



# TEACHING BEYOND BORDERS: THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF FILIPINO ENGLISH EDUCATORS IN MISSOURI PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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## ABSTRACT

Stepping into American classrooms, Filipino English educators encounter a reality that challenges expectations and reshapes both their professional practice and cultural identity. This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Filipino English teachers working with native English-speaking pupils in Missouri public schools. Grounded in Kim's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory and Dawis and Lofquist's Work Adjustment Theory, the study examined how these educators navigate cultural, linguistic, and professional transitions within a foreign educational environment. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with eight participants and analyzed using Colaizzi's thematic method. Findings reveal a notable gap between teachers' initial expectations and actual classroom experiences. While participants anticipated that teaching native English speakers would be relatively straightforward, they encountered unexpected challenges, including students' limited academic language proficiency and difficulties in classroom management. Despite these obstacles, the educators demonstrated resilience by adopting adaptive strategies, including differentiated instruction, structured lesson delivery, and collaborative learning. The study also highlights the importance of support systems, including collegial relationships, administrative guidance, and Filipino community networks, in facilitating successful adjustment. Participants further reflected on their dual roles as educators and cultural ambassadors, emphasizing how values such as empathy, patience, and resilience shaped their teaching practices. Although the experience fostered professional growth and personal pride, there remains a strong call for more comprehensive institutional and emotional support to enhance teacher well-being and effectiveness.

**Keywords:** *global educators, lived experiences, teaching in the United States, Filipino teachers*

## INTRODUCTION

Western-centered norms have long influenced hiring and teaching practices in English language education. As early as 1991, TESOL formally opposed hiring based solely on native-speaker status; however, such biases persist in many institutions, contributing to workplace discrimination, student preference for Western English models, and diminished self-perception among non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) (Pontillas, 2021; Obenza et al., 2025; Zhang & Solarz, 2022). Language variation further complicates this issue, as some Filipino educators avoid using Philippine English due to its perceived deviation from American or British standards, often adjusting their speech to align with Western norms to gain acceptance (Policarpio, 2021; Tocalo et al., 2025).

Despite these challenges, NNESTs bring significant pedagogical strengths. Their experience as second-language learners enable them to empathize with students and apply effective, culturally responsive teaching strategies. Filipino educators, in particular, are recognized for their adaptability, intercultural competence, and training in communicative language teaching, which allow them to effectively support learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Bing et al., 2023; Zhang & Solarz, 2022). However, transitioning to international contexts presents challenges, including adapting to new curricula, school systems, and classroom management expectations (Ortega & Sumayo, 2024).

In the United States, Filipino teachers have played a vital role in addressing teacher shortages while contributing to culturally responsive and globally oriented education. Many participate in the J-1 Teacher Exchange Program, which provides opportunities for professional growth, cross-cultural teaching, and improved economic conditions. Deployment data show a steady increase in Filipino teachers in the U.S., reflecting the demand for their expertise (Experiences of the Filipino teachers in the Virgin Islands, 2023; Arcillo, 2023). Financial motivations, along with limited opportunities and challenging conditions in the Philippines, have driven many educators to seek employment abroad (Alsado & Oliveros, 2025; Edaño & Lien, 2024).

However, overseas teaching also presents significant personal and professional challenges. Filipino educators frequently experience homesickness, cultural adjustment difficulties, and emotional strain due to separation from family and support systems (Vicente & Flordeliz, 2024). Adapting to unfamiliar institutional expectations and classroom environments can further affect their well-being and instructional effectiveness (Ahmed & Pierre, 2024). While mentorship and collegial support can mitigate these challenges, access to such support remains inconsistent among J-1 participants (Kaihoi et al., 2024). In many cases, teachers assigned to rural or less-supported schools face greater isolation and pressure to perform in unfamiliar contexts. The lack of structured

support systems may reduce motivation and increase the likelihood of attrition, potentially limiting the long-term contributions of these educators to global education.

Guided by this perspective, the study was conceptualized to examine the lived experiences of Filipino educators participating in the J-1 program in the United States. The researcher, as a Filipino educator working in a Missouri public school district, was motivated by a commitment to understanding and improving the professional well-being of fellow educators navigating similar cross-cultural teaching environments.

