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THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FILIPINO SPED TEACHERS IN THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT
This study explored the lived experiences of Filipino Special Education (SPED) teachers in the United States, focusing on their professional, cultural, and personal transitions. Employing a narrative phenomenological approach, the research engaged ten Filipino SPED teachers with at least one year of teaching experience in various U.S. states. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically to identify patterns in adaptation strategies, instructional practices, cultural integration, and identity negotiation. Findings revealed that participants navigated multi-dimensional transitions, balancing professional expectations with cultural authenticity. Key themes included professional adaptation and flexibility, culturally responsive instructional practices, integration of Filipino values, engagement with American educational norms, and resilience amidst challenges such as stress, burnout, and systemic barriers. The study highlighted the importance of peer mentoring, institutional support, and reflective practice in successful adaptation. Based on these findings, a Professional Development Program is proposed to support internationally recruited Filipino SPED teachers, emphasizing cultural competence, pedagogical flexibility, and holistic professional growth. The study contributes to understanding the transnational experiences of educators and informs strategies for enhancing teacher preparedness and efficacy in cross-cultural contexts.

KEYWORDS: *Filipino Sped Teachers, Lived Experiences, Professional Adaptation, Cultural Integration, Phenomenology, United States, Professional Development*

I. INTRODUCTION

The global migration of teachers, especially Filipino Special Education (SPED) teachers to the U.S., has increased due to the demand for qualified educators and better opportunities. Filipino teachers are recognized for their work ethic and English skills, addressing critical shortages in the U.S. special education workforce. However, there is limited research on their experiences, particularly the cultural and professional challenges they encounter, including acculturative stress. Using Berry's Acculturation Theory, the challenges of balancing Filipino values with U.S. education standards are explored. Integration, the most effective adaptation strategy, allows teachers to merge cultural identities with American educational practices, whereas marginalization can lead to alienation.

This study applies Berry's Acculturation Theory to examine the experiences of Filipino Special Education teachers in the U.S., highlighting four acculturation strategies: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. Assimilation involves adopting American norms at the expense of Filipino identity, while separation resists American influences, preserving Filipino practices. Integration combines both cultural values, enhancing instructional methods and cross-cultural understanding. Marginalization leads to feelings of alienation and reduced professional effectiveness. The study illustrates the cultural negotiations these educators undertake, informing broader discussions on the experiences of transnational educators.

This qualitative phenomenological study investigated the experiences of Filipino Special Education (SPED) teachers in the United States, focusing on their transitions in personal, cultural, and professional aspects as they adapted to a new educational context. Involving ten experienced Filipino SPED teachers from various U.S. states, the research employed thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews to identify patterns in their acculturation strategies, challenges, coping mechanisms, and identity negotiations. The study was specific to Filipino SPED teachers and excluded newly arrived educators to focus on those with familiarity in the American special education system.

This study provides insights for educational stakeholders in the Philippines and the U.S., informing CHED on teacher education curriculum design aligned with global standards. It emphasizes the adaptation of Filipino SPED teachers in American schools, their support needs, and the importance of culturally responsive practices for learners with disabilities. Additionally, it highlights the value parents may find in the diverse backgrounds of immigrant teachers and suggests future research themes on immigrant teacher experiences and education policy reform.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

This study sought to explore and understand the lived experiences of Filipino Special Education (SPED) teachers in the United States of America. Through in-depth qualitative inquiry, the study aimed to generate meaningful insights that informed a Professional Development Program.

Specifically, the study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Filipino Special Education (SPED) teachers in the United States?

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2. What key themes emerge from the narratives of the informants?

3. What are the implications of the identified themes?

4. Based on the study's findings, what Professional Development Program can be proposed for the internationally recruited Filipino SPED teachers in the United States?

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The experiences of Filipino Special Education (SPED) teachers in the United States demonstrate the complexities of professional migration, cultural adjustment, and identity negotiation. While they contribute to the special education teacher deficit in the United States (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2021), they struggle to adapt to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), individualized education plans (IEPs), and inclusion practices in the United States (Kim et al., 2023). Despite difficulties with documentation, behavior control, and cultural hurdles (Sleeter & Carmona, 2020), their Filipino ideals of malasakit (empathy) and pakikipagkapwa-tao (shared humanity) promote inclusive teaching (Del Carmen & Aguila, 2023). According to Berry's Acculturation Theory (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2020; Salami et al., 2022), teachers in the Philippines face challenges such as assimilation, integration, and marginalization due to poor institutional support (CHED, 2022). Many, however, get meaning and resilience from their diaspora contributions (Bhandari, 2023).

