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EXPERIENCES OF FILIPINO TEACHERS IN ONLINE INSTRUCTION WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study aims to investigate the experiences of Filipino ESL teachers engaged in online instruction with international students. It is based on Garrison, Archer, and Anderson's (2000) Community of Inquiry (CoI) Framework, which emphasizes the creation of a collaborative and engaging online learning environment. The research explores the difficulties faced by Filipino educators, including linguistic and cultural hurdles as well as technical problems like erratic internet connections. In-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted with ten Filipino ESL teachers who work with overseas students from different nations. According to the findings, educators face challenges when it comes to modifying their teaching strategies to suit students from a variety of cultural backgrounds and English proficiency levels. Teachers used a variety of coping strategies to address these issues, including visual aids, language simplification, and making use of technology, such as translation software. The study also emphasizes the importance of cultivating cultural awareness, cultivating tolerance, and maintaining an optimistic and receptive mindset in order to establish a healthy learning environment. The experiences of the teachers also highlight the importance of pursuing ongoing professional development in order to enhance instructional methods and student participation in virtual learning environments. Filipino teachers, students, and educational institutions all stand to gain from the study's insightful conclusions on ESL teaching methods. The study provides Filipino educators with useful tactics to boost their efficacy as teachers, increase student engagement, and promote personal development in cross-cultural learning environments. The results can be used by language proficiency testing organizations, such as TESOL and TEFL, to create professional development courses that highlight the unique difficulties of online instruction and assist educators in enhancing their teaching methods. Additionally, students will benefit from the enhanced teaching strategies and culturally sensitive classrooms, which will increase their language skills and understanding of cultural diversity. Lastly, by providing a solid foundation for future research, the study advances our knowledge of Filipino teachers' experiences in online learning and the influence of cultural diversity on ESL instruction.

KEYWORDS: *Filipino Teachers, Online Instruction, International Students*

INTRODUCTION

This phenomenological study aims to investigate the experiences of Filipino ESL teachers engaged in online instruction with international students. It is based on Garrison, Archer, and Anderson's (2000) Community of Inquiry (CoI) Framework, which emphasizes the creation of a collaborative and engaging online learning environment. The research explores the difficulties faced by Filipino educators, including linguistic and cultural hurdles as well as technical problems like erratic internet connections. In-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted with ten Filipino ESL teachers who work with overseas students from different nations. According to the findings, educators face challenges when it comes to modifying their teaching strategies to suit students from a variety of cultural backgrounds and English proficiency levels. Teachers used a variety of coping strategies to address these issues, including visual aids, language simplification, and making use of technology, such as translation software. The study also emphasizes the importance of cultivating cultural awareness, cultivating tolerance, and maintaining an optimistic and receptive mindset in order to establish a healthy learning environment. The experiences of the teachers also highlight the importance of pursuing ongoing professional development in order to enhance instructional methods and student participation in virtual learning environments.

Filipino teachers, students, and educational institutions all stand to gain from the study's insightful conclusions on ESL teaching methods. The study provides Filipino educators with useful tactics to boost their efficacy as teachers, increase student engagement, and promote personal development in cross-cultural learning environments. The results can be used by language proficiency testing organizations, such as TESOL and TEFL, to create professional development courses that highlight the unique difficulties of online instruction and assist educators in enhancing their teaching methods. Additionally, students will benefit from the enhanced teaching strategies and culturally sensitive classrooms, which will increase their language skills and understanding of cultural diversity.

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The Philippines' move to online instruction offers Filipino teachers options because of the significant demand for Filipino educators in the international education market. Given that more than 100 million people know English, the nation is a desirable place for both online and traditional English language teaching (ELT) (ICEF Monitor, 2016; Department of Tourism, 2017). The digital gap is one of the major issues that Filipino educators confront, though, as many do not have access to reliable internet or the required technology. Complexity is further increased by adapting teaching strategies to different cultural backgrounds and learning styles (Liguori & Winkler, 2020). Financial stress is exacerbated by the fact that Filipino teachers are paid less than their native English speakers (UNESCO, 2013).