## Research Questions

This phenomenological study described the lived experiences of Filipino teachers in the US. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is it like to be a Filipino English teacher teaching English Language learner in U.S. schools?
2. How do the Filipino English educators cope with the US educational environment?
3. How do they see the meaning of being a Filipino English teacher working in the U.S.?
4. What recommendations do they offer to support Filipino Educators working in international environments?

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of Filipino English teachers working in Missouri public schools. Grounded in constructivist and interpretivist paradigms, qualitative research was used to capture participants' meanings and perspectives through rich, non-numerical data. Phenomenology was selected to understand how teachers make sense of their cultural, linguistic, and professional transitions. The study involved eight purposively selected Filipino middle school English teachers who provided firsthand accounts of their experiences. Conducted within a Missouri public school district, the research context highlighted the challenges of adapting to a new educational system, diverse students' population, and varying institutional expectations.

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in three sessions per participant, following established phenomenological protocols. The researcher ensured ethical practices by securing informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and storing data securely. The process of epoche, or bracketing, was applied to minimize researcher bias, especially given the researcher's shared background with the participants. Data analysis followed Colaizzi's thematic method, involving transcription, identification of significant statements, formulation of meanings, clustering of themes, and development of an exhaustive description. This systematic approach allowed for a deep and nuanced understanding of participants' experiences.

To ensure rigor, the study adhered to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability standards. Member checking, thick description, and audit trails were used to validate findings and enhance trustworthiness. Ethical standards were strictly observed, including institutional approval and protection of participants' rights and privacy. Overall, the methodology provided a structured yet flexible framework for capturing the complexity of Filipino teachers' lived experiences and offered reliable insights into their adaptation and professional journeys.

## RESULTS

### *Themes*

*From High Expectations to Classroom Realities in U.S. Schools*  
*Adaptive Strategies and Support Systems in Navigating the U.S. Educational Environment*  
*Constructing Professional Identity and Meaning as Filipino Educators in the U.S.*  
*Strengthening Institutional, Emotional, and Transitional Support for Filipino Teachers Abroad*

The analysis yielded four interrelated themes above. The themes collectively capture the trajectory of transition, adaptation, meaning-making, and support needs among participants.

### ***From High Expectations to Classroom Realities in U.S. Schools***

This theme captures the gap between participants' pre-entry expectations and their actual classroom experiences in the United States. According to the interview data, Filipino English teachers initially presumed that teaching native English speakers would be comparatively simpler; however, their actual experiences revealed unanticipated behavioral, linguistic, and academic difficulties. Pre-entry assumptions regarding native English speakers, restricted academic language proficiency, and classroom management issues are the three categories into which the findings under this subject are arranged. Each of these categories represents a crucial aspect of this expectation–reality mismatch.

Participants initially assumed that teaching in the United States would be easier due to the expectation that native English-speaking students already possess strong fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and academic readiness in English. This belief was rooted in the global perception of English as the dominant language in the U.S. and the assumption that native speakers naturally demonstrate advanced language competence, making instruction less challenging compared to non-native learners.

The findings indicate that each participant entered the U.S. classroom with preconceived expectations that shaped their early teaching experiences. Glenda expressed this perception clearly, stating, "I was expecting I will not be having a hard time teaching English since it is my American students' first language" (Glenda, Phase 1, Page 3, Line 5-6). This reflects a common assumption that English instruction would focus on basic language skills rather than the more complex demands of academic reading, writing, and classroom engagement, revealing a gap between expectation and actual

instructional realities. However, this perspective underestimates the complexity of teaching academic English, which demands explicit instruction beyond everyday conversation. This aligns with Deng et al. (2023), who note that native speakers excel at casual communication but often require support with formal language.

Similarly, Rachel's expectation that teaching English in the US might be easier reinforces the belief that native speaker status reduces instructional difficulty. Her statement shows a common belief that teaching in an English-speaking setting is easy. This idea might stem from global narratives that portray English-speaking countries as advanced in language, but it overlooks the diversity of students and the teaching challenges in U.S. classrooms. Apridayani and Sakkanayok (2025) agree that language skills vary across situations and still require clear teaching methods.