Assimilation among Filipino Special Education (SPED) teachers in the United States is a complex interaction of cultural, professional, and psychological elements. Assimilation is frequently criticized worldwide for encouraging migrants to shed their local identity in favor of the mainstream culture (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2021). In the United States, Filipino SPED teachers confront the combined task of meeting American educational requirements while also exhibiting cultural variety (Jiménez, 2022). Professionally, they integrate into a system that relies on international recruiting to cover teacher shortages, particularly in SPED and STEM sectors, demonstrating a structural reliance on migrant educators (Valerio, 2021).

The separation of Filipino Special Education (SPED) teachers in the United States, as conceptualized by Berry (1997), indicates the deliberate preservation of Filipino culture and identity while limiting involvement with mainstream American society. This dissociation is often caused by emotional resilience and community reliance in the face of cultural dissonance and institutional injustices (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2021). Many Filipino SPED teachers are deeply connected to their heritage through language, faith, and peer networks. However, racial microaggressions and exclusion in schools might exacerbate social withdrawal, increasing reliance on Filipino communities for emotional and professional support (Salazar & Uy, 2023).

Integration of Filipino Special Education (SPED) teachers in the United States is a balanced adaptation that embraces American educational approaches while preserving Filipino cultural values. This approach shows cultural negotiation and professional development, allowing teachers to perform well within the American educational system while preserving their heritage (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2021). Through integration, Filipino SPED teachers implement pedagogical approaches such as Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and inclusive strategies stipulated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Despite the difficulties in integrating Philippine-based training with US standards, they demonstrate adaptation and resilience in negotiating these educational and cultural transformations (Echavez et al., 2024).

Filipino Special Education (SPED) teachers in the United States experience marginalization when they are isolated from both their home culture and the host society, resulting in professional and social isolation (Berry, 1997). Many confront systemic challenges, such as licensure delays, certificate recognition concerns, and a lack of institutional support, which prevent them from fully integrating into the US education system (Tabilin & Tombali, 2024). According to research, these teachers frequently face subtle discrimination and professional undervaluation, especially in districts with little cultural awareness (Echavez, Mallari, & Laborte, 2024). Such factors exacerbate perceptions of marginalization and hinder prospects for true inclusion (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2021).

Reflection and meaning-making allow Filipino Special Education (SPED) teachers in the United States to interpret their migration and professional experiences, promoting both personal growth and cultural resilience. They incorporate Filipino values such as malasakit (compassion), bayanihan (community spirit), and pakikisama (social harmony) into special education settings in the United States through reflective practice, resulting in culturally sensitive and inclusive teaching practices (David, Nadal, & Corpuz, 2022). These processes not only assist teachers in navigating identity reconstruction and cultural adaptation, but they also turn problems into sources of empowerment and professional purpose within the larger context of international education (Gale & Parker, 2021).

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a Narrative Phenomenological Research Design to investigate the lived experiences of Filipino Special Education teachers in the United States, with an emphasis on professional adaptability, cultural identification, and resilience. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposefully selected individuals who had taught for at least one academic year. The findings were compared to existing Philippine and international research on teacher migration and acculturation. Thematic reflection focused on identity, adaptability, and growth, using reflexive journaling as a support mechanism. Ethical norms guaranteed informed consent, confidentiality, and participant well-being. The study provides culturally relevant insights into the psychological and professional transitions of Filipino SPED instructors abroad.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Problem number 1. What are the lived experiences of Filipino Special Education (SPED) teachers in the United States?

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Theme 1: Journey of Becoming a SPED Teacher in the U.S
This theme investigates the experiences of Filipino teachers transferring into Special Education (SPED) professions in the United States, focusing on the dual nature of their Philippine teaching history as both a strength and a challenge. Despite facing institutional impediments, visa issues, and hard workloads, they demonstrated resilience via teamwork, mentorship, and a strong sense of purpose. Their pursuit of personal and professional progress highlights a transforming journey distinguished by resilience and adaptation, demonstrating how migration can spark renewal and development in both their jobs and personal identities (Tang & Choi, 2021; Watson & Rice, 2022; Gonzalez & Lambert, 2023).

