System. Filipino English teachers encountered several unexpected aspects when teaching in the United States. They noted that students freely voiced their opinions, requiring a shift from an authority-centered approach to a more participatory styl. Many were surprised by some students' lack of motivation despite access to abundant resources, underscoring the challenge of fostering intrinsic motivation (Assor et al., 2005). Teachers also observed that U.S. classrooms emphasize alignment with standards, deeper instruction, and evidence-based assessment, prompting significant adjustments in their teaching methods.

Interactions with Students and Colleagues. Filipino English teachers in the United States went through major adjustments in their social and professional interactions. They had to adapt to a work culture that values personal space and privacy, striking a balance between building rapport and maintaining professional boundaries, reflecting the U.S. context of individualism and low-context communication. Over time, their communication skills and cultural adaptation improved through exposure and practice, consistent with Kim's (2001) cross-cultural adjustment theory.

They also had to adjust to students' openness in expressing opinions and questioning ideas, aligning with Hofstede's (2001) low power distance concept. Respect for punctuality and privacy in the workplace further shaped their routines.

Most Significant Cultural Differences in the American Classroom. Filipino English teachers in the United States experienced notable cultural differences that reshaped their teaching and interactions with students. One major adjustment was the informal nature of student–teacher relationships. In contrast to the deference to authority common in the Philippines, U.S. students addressed teachers by their first names, voiced disagreements, and spoke casually, behaviors tied to individualism and mutual respect.

Teachers with strong English skills still needed time to adjust to regional accents, reflecting the diversity of World Englishes, supporting the work of Walker, 2010. Respect was not automatically given but earned over time, requiring teachers to build credibility and trust.

Handling Language Differences or Accents of Both the Participants and Their Students. Filipino English teachers in the United States navigated diverse accents and speech patterns through patience, flexibility, and self-awareness. They often adjusted to students' ways of speaking, used repetition for clarity, and relied on conversational fluency to build rapport, aligning with the idea of a negotiated "third place" in communication. Over time, their accents improved through immersion, focusing more on intelligibility than perfection, aligning with Derwing & Munro, 2005.

Teachers also emphasized honesty about their non-native status, which fostered inclusivity and empowered students, supporting Mahboob's (2010) view that non-native teachers offer unique strengths.

Challenges in Adapting to U.S. Methodologies and Curricula. Filipino English teachers faced major adjustments in pedagogy and curriculum as they entered the U.S. education system. Integrating technology into daily instruction was another challenge, requiring them to use digital tools as primary teaching resources rather than supplements.

Differentiated instruction demanded lesson adjustments to meet diverse learning needs, often in collaboration with support staff, acknowledging the work of Tomlinson, 2014). Finally, they noted that schools only provided learning standards, leaving them to exercise professional judgment in selecting materials and strategies, reflecting the U.S. emphasis on teacher autonomy and responsibility.

Strategies and Coping Mechanisms the Participants Acquired or Developed to Deal with Cultural Differences and Integration Challenges. Filipino English teachers in the United States adopted a variety of strategies to adjust to cultural differences and integration challenges. They learned to integrate technology into their teaching, using learning management systems, educational software, and digital assessments to improve instruction, consistent with Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010. Teachers also made an effort to learn about American culture and student backgrounds, aligning with Nieto's (2010) call for cultural competence in education.

Keeping an open mind, taking one step at a time, and not taking students' words personally helped them manage stress and adapt gradually, consistent with Berry's (2006) findings on transformative and cross-cultural learning. Finally, building strong relationships with students emerged as a key coping strategy, fostering mutual respect and engagement as described by Noddings (2005).

Getting Support from Fellow Teachers in Dealing with Challenges. Building relationships within the school community was crucial for Filipino teachers adjusting to the American education system. They sought support through different ways such as reaching out by email, approaching colleagues, and connecting with both Filipino and American peers. Email communication with mentors and instructional coaches provided timely guidance and reassurance, supporting

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Avalos's (2011) point that continuous feedback strengthens teacher development. Approaching colleagues for advice offered emotional support and practical strategies, echoing Kelchtermans's (2006) findings on collegial support enhancing teacher well-being.

Teachers also benefited from guidance offered by school interventionists, who provided both technical and emotional assistance, consistent with Le Cornu's (2013) emphasis on non-evaluative support networks. These interactions support Ingersoll and Strong's (2011) view that mentorship and peer collaboration improve adaptation and retention in new teaching environments.

