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Professional Adaptation in a New Educational Culture: A Phenomenological Study of Filipino Teachers in Florida, USA

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Abstract

This phenomenological study explored the professional adaptation of Filipino teachers who transitioned from the Philippine educational system to the American educational system in Florida, USA. It sought to understand their experiences of transition, the ways they navigated linguistic, instructional, and cultural demands, the influence of adaptation on their professional identity, and the meanings they attributed to their journey of teaching across borders. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed, involving seven Filipino teachers who had teaching experience in the Philippines and were currently teaching in Florida, USA. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews and analyzed thematically to identify patterns and shared meanings across participants' lived experiences. The findings revealed that teachers' transition involved unfamiliarity with the American educational system, linguistic and communication adjustments, differences in student behavior and classroom norms, unfamiliar administrative and professional responsibilities, reliance on professional support, and cultural shock, emotional strain, and uncertainty. Their adaptation involved adjustments to American English and communication patterns, modification of familiar teaching strategies, student-centered instructional practices, diverse learning needs and classroom behaviors, and the negotiation of Filipino and American teaching practices. Furthermore, teachers viewed their journey as a transformative experience, an opportunity for professional growth, a source of personal resilience, an expansion of educational perspectives, and a pathway to meaningful professional fulfillment. The study implies the need for stronger orientation, mentoring, professional support, cultural preparation, and continuous development programs for Filipino teachers transitioning into American schools.

Keywords: *Filipino Teachers, Professional Adaptation, Phenomenological study*

Introduction

The increasing globalization of education has opened a broader opportunity for teachers to continue their professional career outside their home country. While various education systems experience shortage of teachers, many countries began to expand gathering of international experience to boost their range of educators and maintain quality delivery of education. Among these international educators, Filipino teachers are recognized in the global field because of their strong pedagogical foundations, English language efficiency, flexibility, and teaching dedication. Because of this, they have become an integral part of education systems in countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and the Middle East countries. However, although teaching abroad provides opportunities for professional development, it also requires intricate adaptation processes as teachers face new education policies, teaching strategies, classroom environment, communication style, and cultural expectations. Such transition requires deep professional adaptation while teachers re-compare their teaching methods and reconstruct their identity as educators within a new education culture.

At the global level, the mobility of internationally trained teachers has become an important strategy to address the ongoing shortage of teachers, especially in developed countries experiencing a lack in their education sector. In the United States, many school districts expanded the recruitment of international teachers through employment-based and cultural exchange programs to address teacher shortages in important assignments and schools require additional support. Recent studies show that many teachers from abroad experience challenges related to unfamiliar teaching strategies, class management, education liability system, language usage difference, and cultural standards even though they have a broad teaching experience in their home country (Gamez-Catiis, 2024; Samia & Calaguas, 2025). Studies have also shown that migrant teachers often go through the difficult professional adaptation process as they walk the new education environment in conjunction with personal and cultural change (Tabata & Yambao, 2026).

In the Philippines, teachers' migration became a notable phenomenon while many licensed teachers decided to seek overseas opportunities due to higher income, better working conditions, broader opportunities for professional development, and aims to gain better quality of life. Recent studies show that many former teachers from the Department of Education (DepEd) view teaching abroad not only as a way to improve their economic status but also as an opportunity for professional fulfillment and personal growth despite the challenges affiliated with migration. Further, studies show that Filipino teachers pass through significant personal and professional challenges as they move from the Philippine educational system to foreign school environments with diverse curriculum, education philosophy, analysis criteria, classroom culture, and expected institutional. Although Filipino teachers continue to be recognized as their stability, ability, and dedication, their adaptation remains an intricate and continuing process of new education culture that requires a deeper learning (Tantay et al., 2024; Absado & Oliveros, 2025).

Despite the growing literature about Filipino teachers working abroad, a gap still remains in understanding the elaborate process of their professional adaptation to the particular context of education in the United States. Most existing studies focus on migration causes, economic purposes, language use experience, cultural differences, challenging strategies, and overall experience of Filipino teachers. For example, Del Valle Jr. (2024) emphasized the challenges and opportunities experienced by Filipino teachers in the United States, while Alendajao et al. (2023) identified Filipino teachers experiences in New Mexico. Meanwhile, Samia and Calaguas (2025) examined the experiences of Filipino teachers in cultural exchange programs. However, deeper phenomenological examination is still lacking in how DepEd's former teachers interpret their journey towards a new education culture and how it transforms their self-perspective as professional teachers. As such, a study is required to be further examined in the lives of Filipino teachers in Florida, USA, particularly on how they conduct the professional adaptation process, rebuilding their identity as a teacher, and interpreting their teaching experience abroad.