Theme 2: Initial Expectations vs. Actual Experiences in the U.S.
This subject emphasizes the contrast between Filipino Special Education (SPED) teachers' aspirations for teaching in the United States and the realities they faced in American classrooms. While many expected unlimited resources and highly motivated students, they were instead met with problems like as inadequate materials, different learner behaviors, and cultural differences. These experiences required adaptability, empathy, and cross-cultural understanding. The teachers discovered that success in SPED education was dependent on compassion and solid relationships rather than resources alone. Support from fellow Filipino educators and school administrators was critical in easing adjustment and increasing job satisfaction (Tang & Choi, 2021; Watson & Rice, 2022; Alquraini, 2020; Gonzalez & Lambert, 2023; Tuckwiller & Dardick, 2022).

Theme 3: Teaching Strategies that Helped or Did Not Work for Students with Disabilities
This theme focuses on the teaching practices employed by Filipino Special Education (SPED) instructors in the United States and their impact on children with disabilities. The findings indicate that effective SPED training is based on flexibility, inventiveness, and responsiveness to individual requirements. Teachers discovered that varied instruction, hands-on learning, and small-group or customized help increased student engagement and knowledge (Tomlinson, 2017; Chen & Alvarez, 2023; Smith & Johnson, 2021). Consistent routines and positive behavior support increased stability and order (Lee et al., 2022; Simonsen et al., 2008). In contrast, strict, paperwork-heavy, or lecture-based strategies were less effective. Empathy, teamwork, and adaptable, organized approaches are essential components of successful SPED education (Martinez & Thompson, 2024; Lane et al., 2015).

Theme 4: Challenges in Meeting Academic and Behavioral Needs of Students
Theme 4 highlights the significant challenges faced by special education (SPED) instructors in managing the academic and behavioral needs of students with disabilities. These educators struggle with time constraints, high caseloads, and insufficient collaboration with general education teachers. Communication barriers among educators, parents, and IEP teams, often influenced by cultural and linguistic factors, impede effective student support. The demanding nature of SPED work leads to high levels of stress and burnout, exacerbated by unpredictable student behavior that disrupts learning. Overall, the findings underscore the complex demands placed on SPED teachers—academic, behavioral, medical, and administrative—calling for improved systemic support, collaboration, and staffing to enhance teaching effectiveness and student progress. (Johnson & Parker, 2021; Roberts & Kim, 2023; Martinez & Thompson, 2024; Alquraini, 2020).

Theme 5: Adoption of American Cultural Norms and Teaching Practices
Filipino SPED teachers adapted to US education by embracing IEP compliance, individualized instruction, and explicit teaching in accordance with the IDEA framework. They promoted excellent teacher-student connections, used collaborative and student-centered techniques, and used flexible pace to meet students' different learning requirements. Implementing structured US programs like PAX improved behavior and academic outcomes, while incorporating technology and adopting a growth mindset increased engagement and motivation. Continuous professional development helped them adapt to American educational norms, encouraging effective, inclusive, and culturally responsive teaching approaches. (Smith & Nguyen, 2021; Johnson et al., 2022; Martinez & Lee, 2023; Roberts & Kim, 2024).

Theme 6: Changes in Communication Style and Classroom Behavior in the U.S.
Filipino teachers in the United States changed their communication and classroom management approaches by implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and digital technologies such as Class Dojo to encourage positive reinforcement and family collaboration. They switched from authoritative to relational tactics, emphasizing empathy, explanation, and restorative discipline in order to build trust. Consistency in implementing school-wide regulations increased behavioral predictability and teacher collaboration. Furthermore, following evidence-based and crisis management practices, such as Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI), guaranteed safety, professionalism, and legal compliance. These changes indicate a shift towards student-centered, transparent, and culturally relevant classroom approaches. (Sugai et al., 2021; Johnson & Martinez, 2023).

Theme 7: Handling Ethical and Legal Responsibilities under IDEA
Filipino special education instructors in the United States have exhibited a great dedication to ethical and legal responsibilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). They rigorously followed the Individualized Education Program (IEP) criteria by monitoring student progress, maintaining correct documentation, and assuring compliance with legal timelines. (Smith & Johnson, 2021; Chen & Alvarez, 2022). Eachers also accepted their twin roles as legal experts and advocates, supporting student rights in partnership with parents and multidisciplinary teams (Lee & Roberts, 2023; Martinez & Thompson, 2024). Furthermore, they maintained confidentiality by protecting student information and

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maintaining privacy limits, in accordance with both US legal norms and Filipino culture principles of discretion.