Karen's observation, "I thought that students here are very profound with the English language because it is their native language," (Phase 1, Page 13, Line 5-6) further illustrates the assumption that native speakers possess deep and comprehensive language knowledge. The term "profound" implies a high level of vocabulary and command of linguistic structures. This assumption represents an unrealistic vision of native speakers that fails to account for differences in educational background and literacy development. According to studies, academic language proficiency is gained through instruction and exposure rather than native language acquisition (Zhang & Solarz, 2022).

Jenny's statement, "My expectation was my American students would be very proficient in English because that is their native tongue," (Phase 1, Page 14, Line 9-10) reinforces the same pattern of equating nativeness with proficiency. Her anticipation demonstrates how linguistic identity is frequently coupled with ability, obscuring the divide between social and academic language. This is consistent with recent research, which indicates that many native speakers still struggle with formal writing, grammar, and vocabulary, particularly in different educational environments (Bing et al., 2023).

Overall, the individual comments show a consistent pattern of idealized expectations for native English speakers, with each highlighting a different dimension—ease of teaching, fluency, competency, and even behavior. These findings underscore a significant misunderstanding that native language guarantees academic competency, underlining the need for better preparation and orientation for international teachers entering different educational situations.

### ***Adaptive Strategies and Support Systems in Navigating the U.S. Educational Environment***

Another key finding of the study is that Filipino educators actively use adaptive strategies and support systems to manage the intricacies of the US educational system. The results show that among the most pressing issues faced by Filipino teachers in American schools are linguistic and communication obstacles. These difficulties are mostly caused by accent discrepancies, students' use of colloquial language, and

inconsistencies between academic and ordinary language. As one participant shared, “My accent and the accent of the students was one of my struggles” (Glenda, Phase 2, p.1, l.4). This statement demonstrates a mutual gap in comprehension, in which both the teacher and the pupils must adjust to each other's speech patterns. The issue is more than just pronunciation; it shows a broader necessity for language adaptation in a multicultural classroom.

Similarly, Rhod noted that “They use colloquial words from their community” (Phase 2, p.7, l.12), pointing to the localized and culturally embedded nature of student language. This shows that communication barriers are caused by both accent and familiarity with informal, community-based language. The usage of such language might cause a gap, particularly among educators trained in more formal or standardized versions of English. Jenny further emphasized this gap by stating, “They are used to informal and slang and usually don't understand the academic language I use” (Phase 2, p.16, l.8–9). This demonstrates a two-way challenge: while students struggle with academic language, teachers must bridge the gap between formal education and students' everyday linguistic realities.

Karen's experience deepens this understanding: “Some of the students may not fully understand what I truly meant because they're not used to my accent... even if I try to use technical words, they're having a hard time understanding those” (Phase 2, p.8, l.275–278).

This demonstrates how accent and vocabulary both influence comprehension. Even when teachers employ exact or technical terminology, meaning might be lost if delivery and familiarity are not appropriate for pupils' linguistic backgrounds. Participants used adaptive ways to deal with these obstacles. Mae shared, “Sometimes I need to talk or slow down with how I speak because of my accent, because I do pronounce words differently from theirs” (Phase 2, p.11, l.386–388). This reflects how teachers actively adapt their communication style to improve understanding and displays a deliberate attempt to modify speech for clarity.

These responses show that communication barriers are complex and ever-changing. They involve pronunciation, accent, cultural use, students' familiarity with academic language, and teaching speed and clarity. Instead of waiting, participants used strategies such as slowing their speech, choosing simpler words, and considering students' backgrounds. These actions show skill and cultural sensitivity.

These experiences highlight the importance of being flexible with language and communicating across cultures in diverse schools. Filipino educators' ability to recognize and manage these barriers shows their commitment and strength as teachers. Furthermore, these examples illustrate the need for schools to provide support, such as training in culturally respectful communication and language learning strategies, to better prepare teachers for diverse classrooms.