This study has important significance in the field of education, especially in understanding the international mobility of teachers, professional adaptation, and identity development within diverse education cultures. The results of the study can provide important insights for Filipino teachers who intend to teach abroad by providing more realistic understanding of opportunities, challenges, and processes facing transition from the Philippine educational system to the American system. It can also serve as a basis for school, administrators, and policy builders in the Philippines and the United States in designing more suitable orientation, mentoring programs, professional development activities, and support mechanisms to facilitate integration of foreign grades. Further, this study can help improve policies regarding international teachers' recruitment and retention by identifying their professional and personal needs as they adapt to the new teaching environment. Ultimately, this study can serve as an important reference for future researchers who will conduct studies on teacher migration, professional identity, cultural adaptation, and international education, particularly in the field of phenomenological research focused on Filipino teachers teaching abroad.

Essentially, this will be done to further widen the reach and impacts of this study through its results, which will be presented at national and international conferences, and be submitted for publication to a peer-reviewed education journal. Such efforts will better inform and further inspire education stakeholders toward improvement in experiences of Filipino teachers in Florida, USA.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore and understand the lives of Filipino teachers who undergo professional adaptation process while teaching a new education culture in Florida, USA. Further, this research aims to describe challenges, tailoring strategies, and changes experienced by Filipino teachers while they are walking through the transition from the Philippine educational system to the American system.

In the context of this study, Filipino teachers refer to licensed teachers from the Philippines, specifically the former faculty of the Department of Education (DepEd), who moved to the United States to continue their teaching profession. These teachers go through the process of transnational teaching where they need to adapt their knowledge, skills, teaching beliefs, and professional identities to respond to Florida's standards, expectations, and cultures.

Research Questions

1. How do Filipino teachers describe their experiences of transitioning into the American educational system?
2. How do Filipino teachers navigate and adapt to the linguistic, instructional, and cultural demands of American schools?
3. What meanings do Filipino teachers attribute to their journey of teaching across borders?

Theoretical Lens

This study is anchored on three theories that serve as a guide to understanding the professional adaptation process of Filipino teachers to a new education culture. These theories provide a deeper view of how experienced, interpreted, and teachers shape their experiences while moving from one educational system to another. Mezrow's Transformative Learning Theory (1997) explains how the perspective, belief, and understanding of individuals changes a significant experience and critical meditation. In relation to the current study, this theory is used to understand how Filipino teachers experienced changes in their views on teaching, pedagogical practices, and professional identities as they fit the standards and expectations of the U.S. educational system. Moreover, Acculturation Theory is also used by Berry (2005) as a basis for understanding the individual's adaptation process in a new cultural environment. This theory shows how people manage their own culture and the new culture they include through continuing negotiations and adaptation. Meanwhile, the Teacher Professional Identity Theory by Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) emphasizes that the professional identity of teachers is not permanent, but continues to develop and evolve based on their experiences, interactions, and context of their work. Through this theory, it is better to understand how Filipino teachers re-compare their identities as educators as they face new roles, responsibilities, and expectations within Florida's educational system.

Methodology

This section presents the methodology used in this qualitative study. The methods and procedures that were used in this study about the Filipino teachers in the American educational system are provided in this section.

Research Design

This study utilized qualitative research methods, particularly phenomenological inquiry, to explore and understand the lives of Filipino teachers who have moved from the Philippine educational system and currently teaches in Florida, USA. Qualitative research focuses on understanding how individuals interpret their experiences and how they understand the reality they experience in a particular context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this way, the researcher gathered deep and detailed data from participants' accounts to understand their views, experiences, and interpretations regarding a particular phenomenon.

This qualitative design will be used in order to produce rich, deep, and detailed description of the professional adaptation process of Filipino teachers to a new education culture. The study specifically examines their experiences in moving to the U.S. educational system, the challenges they experience in language, teaching, and culture, as well as the ways they use to adapt to new school standards and expectations. Furthermore, these experiences will be reviewed how these experiences affect their professional identity and perspective as educators, as well as meaning they relate to their journey as teachers abroad.