Theme 8: Use of Assistive Technology in Supporting Learning

Filipino SPED teachers successfully combined assistive technology and multisensory assistance to improve student learning and accessibility. They employed manipulatives, audiovisual tools, and adaptive technologies including text-to-speech, speech-to-text, and visual timers to increase reading and math engagement and comprehension (Alquraini & Gut, 2020; Reinking & Bradley, 2021). Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices, such as PECS, iPads, and low-tech tools like laminated cards, have increased nonverbal kids' expressive communication and inclusion (O'Neill et al., 2022; Brady et al., 2022). Teachers also emphasized behavioral balance by mixing digital and conventional approaches to promote focus, organization, and adherence to IEP-based modifications (Brown et al., 2021; Carter et al., 2020).

Theme 9: Filipino Values, Customs, or Teaching Approaches Upheld in the U.S. Classroom

Filipino educators in American classrooms preserve values such as respect, discipline, and community through culturally rooted teaching and management methods. They use reinforcement systems, rituals, and nonverbal cues to keep order while creating a supportive, family-like environment. Professionalism, teamwork, and bayanihan (community spirit) inspire their partnership with parents and colleagues, evoking collectivist principles. Their excellent work ethic and dedication, as demonstrated by brigada eskwela, demonstrate resilience and commitment to student success. Teachers encourage literacy, inclusion, and socio-emotional maturation by incorporating Filipino pedagogies and social routines such as greetings and civility, bridging local traditions with global educational methods (Lopez & Tan, 2022; Mendoza et al., 2024).

Theme 10: Connection with Filipino Communities in the U.S.

Filipino educators in the United States connect with Filipino and ethnic populations at various levels in order to balance professional, emotional, and cultural demands. Some select limited involvement to reduce stress and maintain well-being (Santos & Lee, 2021; Ramirez & Nguyen, 2023), while others take on active leadership roles to enhance solidarity and advocacy (Cruz et al., 2022). Professional and social networks—both in-person and online—are essential locations for cooperation, knowledge exchange, and emotional support. These networks assist educators in adapting to educational situations in the United States while maintaining their cultural identity, encouraging resilience, professional growth, and inclusivity in multicultural settings (Santos & Lee, 2021; Cruz et al., 2022).

Theme 11: Engagement or Non-Engagement in American Cultural Activities

Filipino educators in the United States display both selective non-engagement and active participation in American cultural activities, indicating adaptive techniques for cultural balance and professional integration. Some teachers avoid activities that conflict with personal or cultural beliefs in order to maintain their well-being and integrity (Lee & Chen, 2021; Santos & Rivera, 2022; Tan & Alvarez, 2023). Others actively participate in school and community activities to promote adaptability, professional development, and intercultural competency (De la Cruz & Santos, 2021; Li & Fernandez, 2022). Such participation improves relationships, instructional efficacy, and acceptance within host schools, whereas selective engagement allows instructors to keep their authenticity and psychological resilience.

Theme 12: Blending Filipino Cultural Identity with American Practices in the Classroom

Filipino educators in the United States incorporate their cultural identity into American teaching practices through heritage sharing, value integration, and cross-cultural discussion. They blend Filipino traditions, language, and values such as respect, perseverance, and faith into teaching to improve diversity and student participation (Delos Reyes & Tan, 2021; Garcia & Lim, 2023). Teachers construct balanced, student-centered classroom environments by combining Filipino discipline with American innovation and autonomy (Santos & Rivera, 2022). Their emphasis on conversation and mutual respect promotes multicultural awareness and sensitivity (Li & Fernandez, 2022; Santos & Villanueva, 2024). Overall, this integration encourages cultural appreciation, academic drive, and peaceful intercultural learning environments.

Theme 13: Filipino Values and Approaches in Managing Students and Collaborating with Colleagues

Filipino educators use essential cultural values—malasakit (compassion), pakikisama (harmony), bayanihan (cooperation), and lambing (warmth)—to effectively manage students and interact with colleagues. These values promote empathy, teamwork, and supportive relationships, which benefit both intellectual and emotional growth (De la Cruz & Santos, 2021; Gonzales et al., 2023). Pakikisama and bayanihan help teachers foster trust and cooperative learning settings (Santos et al., 2021; Navarro et al., 2023). Expressions of lambing and malasakit boost motivation and teamwork (De Vera & Chua, 2020; Villanueva, 2024). Overall, these relational ideals foster inclusive, caring, and resilient educational communities in diverse cultural settings.