Managing Stress and Maintaining One's Well-Being While Adjusting to the Teaching Role in the USA. Filipino teachers in the United States faced mental and physical challenges as they adjusted to new school cultures and responsibilities. They practiced mind-conditioning by staying optimistic and reframing stress as temporary, a strategy that strengthened resilience. Finding time to travel gave them mental breaks and opportunities to appreciate their new environment, while open communication with school administrators helped clarify expectations and secure needed support (Johnson et al., 2005).

Engaging in personal hobbies and building connections within the Filipino community also provided cultural comfort and emotional support, helping them feel less isolated.

Most Valuable Lessons the Participants Have Learned from Teaching in the USA. Filipino English teachers in the United States gained meaningful lessons that reshaped how they teach and interact with students. They learned that building relationships and trust is central to creating a respectful and engaging classroom, supporting findings that strong teacher–student connections improve learning and behavior, which reflects the work of Reyes, 2015.

Adaptability, boldness, and flexibility emerged as key traits for thriving in U.S. classrooms. Teachers discovered that managing students effectively required assertiveness and clear expectations alongside empathy, which supports the work of Bautista, 2020. They also learned to adjust teaching methods and curriculum strategies to meet shifting demands, echoing studies on cultural and pedagogical agility. Finally, they developed emotional resilience by not taking students' words personally, viewing misbehavior as part of adolescence or cultural differences rather than personal attacks.

Changes on Teaching and Education Perspectives Since Started Working in the USA. Teaching in the United States reshaped Filipino English teachers' views on their profession, their roles, and their learners. They also recognized the need for continuous growth, moving beyond lecture-based methods toward learner-centered approaches, as Avalos (2011) emphasizes. A welcome change was less paperwork, which allowed more focus on student learning, echoing the findings of Darling-Hammond et al. (2017).

Teachers also had to establish new classroom management strategies suited to different behavioral norms. Finally, they observed that many U.S. students place less importance on education, prompting teachers to rethink how to motivate learners, consistent with Ryan and Deci's (2000) work on intrinsic motivation.

Best Practices in Teaching English in the USA. Filipino English teachers in the United States have adopted a variety of practices that enhance learning and reflect their adaptability to new classroom dynamics. They integrate technology such as learning management systems and interactive applications to engage students and support multimodal learning, aligning with Trust & Whalen, 2020. Building personal connections with students has been essential for classroom management and participation, echoing the importance of culturally responsive relationships. Teachers also shifted toward output-based projects, using performance assessments to promote deeper understanding, reflecting the study of Villanueva & Dela Cruz, 2018.

Collaboration with colleagues through professional learning communities helps teachers co-plan lessons and gain new strategies. Lessons have become more student-centered and collaborative, encouraging inquiry and active learning, underscoring Nuñez, 2020. Teachers employ diverse methods and differentiated instruction to meet varied learning needs, while also fostering a love for reading through routines and rich literary materials. Encouraging critical thinking through questioning and reflective tasks further strengthens students' analytical skills, echoing the work of Aguilar, 2021.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study examined the lived experiences of Filipino English teachers in the United States and revealed a journey marked by both challenge and growth. Transitioning from Philippine to American classrooms was described as rewarding yet demanding, with teachers navigating cultural differences, emotional pressures, and significant shifts in pedagogy. Differences in student behavior, communication norms, classroom management, and the integration of technology required them to rethink and reshape their teaching practices.

Despite these challenges, Filipino teachers demonstrated remarkable resilience, adaptability, and a strong commitment to their profession. They embraced student-centered learning, differentiated instruction, and relationship-building as key strategies for success. Emotional resilience, open communication, and continuous learning emerged as essential tools in maintaining their effectiveness and well-being. These findings affirm that teaching is not only a technical role but a deeply human endeavor shaped by cultural identity and personal values. Filipino teachers bring discipline, empathy, and creativity that enrich classrooms abroad, while their experiences highlight the need for stronger support systems, mentoring, and professional development to help educators thrive in diverse and evolving educational environments.

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AREA FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study sheds light on the experiences of Filipino English teachers in the United States, but it also opens several directions for future inquiry. One important area is the reintegration of teachers who return to the Philippine education system after working abroad. Research could examine how international experiences reshape their teaching philosophies, instructional methods, and professional identities, as well as what support they need to transfer their acquired skills effectively.

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