Meanwhile, phenomenological approach will be used because the main purpose of the study is to understand the essence of personal experiences experienced by Filipino teachers as they fit into a new system and culture of education. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological research focuses on the description and understanding of the living experiences of individuals regarding a particular phenomenon. Instead of focusing only attention on the outer characteristics of an experience, phenomenological inquiry strives to understand how it is experienced, interpreted, and feels directly experienced by people.

The qualitative phenomenological design is suitable for the current study because it aims to understand the identical and unique experiences of Filipino teachers in their professional transition in Florida, USA. Through their narratives, significant experiences related to linguistic, instructional, and cultural adaptation can be determined, as well as changes occur in their professional identity. The phenomenological approach will also allow to further understand how participants interpret their teaching journey abroad and what it means in their lives as professional educators. To obtain the deep and personal accountability of participants, in-depth, semi-structured interviews as the main method of data recruitment. This type of interview will give participants enough opportunity to freely share their experiences, feelings, views, challenges, and ways of adaptation as the discussion

remains on the main objectives of the study. Through this process, the researchers are expected to develop rich and significant data that will serve as a basis for determining the essence of professional adaptation of Filipino teachers to the new culture of education in Florida, USA.

Research Participants

This study will be conducted at select public schools in Florida, USA, where Filipino teachers currently teach formerly in the Philippines. Participants will be formed approximately seven to be selected through purpose sampling. Participants will be subject to in-depth, semi-structured interviews to obtain deep and personal accounts about their experiences in moving from the Philippine educational system to the U.S. educational system. The purpose sampling, also known as purposeful or selective sampling, will be used in the study, because participants need to have a direct experience with the phenomenon examined. According to Campbell et al. (2020), purposive sampling is a qualitative research strategy used to determine and select individuals with adequate knowledge and experience regarding the subject investigated.

To ensure that participants can provide rich and significant data, the researcher set the following selection criteria: (1) the participant is a Filipino and former teacher in the Department of Education or DepEd in the Philippines; (2) the participant currently teaches a public school in Florida, USA; (3) the participant has at least three years of teaching experience in the Philippines before moving to the United States; (4) the participant has at least one year of teaching experience in Florida to have sufficient experience in adapting to the new education system; and (5) the participant voluntarily agree to participate in the study and share their personal and professional experiences. These standards are set to ensure that participants have actual and sufficient experience in both Philippine and United States educational system. Their teaching experience in the Philippines will provide an important basis in understanding the changes they experienced after moving to Florida, whereas their current experience in the United States will provide insight about the process of linguistic, instructional, and cultural adaptation. Through purpose sampling and in-depth interviews, the researcher is expected to meet the deep narrative that will help understanding the essence of professional adaptation, professional identity change, and meaning that Filipino teachers associate with their overseas teaching journey.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data in this study will be reviewed and interpreted through the Thematic Analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006). This method is appropriate to study because it provides a systematic way to determine, assess, and report significant patterns or themes from participants' accounts. Through this, it will analyze Filipino teachers' experiences regarding their transition to the U.S. educational system, adaptation process, professional identity change, and meanings they associate with their teaching experience abroad.

The first phase is to familiarize data (familiarization with the data). After interviews have been recorded and transcribed, the researcher has repeatedly read and listened to transcripts and recordings to have a deep understanding of participants' accounts. Important ideas, observations, and initial insight related to research questions will be recorded while analyzing data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The second stage is the formation of initial code (generating initial codes). At this stage, statements or data containers will systematically identify and contain the data related to participants' experience. Codes will serve as the basis for determining repeated ideas and significant patterns in their narratives.

The third stage is finding potential themes (searching for themes). The related code will be combining to produce initial themes representing important patterns in data. These themes will be associated with the study's goals and with four major research questions.

In the fourth stage, reviewing themes will be conducted and reviewing themes to ensure that each theme is clear, interconnected, and that data is supported enough. Also, the researcher will check whether the themes actually represent participants' experiences and whether there are codes that need to combine, move, or remove.

The fifth stage is the reference and naming the themes (defining and naming the themes). At this stage, the main idea and essence of each theme is defined based on participants' accounts. Themes will be given clear and significant names that directly describe their professional adaptation experiences, linguistic, instructional, and cultural adaptation, as well as in changing their professional identity.