Theme 14: Communication with Parents/Guardians of Students with Special Needs

Communication between Filipino educators and parents of students with special needs combines organized systems with culturally rooted relational techniques. Teachers use school-mandated resources like ClassDojo and emails for accountability, but they supplement them with personal, empathic interactions that demonstrate malasakit (compassion) and cultural awareness (Li & Torres, 2021; Reyes et al., 2022). Research shows that mixing formal and relational communication improves trust, family engagement, and collaboration in special education (Smith & Nguyen, 2023; Navarro & Lee, 2024). Filipino educators bridge professional and personal ties by remaining consistent, positive, and

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culturally relevant, building inclusive partnerships that promote both academic and emotional student development.

Theme 15. Instances of Feeling Disconnected from Both Filipino and American Cultures

Filipino educators in the United States face varied degrees of cultural estrangement, indicating problems to integrate Filipino collectivist principles with American individualism. Some people feel caught between two cultures, leading to disorientation and a lack of belonging (Santos & Cruz, 2021; Lim et al., 2022). Others manage partial disengagement while adapting through reflective and observant learning, which promotes resilience (Smith & Nguyen, 2023). Teachers that successfully integrate both cultures exhibit bicultural competence and job satisfaction (Berry, 2020; Navarro & Reyes, 2023). Maintaining Filipino cultural links abroad—via customs, social networks, and shared values—emerges as a protective strategy that enhances identity, reduces stress, and promotes emotional well-being (Cruz & Lim, 2022).

Theme 16. Managing Challenges like Lack of Resources, Support, or Systemic Obstacles as SPED Teachers

Filipino SPED (Special Education) instructors overcome problems such inadequate resources and structural impediments via collaboration, resourcefulness, and activism. Building professional networks and co-teaching promote mutual support, skill exchange, and higher instructional quality (Lim & Santos, 2021; Navarro & Reyes, 2023). Teachers display resourcefulness by using repurposed resources and communicating with parents and officials to advocate for kids' rights (Cruz et al., 2022; Delos Reyes & Tan, 2021). Institutional support and professional training improve teacher competence, confidence, and retention (Smith & Nguyen, 2023). Overall, teamwork, adaptation, and advocacy stand up as critical tactics for addressing structural and resource-based issues.

Theme 17. Stress, Burnout, and Job Satisfaction of SPED Teachers

Filipino SPED teachers in the United States suffer substantial stress and burnout, but they build resilience and satisfaction via adaptability, coping methods, and strong support networks. Initially overwhelmed by workloads and cultural changes, they learn to cope with stress via self-care, contemplation, and preserving work-life balance (Santos & Lim, 2021; Cruz et al., 2022). A positive viewpoint and intrinsic motivation improve job satisfaction and professional development (Navarro & Reyes, 2023). Despite hurdles, social support and teamwork based on Filipino values such as bayanihan can assist reduce burnout. Overall, resilience, optimism, and social support are identified as critical components in maintaining SPED teachers' well-being and dedication.

Theme 18. Advice SPED teachers in the US to SPED teachers planning to work in the US

Filipino SPED teachers in the United States encourage aspiring educators to choose this field because of its strong professional development, important advocacy work, and rewarding impact. Teaching SPED in the United States provides financial stability, organized development, and opportunities such as H1B sponsorship and residence (Lim & Santos, 2021; Navarro & Reyes, 2023). Despite the emotional burdens, advocating for disabled students provides a sense of purpose and professional satisfaction (Cruz et al., 2022). Witnessing student accomplishment boosts motivation and resilience, whilst positive work settings and collegial support improve overall wellbeing. Finally, Filipino teachers view the U.S. SPED teaching is a fulfilling journey of service, development, and fulfillment.

Theme 19. How this experience shaped their identity as an educator and as a Filipino

Filipino SPED instructors in the United States acknowledged that their foreign experiences had a tremendous impact on both their professional and cultural identities. Professionally, they gained resilience, adaptability, and confidence while navigating a foreign educational system, increasing their competence and self-awareness (Santos & Lim, 2021; Cruz et al., 2022). Personally, teaching abroad strengthened their cultural identification and pride as Filipinos, strengthening qualities like empathy, dedication, and compassion in their work (Cruz et al., 2022). Their capacity to incorporate Filipino values into diverse classrooms boosted their feeling of national pride and bicultural competence, resulting in personal fulfillment and professional performance (Navarro & Reyes, 2023).