Power outages and erratic internet connections in places like Tagum City, where a large number of teachers use online instruction, make these problems much worse. In order to find insights that help enhance teaching methods in this expanding industry, a study that examines the experiences and difficulties faced by Filipino educators instructing overseas students online is necessary.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this phenomenological study is to examine the various experiences of Filipino teachers in online instruction with international students. Given the varied cultural backgrounds of both the teachers and the students, the difficulties Filipino teachers face when instructing overseas students virtually will be characterized as their experiences in this study. The study aims to gain a thorough understanding of these difficulties, concentrating on issues like cultural differences, language hurdles, and the modification of teaching strategies. It is the researcher's aim that this study will benefit Filipino ESL teachers, students, future researchers, and Language Proficiency Testing Organizations.

The findings will be significant for Language Proficiency Testing Organizations, such as TESOL and TEFL, in supporting Filipino ESL teachers through professional development initiatives like workshops, webinars, and training sessions aimed at improving teaching practices for online instruction. The findings of the study will also help Filipino ESL teachers improve their methodology, increase student engagement, and promote personal development with a greater emphasis on cultural sensitivity. This study can help Filipino students who teach online improve their English language skills and understanding of culture. Furthermore, the wealth of information acquired in this study might be used by future researchers to investigate the challenges encountered by Filipino educators, successful teaching methods, and cultural dynamics while instructing overseas students online.

Research Objectives

This study aims to explore the experiences of Filipino teachers in online instruction with international students. The study seeks to answer the following objectives:

1. What are the experiences of Filipino teachers in online instruction with international students?
2. What are the coping mechanisms employed by the Filipino teachers from their experiences in online instruction with international students?
3. What are the insights Filipino teachers in their experiences in online instruction with international students?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study will employ qualitative research with a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of Filipino teachers teaching English online to international students. The goal of qualitative research, according to Ugwu (2023), is to fully comprehend social occurrences in their natural setting by concentrating on the causes behind them rather than merely summarizing them. This method places a strong emphasis on people's first-hand, direct experiences as sources of meaning. Furthermore, by highlighting people's lived experiences, phenomenology research enables the researcher to identify the underlying phenomena based on participants' perceptions (Kyungmee, 2020). By using this method, the study will reveal the problems and experiences Filipino instructors have when teaching online, offering important insights into how they deal with obstacles and put coping strategies into practice in a complicated, varied educational environment. With the use of this design, Filipino online educators would be able to exchange tactics for dealing with the difficulties of instructing foreign pupils virtually.

Research Participants

This study will utilize purposive sampling as a tool for participant's selection. Creswell (2014) stated that purposive sampling can help researchers identify and select participants based on their experiences and characteristics connected to the study. The selection of participants is based primarily on their distinct characteristics and perspectives, from which researchers can obtain valuable insights in an educational context. This enables researchers to optimize the effectiveness of data collection by giving attention to

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participants who can contribute meaningfully to the study. This tool will allow researchers to chunk down the number of participants; hence, there is no need to gather a larger number of participants to acquire the objective and goal of the study (Patton, 2015).

Furthermore, the research instrument that will be used in this study is a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions. The participants of this study will be Filipino teachers with three years of teaching experience with different international students. The total number of participants will be 10, five of whom will be part of an in-depth interview (IDI), and the other half will be participants in a focus group discussion (FGD). These Filipino teachers should have experience handling at least two different international students. As stated by Creswell (2014), the research must involve at least 5 to 25 participants, hence, the number of participants selected is adequate for the study.

Data Collection

The following are the procedures that will be employed to collect adequate information from the participants:
First, I will obtain the REC certificate before I conduct the study. Afterwards, I will inform the prospective participants and ask permission to be part of the study. Afterwards, if they give their consent, a consent form will be sent to them. I will prepare the measures to be utilized during the conduct of the interview. Furthermore, by conducting in-depth interviews, we will use the phenomenological approach as a tool to describe the lived human experience of a social phenomenon. In this manner, it enables me to examine their individual experiences and challenges and explore their lived experiences in teaching international students. This will be collected by means of interviews with audio and video recordings, and it will be evaluated in a systematic way.