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The sixth and final stages are the report writing (producing the report). At this stage, the theme and related accounts of participants will be combined to produce clear and related descriptions in the phenomenon. Selected statements from participants will be used as evidence to support each theme, while maintaining the confidentiality of their identity. In total, this process will allow the researcher to visualize and understand the essence of professional adaptation of Filipino teachers to new education culture in Florida, USA (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results

This section presents the results of the study about the experiences, adaptation, and meaning-making of Filipino teachers in the American educational system. The responses gathered from in depth interviews were carefully analyzed with the assistance of the experts. Core ideas were extracted and identified from the transcriptions to develop and create themes.

Experiences of Filipino Teachers in Transitioning into the American Educational System

The data obtained regarding the experiences of Filipino teachers in transitioning into the American educational system is summarized into six essential themes. These include the following: (1) Unfamiliarity with the American educational system; (2) Challenges in Linguistic and communication adjustments; (3) Differences in student behavior and classroom norms; (4) Difficulties in adapting to unfamiliar administrative and professional responsibilities; (5) Reliance on professional support during transition; and (6) Cultural shock, emotional strain, and uncertainty during transition.

Table 1
Experiences of Filipino Teachers in Transitioning into the American Educational System

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Unfamiliarity with the American educational system	• Different educational system (IDI-01) • Unfamiliar curriculum standards (IDI-02) • New classroom management approaches (IDI-07) • Unfamiliar instructional expectations (IDI-04) • Different assessment practices (IDI-06)
Challenges in Linguistic and communication adjustments	• Experiencing pronunciation differences (IDI-02) • Understanding unfamiliar student expressions (IDI-03) • Navigating different communication styles (IDI-07) • Managing communication-related anxiety (IDI-01) • Adjusting communication with families (IDI-05)
Differences in student behavior and classroom norms	• Outspoken student behavior (IDI-01) • Greater student independence (IDI-05) • Different expressions of respect (IDI-06) • Challenging classroom behaviors (IDI-03) • Changing teacher-student relationships (IDI-02)
Difficulties in adapting to unfamiliar administrative and professional responsibilities	• Unfamiliar school procedures (IDI-01) • Detailed documentation requirements (IDI-03) • New reporting protocols (IDI-06) • Different accountability expectations (IDI-07) • Unfamiliar professional responsibilities (IDI-04)
Reliance on professional support during transition	• Guidance from administrators (IDI-01) • Support from colleagues (IDI-02) • Mentorship and instructional coaching (IDI-06) • Professional development opportunities (IDI-04) • Collaborative learning experiences (IDI-02)
Cultural shock, emotional strain, and uncertainty during transition	• Feeling overwhelmed initially (IDI-02) • Experiencing cultural shock (IDI-06) • Emotional adjustment difficulties (IDI-07) • Uncertainty about teaching abilities (IDI-01) • Experiencing homesickness (IDI-03) • Transition-related stress and anxiety (IDI-04)

Unfamiliarity with the American Educational System

The migration of Filipino teacher to American educational system opened a new experience full of adaptation and learning. Participants showed that their first teaching months in Florida had not been easy due to curriculum differences, teaching methods, technology use, and school policies. As foreigners came from, they had to understand and learn a system that was quite different from their Philippine practices.

In relation to this, IDI-01 said:

> *"…One of my biggest adjustments was learning a completely different educational system, including the curriculum, teaching strategies, classroom management, assessments, and the use of technology."*

In addition, IDI-02 said:

> *"During my first week in the United States, I realized how different the educational system was when one of my students experienced a meltdown… At that time, I did not know how to support a student with special needs while simultaneously teaching other students. I was unfamiliar with IEPs and felt overwhelmed."*

Based on participants' statements, it is clear that one of the major challenges as they moved to America is being unfamiliar with the country's educational system. New expectations, processes, and responsibilities resulted in tests as they begin to teach in the new environment.

Challenges in Linguistic and Communication Adjustments

The use of English language and interaction with students, parents, and colleagues has become an important part of the process of adapting participants. They share that they experienced opportunities to understand different accents, expressions, pronunciations, and communications.