Theme 20. How this experience as a special education teacher influenced your teaching methods and educational philosophy over time

The experience of teaching special education (SPED) in the United States dramatically influenced Filipino educators' teaching methods and educational ideologies, encouraging both instructional innovation and philosophical development. To fulfill the unique requirements of students, teachers created adaptive and creative tactics such as differentiated instruction and tailored interventions (Santos & Lim, 2021; Cruz et al., 2022; Navarro & Reyes, 2023). This adaptability supported ongoing professional development and reflective practice. Philosophically, educators supported patience, realism, and comprehensive care, emphasizing social, emotional, and functional improvement alongside intellectual achievement. Filipino SPED teachers redefined success by celebrating modest milestones and encouraging independence, while also building empathy, resilience, and inclusive pedagogical approaches in their classrooms.

Theme 21. Advice SPED Teachers to fellow Filipino SPED teachers who are considering teaching in the US

Filipino SPED professors encourage aspiring educators to prepare professionally, emotionally, and financially for teaching in the United States. Resilience, adaptability, and good organizational skills are required to manage paperwork, behavioral interventions, and legal compliance (Cruz et al., 2022; Santos & Lim, 2021). Financial literacy, life adaptability, and family readiness are all necessary for long-term stability overseas (Navarro & Reyes, 2023). Teachers must accept cultural differences, exhibit humility, and uphold ethical professionalism while constantly striving for improvement. Despite the difficulties, the experience provides personal fulfillment, professional development, and the potential to

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make significant contributions to students' lives through compassion, patience, and tenacity.

Theme 22: Changes or improvements participants like to see in the future of special education in the United States
Participants stressed the need for systemic improvements in US special education, with a focus on greater financing, resources, and staff support to improve instructional quality and teacher well-being (Lim & Santos, 2021; Cruz et al., 2022). Collaboration and training among general and special educators were deemed critical for inclusive practices and student performance (Navarro & Reyes, 2023). Teachers also pushed for more fair resource distribution, smaller class sizes, and trauma-informed, safety-focused programs to address behavioral and mental health issues. Fair salary, professional recognition, and investment in assistive technology were also cited as essential factors in maintaining talented SPED instructors and fostering educational equity across the country.

Problem Number 2. What key themes emerge from the narratives of the informants?
According to the narratives, Filipino teachers transitioned to U.S. special education (SPED) roles by relying heavily on their previous teaching experience in the Philippines. They adjusted through co-teaching, on-the-job training, and professional development in spite of obstacles like visa problems, high workloads, and initial stress (Themes 1, 2, 16, 17). The most successful teaching methods, according to them, were hands-on, differentiated, and multisensory; routines, visual aids, token systems, and adaptable small-group activities supported behavior control and learning (Themes 2, 3, 5, 7).

Cultural adaptation required striking a balance between U.S. Filipino values like malasakit (care), pakikisama (harmony), bayanihan (partnership), discipline, and empathy are combined with SPED legal requirements, such as Individualized Education Program (IEP) compliance, confidentiality, and evidence-based methods. While others felt marginalized or cut off from both cultures, teachers carefully combined Filipino identity with American teaching methods, encouraging intercultural communication, sensitivity, and respect (Themes 4–6, 8–10, 12–15, 19).

In order to overcome obstacles, instructors used individualized supports, mentorship, networking, professional development, and resilience (Themes 16, 18, 21). They also used organized communication technologies (ClassDojo, email). In addition to strengthening pride in Filipino cultural values, their experiences influenced their personal identities and instructional philosophy, encouraging student-centered approaches, creativity, patience, realism, and holistic support (Themes 19, 20).

Lastly, participants pointed up areas where the United States needs to improve. Program specificity, mental health assistance, assistive technology, increased financing, staffing, trauma-informed practices, and better cooperation between general education and special education teachers are all examples of SPED (Theme 22).

Problem Number 3. What are the Implications of the identified themes?
In order to overcome obstacles like visa problems, excessive workloads, and multi-layered responsibilities, the stories show that Filipino SPED teachers must successfully integrate into American classrooms by utilizing their prior teaching experience, resilience, adaptability, and growth-oriented mindset (Implications 1, 3, 16). While maintaining organized routines to assist behavior control and engagement, effective teaching necessitates flexible, student-centered techniques, such as individualized instruction, hands-on learning, small-group activities, and visual supports (Implications 2, 4, 20).