In summary, addressing language differences and communication barriers is central to Filipino educators' adjustment to the U.S. education system. This aligns with other studies on internationally trained teachers adapting to new language settings. For example, Dewaele et. al (2025) found that accents and communication differences can affect classroom interaction and teacher confidence, while Li and Pei (2024) noted that not knowing students' everyday language makes teaching more challenging. Boonsuk (2026) emphasized recognizing World Englishes and fostering mutual understanding rather than enforcing a single standard. Together, these studies support our findings by showing that linguistic adaptation is both a challenge and an important area for professional growth among international teachers.

### ***Constructing Professional Identity and Meaning as Filipino Educators in the U.S***

The study shows that Filipino educators in the U.S. do not just adapt to a new education system; they also shape it. They also shape and redefine their professional identity. Theme 3 describes how these immigrants educators find meaning in their experiences and shape their purpose amid challenges, opportunities, cultural identity, and growth. It shows changes in their sense of self as teachers as they balance cultural expectations, job demands, and the responsibility of representing Filipino educators abroad.

Viewing the Role as Both a Challenge and an Opportunity, openly state the complex emotional and professional implications of teaching English in a country where English is the native language. Their stories demonstrate a shared awareness of irony, pressure, and difficulty, yet these are continually reframed as powerful events that promote professional legitimacy and personal fulfillment.

Glenda described her experience as ironic, stating, "It's somehow ironic since these students are native speakers and I'm not but I am teaching them English" (Glenda, Phase 2, p.1, l.10). This response reflects the participants' understanding of the social expectations that surround English education, in which native speakers are frequently thought to be better qualified. Glenda's statement implies that her role undermines traditional notions of language authority. At the same time, it emphasizes the psychological strain that Filipino teachers may face when educating children who are viewed as linguistically superior. This irony serves as a reminder that their competency must be continuously shown, not assumed.

Rachel emphasized the broader significance of her role by stating, "It means being both an educator and a cultural bridge" (Rachel, Phase 2, p.4, l.8). This statement demonstrates Filipino educators' vision of themselves as more than just grammar and writing instructors. Rachel describes teaching as intercultural work, in which she acts as a bridge between cultures, values, and communication styles. This suggests that the challenge of teaching in the United States also provides opportunity to include diversity and cultural understanding into the classroom, so increasing pupils' global awareness.

Rhod explicitly acknowledged the difficulty of the role, stating, “Working in a country where English is the native language is very challenging” (Rhod, Phase 2, p.7, l.20). His statement emphasizes the emotional and professional responsibilities of teaching in an environment where English is integrated into daily life and cultural standards. The difficulty is not simply linguistic, but also related to expectations of credibility and performance. Rhod's response implies that teaching in the United States may exacerbate self-doubt and worry, particularly among instructors who are aware of being judged against native-speaker criteria.

Mae described her experience as “both challenging and empowering” (Mae, Phase 2, p.18, l.8). This remark accurately describes the spirit of the category: the job combines difficulty with empowerment. Mae acknowledges the burden of adjusting to a new system, but she also emphasizes how the experience fosters confidence and self-esteem. Her usage of the word "empowering" implies that overcoming obstacles boosts Filipino educators' sense of accomplishment and potential.

Mae further elaborated on this duality, stating: “It is very satisfying... It pushes me to constantly prove my competence. But it also gives me the room to grow and to challenge the idea that only native speakers can be effective in teaching English in America” (Mae, Phase 2, p.10, l.344–348). This answer is significant because it emphasizes both external and internal motivation. According to Mae, Filipino educators are frequently required to confirm their authenticity. Rather of getting discouraged, Mae sees this pressure as an opportunity for professional development and a chance to debunk the native-speaker myth. Her attitude displays empowerment through resistance; she takes joy in demonstrating that teaching efficacy is determined by skill, training, and dedication rather than birthplace or accent.

Similarly, Paolo shared that “teaching English, as a Filipino teacher in the US, is really challenging... at the same time, it allows me to model the effective English teaching that is not limited to the native...” (Paolo, Phase 2). This response confirms the idea that obstacles provide chances to reinvent what it means to be an English teacher in the United States. Paolo understands that the role requires competence, confidence, and adaptability, but he also sees it as an opportunity to demonstrate that professional skill is not limited to native speakers. His statement implies that Filipino educators see their presence in US schools as a form of representation and advocacy, demonstrating that international educators can make substantial contributions to American education.