Furthermore, I will also employ focus group discussions for the triangulation of data. This way, the collected data will be validated using triangulation strategies. According to Noble and Heale (2019), research triangulation is a procedure to ensure the validity and credibility of the research. This aims to evaluate and validate the results of the study. This means that all the information and data gathered from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions will be examined closely to ensure that they are aligned and focused on the research objectives. The related literature will be examined closely, and the similarities and differences from the findings will be categorized accordingly.

Data Analysis

After collecting all the relevant and reliable information using the most appropriate method, the extraction of useful and pertinent information from the gathered data will undergo further interpretation and manipulation, a process referred to as data analysis (Ibrahim, 2015). Smith and Brown (2018) stated that analyzing data is vital in determining the gaps among the participants. Hence, the researcher can easily scrutinize and evaluate the collected data.

In this study, I will employ thematic analysis to analyze, identify, and explain the collected data. Braun and Clarke (2012) explain that thematic analysis involves analyzing, identifying, and interpreting themes within the gathered data. This method illustrates how data are categorized and organized into possible themes, refining and reviewing them. Additionally, as stated by Lochmiller and Lester (2017), this method can help the researcher come up with broader perspectives that could mirror the overall understanding of the data and how the data are aligned with the research questions.

Specifically, I will follow the six phases suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), as cited in Dawadi, 2020. The phases include familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing reports. The phases presented by Braun and Clarke are not linear steps but reflective processes. Therefore, these phases seek to provide a more rigorous framework for the application of the methods. This approach is appropriate for this study to gather trustworthy and insightful results and findings during the data analysis (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Experiences of Filipino teachers in online instruction with international students

Theme 1: Cultural Sensitivity and Exchange

Cultural awareness and communication are critical components of successful online learning experiences for both professors and students. Teachers must comprehend and adjust to the varied values, cultures, and beliefs of their students to establish a productive learning environment. According to IDI01, *"Teaching them as well as acquainting them with their values, culture, and interests makes our learning environment serene and peaceful,"* emphasizing the role that cultural sensitivity has in developing empathy. However, the process is challenging because IDI02 showed how challenging it is to bridge the language divide, especially when dealing with students that have little to no English proficiency.

Despite these challenges, teachers find cultural exchange valuable, as highlighted by FGD02*: "They're not only learning from your lessons, but also you learn from them."* This reciprocal learning process benefits both parties and fosters intellectual development as well as a greater understanding of other cultures.

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Theme 2: Challenges in Language and Communication

The online teaching experience of Filipino instructors emphasizes the difficulties associated with language, culture, and adaptive pedagogy. Teachers have to imaginatively deal with these challenges, as IDI02 explained, *"First, is the language barrier and communication. As you know, the majority of my students are Chinese, and most of them have no background in English, specifically kids, hence, it's hard for them to understand the language.* "This is a challenge that requires creative approaches to facilitate understanding and participation. Cultural sensitivity also plays an important role in promoting an inclusive classroom. As IDI02 stressed, "For the international students, I need to be more culturally sensitive and must embody cultural awareness to have a smooth class with them to avoid offending them as well." All these notwithstanding, the experience advances the professional development of the teachers, increasing their communication skills, flexibility, and internationalization of education.

Theme 3: Adapting to Online Teaching

Teachers moving from in-person to virtual classrooms encounter previously unheard-of difficulties adjusting to teaching online, including adjusting to cultural differences, technological advancements, and students' diverse learning preferences. As reported by IDI05, many teachers found the transition difficult: *"I was trained or practiced to be a traditional teacher, like a real classroom setting, and then abruptly switched to online teaching." So, it's very difficult for me."* This transition involves not only mastering digital tools but also adjusting pedagogical approaches to suit varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds. For instance, FGD05 focused on the requirement of being sensitive to cultures when he mentioned, *"One of the things I struggle with is knowing their culture too and seeing their beliefs when I am having my class."* Moreover, the online instructors also need to make adjustments with regards to time zones, as noted by FGD03, *"It really requires understanding their cultural nuances… and maybe their time zones, I think, because we really need to adjust."* Despite such requirements, instructors achieve growth and contentment with the ability to be flexible, so their online instructional experience turns out to be both challenging and fulfilling.