The process of cultural assimilation entails balancing Filipino identity with American educational standards. In order to promote inclusivity, relational teaching, and professional efficacy, teachers frequently repress or modify elements of their cultural identity while maintaining fundamental Filipino values like bayanihan (partnership), pakikisama (harmony), and malasakit (care) (Implications 5, 6, 9–15, 17, 19). Both teacher effectiveness and student engagement are improved by fostering cross-cultural conversation, integrating cultural traditions with American pedagogy, and preserving linkages with Filipino communities (Implications 7, 9, 12, 13, 15).

Collaboration, networking, mentorship, and access to structured support systems—all of which aid in managing stress, burnout, and complicated SPED demands—reinforce professional growth (Implications 16, 17, 18, 21). For individuals thinking about studying in the United States, the advice of seasoned educators highlights the significance of readiness, legal expertise, fortitude, financial readiness, and cultural flexibility. responsibilities of SPED (Implications 18, 21).

Participants conclude by highlighting the need for systemic changes in the United States. In order to maximize student results, SPED should prioritize greater financing, staffing, professional development, assistive technology, mental health and trauma-informed care, and improved cooperation between general education and special education teachers (Implication 22).

Problem Number 4. What Professional Development Program can be proposed for the internationally recruited Filipino SPED teachers in the United States?

Rationale
Filipino Special Education (SPED) teachers transitioning to U.S. classrooms face multifaceted challenges that include adapting to new educational policies, instructional practices, and cultural norms, while maintaining their professional identity and core Filipino values. These challenges can affect teaching effectiveness, professional growth, and well-being. A structured Professional Development Program is necessary to equip internationally recruited educators with the skills, cultural competence, and support systems needed to navigate these transitions successfully, enhance instructional quality, and foster sustainable professional integration.

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General Objective

To design a comprehensive Professional Development Program that supports the professional, cultural, and personal adaptation of Filipino SPED teachers in the United States, promoting effective teaching, cultural integration, and long-term career growth.

Focus Area	Objective	Activities	Resources	Persons Involved	Time Frame	Expected Outcomes
Pre-Departure Preparation & Credentialing	Ensure proper alignment of Philippine qualifications with U.S. SPED requirements	Credential evaluation, bridging programs, orientation/workshops on U.S. education policies, IDEA law, culturally responsive practices; basic training in assistive tech and multi-sensory tools	Orientation modules, bridging courses, assistive technology tools, workshop materials	Teacher candidates, Philippine training institutions, U.S. certification bodies	December - April	Smooth transition, foundational knowledge, early classroom effectiveness
Professional Adaptation & Skill Development	Enhance instructional skills and adaptation to U.S. SPED system	Continuous PD on differentiated instruction, small-group teaching, behavior management, IEP implementation; mentorship, peer collaboration, reflective practice	PD workshops, mentoring guides, peer networks, reflective journals	Teachers, mentors, school administrators	June - August	Improved teaching strategies, effective classroom routines, professional growth
Cultural Competence & Identity Integration	Balance Filipino cultural values with U.S. norms	Cross-cultural training, diversity initiatives, participation in professional networks, engagement with Filipino community groups	Training modules, community networks, diversity resources	Teachers, cultural trainers, Filipino community organization	July - May	Strong cultural identity, enhanced communication, successful professional integration
Stress Management & Well-Being	Promote teacher resilience and prevent burnout	Self-care routines, stress reduction strategies, work-life balance, counseling, participation in professional learning communities	Wellness programs, counseling services, reflection tools	Teachers, school counselors, wellness coordinators	July-May	Reduced stress, improved resilience, sustained professional effectiveness
Technology & Instructional Support	Support individualized learning and student engagement	Integration of AAC devices, behavior management software, multi-sensory tools; collaborative customization of interventions	Assistive technologies, multi-sensory tools, software applications	Teachers, SPED specialists, technology coordinators	July - May	Enhanced student engagement, inclusive classroom practices
Long-Term Professional Planning	Ensure career growth and sustainability	Strategic career planning, financial management, licensure renewal, pursuit of advanced certifications or higher education	Career planning guides, certification programs, financial management tools	Teachers, career advisors, educational institutions	July- May	Professional advancement, expertise in specialized areas, long-term career success
Institutional Support	Facilitate smooth adaptation to school norms	Structured mentorship, PD programs on culturally responsive teaching, inclusive instruction, trauma-informed care; guidance	Mentorship programs, PD materials, school policy manuals	School administrators, mentors, teachers	July- May	Effective integration, reduced procedural barriers, professional confidence