The analysis shows that Filipino educators often view their experiences as a mix of difficulties and change. They face challenges such as language demands, adjusting to a new culture, and proving their capabilities. But they also find opportunities to grow, feel confident, and challenge stereotypes about who can teach English. Many say their role is important because it lets them demonstrate their skills and add cultural value to U.S. schools.

These responses suggest that Filipino educators create their professional identity by balancing openness with confidence. Teaching in the U.S. becomes more than a job;

it is a way to earn professional respect. Their stories show that their work is a personal goal to challenge common beliefs, prove their ability, and demonstrate that excellence is not only about being a native English speaker.

These findings align with existing research on international teachers and identity. For example, Norton's (2013) theory of identity and investment explains how language users negotiate legitimacy and power in English-speaking settings, reflecting participants' need to "prove competence" when teaching native speakers. Bourdieu's (1991) idea of linguistic capital shows why accent and native speaker status affect credibility, making the role both challenging and complex, as seen with Glenda and Mae. Studies on non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), like those by Vaishnav (2025) and Deng et al. (2023), show that despite pressure from native-speaker norms, these teachers bring strengths such as empathy, cultural insight, and language skills. This fits with Rachel's description of being a "cultural bridge" and Paolo's view that good English teaching isn't limited to native speakers. Together, these theories and studies support the participants' view that teaching in the U.S. involves both challenges to legitimacy and chances for professional growth and representation

### ***Strengthening Institutional, Emotional, and Transitional Support for Filipino Teachers Abroad***

The study's findings highlight that although Filipino educators exhibit resilience and adaptation within the U.S. educational context, their success is significantly influenced by the assistance they get throughout their transition and professional development abroad. Theme 4 emphasizes the necessity of enhancing support systems that cater to professional requirements, mental health, institutional direction, and long-term career viability. This theme illustrates participants' acknowledgment that succeeding as an international educator necessitates organized support from educational institutions, policymakers, and communities.

The results indicate that Filipino educators in the United States encounter considerable emotional and psychosocial difficulties while adapting to life and work overseas. Participants showed resilience in fulfilling professional obligations, although they articulated a necessity for enhanced emotional support systems to mitigate homesickness, stress, culture shock, and mental health challenges. This category emphasizes that successful adaptation is not solely professional; it is profoundly emotional, necessitating support systems that foster teachers' well-being and sense of belonging.

Glenda shared that "It is very challenging balancing work and life with homesickness" (Glenda, Phase 3, p.2, l.10). This sentence conveys the emotional weight of physical separation from family and established support networks. Homesickness presents a persistent difficulty that impairs daily functioning, hindering teachers' ability to sustain emotional equilibrium while meeting rigorous professional obligations. Glenda's remark indicates that the experience of teaching overseas entails emotional costs that may not be readily apparent in the workplace.

Jenny directly emphasized the need for mental health support, stating that “Stronger emotional and mental support for J1 teachers is needed” (Jenny, Phase 3, p.15, l.7). This answer underscores the susceptibility of international educators to emotional fatigue, isolation, and adaptation stress. Jenny's assertion suggests that existing support structures may be inadequate, highlighting the necessity for organized mental health programs, counseling services, and secure environments where educators can articulate challenges without apprehension of criticism.

Rhod suggested a culturally grounded approach to support by stating, “We should have spiritual reflection groups for teachers” (Rhod, Phase 3, p.8, l.8). This response suggests that emotional support need not be confined to professional counseling; it can also encompass spiritual and communal dimensions. Rhod's proposal illustrates how Filipino educators may get resilience from faith-oriented practices and communal contemplation. This underscores the need of culturally attuned support systems that acknowledge spirituality as a means of coping with stress and emotional challenges.

Paolo reinforced the need for stronger transition support, stating, “I think that there is a need for stronger orientation programs like onboarding mentorship and mental support for incoming J1 teachers in the US” (Paolo, Phase 3, p.15, l.571–572). This statement indicates that emotional well-being is intricately linked to preparedness and direction. Paolo's focus on mentorship and onboarding indicates that new educators encounter emotional distress, partially stemming from ambiguity and insufficient guidance. This suggests that early intervention via organized programs may alleviate anxiety and enhance instructors' confidence in their new positions.