Theme 4: Building Connections and Affection

In online education, teachers develop strong bonds with their students through cultural awareness and participation, so establishing relationships and fostering love goes beyond only imparting knowledge. Seeing the development of their students and their interest in Filipino culture brings teachers immense joy. The significance of cultural sensitivity and rapport-building in the classroom is demonstrated by this mutual sharing of knowledge and values. As IDI04 put it, *"what's more rewarding is that they're not only learning from your lessons, but also you learn from them."* IDI03 also emphasized the importance of creating a welcoming learning environment *by "familiarizing them with their values, culture, and interests"* to keep students' attention despite the challenges associated with online instruction. Through these interactions, teachers not only transfer knowledge but also develop mutual respect, empathy, and appreciation for different cultures.

Coping mechanisms employed by the Filipino teachers from their experiences in online instruction with international students

Theme 1: Strategies for Overcoming Technical and Logistical Challenges

Overcoming technical and logistical challenges in distance learning requires flexibility, creativity, and tolerance, as teachers create channels for ensuring successful learning amid challenges. Teachers apply various coping strategies, such as employing visual aids, interactive activities, and simple language, to supplement students' difficulties in comprehension. As IDI04 put it, *"I make use of visual aids such as pictures and TPR, or simply called the total physical response, in order for her to have a better idea about what I want to convey."* Similarly, FGD05 noted the importance of simplifying instruction and avoiding using idiomatic terms to assist English-limited students. Conversely, FGD04 emphasized the need to entice students through incentives and participatory measures, stating that "just catching his attention would give me a time to really teach him well." These measures not only facilitate enhanced understanding but also stimulate a more active and solicitous learning process, which ensures that language problems and online constraints do not undermine the ability of the students to learn maximally.

Theme 2: Addressing Language Barriers in Virtual Classrooms

Numerous coping mechanisms are required to help students get beyond language barriers in online learning settings and advance their wellness. Teachers use a range of strategies, including as visual aids, language simplification, and encouraging active involvement, to assist students in overcoming language difficulties. IDI02 highlighted the use of visual aids and Total Physical Response (TPR) for students who have no English competence, stating that *"Simplicity at its finest"* ensures that even the most basic learners can comprehend the language. By stating, *"I simplify my language using short sentences and avoiding idiomatic expressions,"* FGD02 reinforces the need of patience in creating a more welcoming and supportive learning environment. These methods, coupled with fostering patience and empathy, are key to overcoming the challenges posed by language barriers and ensuring that students feel supported as they navigate learning in a second language.

Theme 3: Techniques for Maintaining Student Engagement and Participation

In virtual classrooms, strategies for sustaining student participation and engagement are essential, particularly when instructing diverse overseas students. Teachers utilize a variety of coping strategies to get beyond obstacles such cultural differences, emotional

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strain, and language problems. Using visual aids and tactile reactions to encourage learning, IDI02 emphasized that *"simplicity at its finest"* is essential for instructing pupils with weak English proficiency. In the same way, FGD02 emphasized the value of *"encouragement" and "simplified language using short sentences"* in promoting conversation. These methods help ensure students feel supported and can overcome challenges in understanding, contributing to a more effective and inclusive learning environment.