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		on licensure, IEP compliance, policies				
Resource Allocation	Provide adequate teaching and learning materials	Increased funding for classroom materials, assistive technologies, multi-sensory tools; maintain smaller class sizes or co-teaching arrangements	Funding, instructional materials, classroom management resources	School management, teachers, funding bodies	July- May	Individualized instruction, improved student learning outcomes, effective adaptation
Collaboration & Networking	Strengthen professional and cultural support	Inter-school collaboration, peer support networks, partnerships with Filipino communities	Collaboration platforms, networking events, community liaison	Teachers, school administrators, Filipino community leaders	July- May	Shared best practices, stronger support systems, enhanced teacher and student engagement
Program & Policy Improvements	Align SPED programs with student and teacher needs	Design trauma-informed, individualized, culturally sensitive programs; regular review of curricula, instructional strategies, and assessment practices	Policy guidelines, curriculum frameworks, evidence-based research	Policymakers, school leaders, educators	July - May	Improved program effectiveness, evidence-based instruction, better outcomes for teachers and students

Summary of Key Focus Areas

1. Pre-Departure Preparation & Credentialing – Lays the foundation for professional competence and legal compliance.
2. Professional Adaptation & Skill Development – Enhances pedagogical skills and classroom effectiveness.
3. Cultural Competence & Identity Integration – Ensures successful cultural adjustment while maintaining Filipino values.
4. Stress Management & Well-Being – Promotes resilience and prevents burnout.
5. Technology & Instructional Support – Supports student-centered, inclusive teaching practices.
6. Long-Term Professional Planning – Guides sustainable career development.
7. Institutional Support – Provides mentorship, guidance, and procedural clarity.
8. Resource Allocation – Ensures access to necessary materials and manageable class sizes.
9. Collaboration & Networking – Fosters peer support, shared best practices, and community engagement.
10. Program & Policy Improvements – Aligns SPED programs and policies with evidence-based practices and teacher/student needs.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study reveals 22 major themes and 79 sub-themes reflecting the experiences of Filipino SPED teachers in the United States. Key findings include their transition from teaching in the Philippines to U.S. SPED roles, discrepancies between expectations and actual experiences, and challenges such as cultural adjustments and workload. The narratives emphasize the influence of Filipino values, collaboration with colleagues, family engagement, and advocacy for inclusion. Additionally, financial realities, personal sacrifices, and aspirations for improvement in U.S. special education funding and safety are highlighted, portraying a comprehensive view of their professional and personal journeys.

Conclusively, the adaptation of Philippine-trained educators to U.S. special education (SPED) roles is influenced by prior experience, motivation, and systemic challenges, necessitating mentorship and support for successful transitions. The American SPED system emphasizes student-centered strategies, effectively countering rigid approaches. However, participants face ongoing challenges, including cultural disconnection and stress, requiring a balance between cultural values and professional standards. Their integration of Filipino values, such as pakikisama and malasakit, within U.S. instructional methods fosters inclusive practices, promoting both professional growth and cultural authenticity. The findings underline the importance of continuous development, collaboration, and advocacy for enhanced teacher effectiveness and student outcomes.

The recommendations for Philippine-trained educators transitioning to U.S. special education (SPED) highlight key areas for successful integration. Firstly, they should align their qualifications with U.S. licensure requirements and engage in workshops on U.S. education policies and special education law (IDEA). Continuous professional development in instructional strategies and behavior management is encouraged, along with mentorship and reflective practices. Educators are urged to balance Filipino cultural values with American norms and enhance their teaching through cross-cultural training. Establishing self-care routines and utilizing school support services can help manage the demands of SPED roles. Incorporating assistive technologies and collaborating with specialists is essential for personalized student engagement.

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Further, a strategic career plan that focuses on advancement and financial management is recommended. Schools should implement structured mentorship programs, increase funding for resources, and foster inter-school collaboration, while policymakers must create trauma-informed and culturally sensitive programs to improve educational outcomes.

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