Glenda also acknowledged the importance of community-based support, stating, “We have a strong supportive Filipino community that helps us all, from getting adjusted to the place... helping us start our life here” (Glenda, Phase 3, p.2, l.38–39). This response emphasizes that emotional support is frequently located beyond the educational environment. The Filipino community serves as an alternative support network that offers a sense of belonging, solace, and pragmatic assistance. Glenda's assertion indicates that community networks alleviate feelings of isolation and assist educators in navigating cultural transitions by establishing a “family away from home.”

Jhanna's response reflects the emotional shock experienced at the beginning of the transition: “my 1st day was the worst... I was asking myself... is this really what I'm going to have... is this worth it?” (Jhanna, Phase 2, p.6, l.156–158). This comment illustrates the overwhelming nature of initial exposure to the U.S. classroom setting. Jhanna's inquiries indicate worry, fear, and uncertainty, implying that early events may evoke emotional turmoil and self-doubt. This underscores the necessity for psychological comfort and robust transitional support, particularly during the earliest phases of teaching overseas.

Analysis of these responses indicates that Filipino teachers encounter emotional obstacles on various levels: personal issues like homesickness, professional stress associated with adaptation, and psychological strain during the initial transition phase.

Participants consistently recognized the necessity for emotional and mental health support, with culturally attuned coping strategies, including spirituality and a sense of community connection. The data indicate that psychological well-being is a crucial factor in teacher effectiveness and retention.

This category signifies that emotional assistance is essential, rather than optional, for the success of overseas teachers. Participants' experiences indicate that adaptation overseas is emotionally taxing and can influence confidence, motivation, and job satisfaction. Emotional and psychosocial support systems, including mentorship, mental health services, spiritual reflection groups, and robust community networks assist Filipino educators in overcoming problems and maintaining their dedication to their profession. The findings indicate that enhancing emotional support systems is essential for Filipino teachers abroad to thrive both emotionally and professionally, rather than merely surviving.

These findings are corroborated by prior studies highlighting the significance of emotional well-being and psychological assistance for migrant and foreign educators. Salvo-Garrido et al. (2025) elucidate that educators' resilience is intricately linked to emotional stability, intrinsic motivation, and availability of supportive surroundings, which corresponds with participants' articulated necessity for mental and emotional assistance. Likewise, Kim et al. (2025) discovered that immigrant educators frequently encounter isolation, stress, and challenges in adaptation during their initial years overseas, underscoring the necessity for robust support systems, including mentorship and a sense of community belonging. Castro et al. (2022) highlighted that internationally mobile educators experience identity and emotional challenges while adapting to unfamiliar school cultures, and that their professional success is significantly contingent upon institutional and social support systems. These studies collectively underscore the importance of emotional and psychosocial support in assisting Filipino educators in managing homesickness, culture shock, and the challenges of teaching in a foreign context.

## DISCUSSION

Participants initially held expectations that teaching English in the United States would be less demanding due to students' status as native English speakers. However, their lived experiences revealed a significant mismatch between expectations and reality. They encountered challenges related to students' limited academic language proficiency, restricted vocabulary, weak grammatical foundations, and complex classroom management demands. These experiences contributed to emotional strain, professional dissonance, and a perceived reduction in instructional authority, highlighting the gap between anticipated and actual teaching contexts.

Participants demonstrated adaptive competence by modifying both communication and pedagogical approaches. They addressed linguistic differences—such as accent variation and student use of informal language—by adjusting speech rate,

clarifying instructions, and contextualizing content. Instructionally, they employed learner-centered strategies, including differentiated instruction, structured reading activities, and collaborative learning techniques (e.g., Think-Pair-Share), to respond to diverse learner needs. Their adjustment was further facilitated by access to collegial support, administrative guidance, professional development opportunities, and Filipino peer networks, which collectively provided both instructional scaffolding and emotional reassurance.

The experience of teaching in a foreign context contributed to the reconstruction of participants' professional identity. While the role was perceived as demanding, it was also viewed as affirming and meaningful. Participants integrated core Filipino values, such as resilience, empathy, patience, and respect into their pedagogical practices, enhancing relational connections with students. Over time, they reported increased self-efficacy, professional growth, and a strengthened sense of pride in representing Filipino educators internationally. Their narratives reflect a dynamic process of identity negotiation and affirmation within a cross-cultural teaching environment.