Theme 4: Emotional and Cultural Sensitivity in Online Teaching

Overcoming the difficulties of online instruction, particularly when working with overseas students, requires emotional and cultural awareness. Teachers frequently use a range of coping strategies to help students with emotional problems and linguistic limitations while preserving a positive learning environment. As an illustration of the need of simplifying communication for improved comprehension, FGD05 described how she utilized *"visual aids such as pictures and TPR" (Total Physical Response) and "Google Translate"* to help a student with no prior knowledge of English comprehend. By urging the student to *"connect with other students from China"* and exchange stories, IDI04 helped in addressing emotional problems, such as homesickness, highlighting the need of empathy in handling emotional difficulties. Teachers such as Jen also emphasized the need of patience, saying, *"recognize learning as a new language,* just like what IDI02 *said that this is not their first language,"* to make sure that students feel supported and encouraged as they progress through their learning process. These methods help to establish a welcoming, culturally aware, and emotionally encouraging learning environment for every student.

Theme 5: Personal and Professional Adaptability in Online Teaching

For online educators who engage with overseas students, both professional and personal flexibility are essential, particularly when overcoming obstacles like emotional problems, cultural differences, and language hurdles. To provide a supportive learning environment, educators use a range of coping strategies, including the use of visual aids, the simplification of language, and the provision of emotional support. *"Simplicity at its finest"* was the key to making learning feasible, according to IDI01, who described how she helped a student with zero English competence using visual aids and *"Total Physical Response (TPR)"*. Additionally, as FGD03 noted, cultivating a positive and open-minded attitude helped teachers navigate cultural sensitivities and learning challenges. *"Being open-minded about their culture and being willing to try new approaches"* made him more adaptable in teaching diverse students. IDI03 also emphasized the importance of patience and encouragement, noting, *"It is very important that you have patience, and you need to encourage the student to follow you."* These strategies and mindsets make online teaching more satisfying and gratifying by promoting foreign students' emotional health in addition to ensuring successful instruction.

Insights from the experiences of Filipino teachers in online instruction with international students.

Theme 1: Mental and Emotional Resilience in Online Teaching

When working with overseas students, mental and emotional resilience are crucial to the success of online instruction. Teachers must constantly engage and encourage pupils from a variety of backgrounds when teaching electronically, which demands a great deal of emotional and mental energy. FGD05 highlighted the emotional strain, stating *that "it takes a lot of mental and emotional energy to teach online,"* as lesson delivery is only one aspect of teaching; another is maintaining student engagement through body language and voice. While FGD02 emphasized the emotional satisfaction that comes from witnessing students progress, IDI04 acknowledged the difficulty of sustaining energy for lengthy teaching hours, saying, *"you need to put your energy into your voice,"* despite the challenges of teaching across cultures. These experiences have taught educators the importance of patience, adaptability, and continuous learning in developing their resilience. As FGD03 put it, teaching online has *"developed me physically, emotionally, and also, the very important, it developed my speaking skills,"* showing how these experiences build resilience both in teachers and students.

Theme 2: Cultural Sensitivity and Effective Cross-Cultural Communication

Online teaching requires cultural awareness and good cross-cultural communication, particularly when working with overseas students. In order to provide an inclusive and productive learning environment, these educators stress the significance of comprehending and honoring varied origins. *"I love teaching kids, so you have to love what you do,"* FGD04 shared, emphasizing the need of patience and building relationships with pupils. "*The kids I have taught love me too, and it's a satisfying feeling."* IDI05 echoed this sentiment, noting that her experience taught her to be flexible and culturally sensitive, saying, *"I now have the language abilities and the empathy necessary to build an inclusive learning environment."* This adaptability is crucial to ensuring effective communication and overcoming the challenges of teaching students from diverse cultural communities. The experiences of IDI01 demonstrate the value of cultural sensitivity in fostering positive relationships and improving teaching methods across a range of student populations. She added that teaching online has helped her develop her communication and cultural awareness skills, saying, *"this experience has helped me to become a better teacher...to improve my communication skills, my cultural awareness."*

Theme 3: Teaching Strategies for Online and International Contexts

In addition to technological proficiency, teaching foreign students online calls for a high degree of cultural awareness and flexibility. Teachers deal with particular difficulties including language limitations and different learning styles, yet they manage to engage their pupils in innovative ways. The significance of reducing language and utilizing resources like visual aids to close

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communication gaps is shown by IDI03's statement *that "Language itself was a great problem...but those mechanisms that I have applied in teaching English...always ensure that learning is possible."* The need of establishing an interactive atmosphere is also emphasized in IDI04, which states that *"you really need to make your classroom student-centered"* in order to maintain young students' interest. Through these efforts, teachers grow personally and professionally, learning from their students and adapting their methods to ensure success. For example, when reflecting on how his ESL experience enhanced his communication and flexibility, IDI05 said, *"It really helps me to become a better teacher because teaching English as a second language, I have developed a strong ability to adapt and differentiate disruption to meet the diverse students."* In general, these strategies not only promote effective learning but also strengthen relationships, making teaching a fulfilling and exciting career.

Theme 4: Continuous Learning and Professional Growth

Online ESL instruction requires continual learning and professional growth, especially when working with international students. Through challenges, educators develop and evolve, becoming more flexible, culturally sensitive, and innovative in their methods. FGD02's phrase, *"You have to love what you do. What you do will also love you,"* emphasized the need of developing patience and enhancing teaching methods, underscoring the need for a passion-driven approach. Talking about how her teaching experiences have helped her grow both professionally and personally, IDI05 said, *"It developed me physically, emotionally, and also, the very important, it developed my speaking."* Additionally, FGD03 emphasized how the experience improved his communication skills and capacity to accommodate a diverse student body, stating, *"It really helps me to become a better teacher because teaching English as a second language, I have developed a strong ability to adapt and differentiate to meet the diverse students."* These insights demonstrate how teaching online not only improves a teacher's capacity for adaptation and communication, but also cultivates a deeper understanding of various cultures, ultimately enhancing the educational experience for both teachers and students.

Implication For Teaching Practices of ESL Teachers

The results of this study demonstrate the notable perks and problems faced by ESL teachers who deal with foreign students virtually. Although they acknowledged that cultural differences, language obstacles, and the emotional effort needed to engage pupils were significant stresses, teachers also emphasized coping strategies they used, such incorporating interactive activities, reducing language, and utilizing visual aids. Teachers suggested that cultural sensitivity is essential to establishing a supportive and inclusive learning environment, stressing the value of cultivating tolerance, flexibility, and empathy to build good connections with students. Additionally, the study found that ESL teachers need to continue their professional development and be willing to try new teaching methods, especially when it comes to online learning. Moreover, the study revealed that ESL teachers must continuously engage in professional development and be open to adopting new teaching strategies, particularly in the context of online education. This continuous learning process enables teachers to adapt to the diverse needs of their students and refine their teaching practices over time.

The study has significant implications for ESL instruction in a number of ways. It begins by emphasizing how important it is for ESL teachers to constantly modify their teaching strategies in order to meet the diverse language proficiency levels and learning preferences of their pupils. This approach aims to improve communication and engagement through the use of visual aids, interactive exercises, and simplified language. To foster trust and prevent misunderstandings, educators must respect and be aware of the cultural backgrounds of their pupils. Teachers should focus on creating a nurturing emotional environment by being patient and providing emotional support, especially when students are struggling with language learning or experiencing homesickness. Making optimal use of technology in online education is also essential as it may enhance communication and add excitement to the learning process. Making efficient use of technology in online education is also essential as it may enhance communication and add excitement to the learning process. Furthermore, the study highlights the need of ongoing professional development since teachers who continuously strive to improve their skills and knowledge are better equipped to meet the needs of their students.
ESL teachers, as it gives them useful advice on how to enhance their methods, deal with difficulties, and better assist their pupils. By using these findings to guide teacher training programs, educational institutions may also make sure that instructors have the skills and techniques they need to deal with a varied range of foreign students. This study is very helpful for students, who will also benefit from these improved teaching strategies as they are more likely to participate in a helpful, culturally sensitive, and productive learning environment. In conclusion, policy makers and educational leaders can use the study's findings to develop guidelines and support systems that focus on cultural awareness, emotional intelligence, and technology integration in ESL teaching, ultimately improving the quality of education for both teachers and students.

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