Despite their adaptability, participants identified critical gaps in support systems. They expressed the need for more structured institutional mechanisms, including comprehensive onboarding programs, mentorship systems, and logistical assistance (e.g., housing and transportation). Equally important were emotional and psychosocial supports to address experiences of stress, homesickness, and social isolation. Participants also emphasized the importance of reintegration frameworks in the Philippines to ensure career continuity, professional recognition, and employment stability upon completion of their international assignments.

## **Conclusions**

This phenomenological inquiry demonstrates that the transition of Filipino English teachers into U.S. public schools is not merely a process of relocation but a complex negotiation of expectations, competence, and professional legitimacy within a new educational culture. The dissonance between anticipated and actual classroom conditions underscores the need to reconceptualize assumptions about language proficiency and teaching ease in native-English contexts. This implies that teacher preparation for international deployment must move beyond content expertise and include training in academic language diversity, culturally responsive classroom management, and sociolinguistic realities of U.S. classrooms.

The participants' adaptive responses indicate that effective teaching in transnational settings is grounded in flexibility, reflective practice, and culturally informed pedagogy. Their ability to recalibrate instructional strategies and communication approaches suggests that adaptability should be treated as a core professional competency rather than an incidental skill. Consequently, teacher development programs—both in the Philippines and host countries—may need to intentionally cultivate adaptive expertise, intercultural communication skills, and context-sensitive instructional design.

Moreover, the reconstruction of professional identity highlights that cross-cultural teaching experiences can serve as a site for both affirmation and transformation of teacher identity. The integration of Filipino values into pedagogical practice suggests that cultural identity is not diminished but rather recontextualized as a professional asset. This has implications for global teacher mobility frameworks, emphasizing the importance of recognizing cultural capital as a contributor to teaching effectiveness and student engagement.

However, the findings also make clear that individual resilience cannot substitute for systemic support. The absence or insufficiency of structured institutional mechanisms points to a critical gap in policy and program design. Thus, there is a need for coordinated support systems that include comprehensive onboarding, sustained mentorship, accessible psychosocial services, and structured reintegration pathways. Such measures are necessary not only to support teacher well-being but also to ensure retention, instructional quality, and long-term professional sustainability.

These insights suggest that international teaching programs, such as the J-1 Exchange Program, should be reframed as reciprocal professional development ecosystems rather than short-term employment opportunities. This perspective calls for stronger alignment among sending institutions, host schools, and policymakers to ensure that Filipino educators are not only able to cope with cross-cultural demands but are also positioned to thrive, contribute meaningfully, and reintegrate effectively into their home educational systems.

## **Recommendations**

The study recommends that program and school administrators strengthen support systems for international teachers by providing comprehensive pre-departure training, structured onboarding, and formal mentorship programs to ease cultural and professional transitions. Schools are encouraged to foster inclusive environments that value diversity, offer continuous professional development in culturally responsive teaching, and ensure access to mental health and wellness resources. Establishing peer support systems can further reduce isolation and enhance teachers' overall well-being and effectiveness in the classroom. For Filipino teachers, proactive self-preparation, engagement in support networks, and continuous development of adaptive and culturally responsive teaching strategies are essential. Teacher education institutions in the Philippines are urged to integrate global competencies, provide international teaching exposure, and enhance communication training. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct longitudinal and comparative studies, as well as explore reintegration experiences, to better understand the long-term impact of international teaching on professional growth and practice.

## **Compliance with Ethical Standards**

The author declares that this study was conducted in accordance with ethical research standards. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents, who were

informed of their right to voluntarily participate and withdraw at any time without penalty. Respondents' anonymity and confidentiality were protected, and all data were handled in compliance with Data Privacy regulations. Their well-being, dignity, and rights were safeguarded throughout the study. The author further affirms that no conflict of interest existed, plagiarism was strictly avoided, and all sources were properly acknowledged. The findings were interpreted objectively and without bias, and the results were used solely for research purposes. Any use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools for language or technical assistance was fully disclosed for transparency.

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