In relation to this, IDI-03 said:

> *"One challenge I faced involved understanding different accents and communication styles. During my first year, there were times when I had difficulty understanding certain expressions used by students and parents."*

In addition, IDI-05 said:

> *"… I sometimes struggled to understand certain student expressions, slang, and communication styles. There were also situations where students expressed frustration more openly than I was accustomed to."*

Hence, these statements show that linguistic and communication adjustments are not only focused on English use but also on understanding different forms of expression. Initially, participants experienced doubt and dispute, but they learned to use active listening, asking clarification, and asking for help from their colleagues.

Differences in Student Behavior and Classroom Norms

The difference between students' behavior and classroom norms is also an important experience of Filipino teachers in their transition to Florida. Participants who are unlike their practicing in the Philippines share the way of expressing opinion, responding to authority, and showing respect for some students. They had to change their former perspective on classroom management and learn to develop positive relationships with students.

In relation to this, IDI-01 said:

> *"I realized the difference during my first classroom discussions… I noticed that students were encouraged to ask questions, share their opinions, and actively participate instead of just listening to lectures. Another big difference was how respect is developed. In the*

> *Philippines, students generally show automatic respect to teachers, but in Florida, I learned that respect is built by creating positive relationships, being consistent, and showing students that you care about them."*

In addition, IDI-05 said:

> *"One of the biggest adjustments was classroom management. I learned that earning students' trust and respect takes time and requires consistency. Unlike in the Philippines, where teachers are often automatically respected, I had to intentionally build positive relationships while consistently implementing classroom expectations."*

Hence, participants showed that the difference between student behavior and classroom norms requires change in their former form of class management. Experiences inquiry, argument, and more independent expression of students can be unique and difficult at the beginning.

Difficulties in Adapting to Unfamiliar Administrative and Professional Responsibilities

Apart from teaching and classroom management changes, participants also needed to adapt to administrative and professional responsibilities that they had not previously been affected. These include more detailed documentation, following new school procedures, understanding reporting protocols, and performance on responsibilities related to student safety and professional compliance.

In relation to this, IDI-03 said:

> *"I also discovered that teachers are responsible for documenting student progress, interventions, and accommodations in much greater detail than I had expected."*

In addition, IDI-05 said:

> *"Another unforgettable experience was when a parent reported a potential school safety concern through an app. Because I was unfamiliar with the reporting protocol, I did not notify the administration immediately, which led to a district investigation. Although it was very stressful and caused me a great deal of anxiety, it became an important learning experience about the seriousness of school safety procedures and professional responsibilities in the U.S."*

The participants' experiences showed that adaptation to the new educational system also involves learning in administrative and professional processes. Responsibilities related to documentation, safety protocols, and distribution of school duties require new knowledge and understanding.

Reliance on Professional Support During Transition

Support from administrators, mentors, coaches, and fellow teachers has become an important part of the process of adapting participants. In their first experiences, they were not only able to save a solution to new challenges, but also the guide of people who were more familiar with the system. Participants share that their colleagues helped provide advice, clarification of new processes, and providing emotional and professional support.

In relation to this, IDI-01 said:

> *"It was stressful at first, but what really stood out to me was the support I received from my administrators, mentor, and colleagues. They were patient, welcoming, and always willing to answer my questions, which made my transition much easier."*

In addition, IDI-05 said:

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> *"Despite these difficulties, what stood out the most was the incredible support I received from the school administration, mentors, and colleagues."*

It is clear that professional support has become the essential ground of participants as they begin with the new educational environment. Being open and willing to help their administrators and colleagues helped to reduce the difficulty of their transition and fill things they haven't yet known.

Cultural Shock, Emotional Strain, and Uncertainty During Transition

Moving to a new country and educational culture also caused a variety of emotional experiences to participants. They share moments of anxiety, uncertainty, being overwhelmed, and culture shock as they try to understand the new classroom environment and expectations of them as teachers. The distance from the family and the need to be adaptable to other cultures also added to the weight of their transition.

In relation to this, IDI-01 said:

> *"Personally, it was difficult because I was far away from my family and adjusting to life in a new country, but professionally, those challenges made me more adaptable, resilient, and confident as a teacher."*

In addition, IDI-05 said:

> *"Although it was very stressful and caused me a great deal of anxiety, it became an important learning experience about the seriousness of school safety procedures and professional responsibilities in the U.S."*

The participants showed that the transition to a new educational culture is not just a professional process but an emotional experience. Culture shock, anxiety, uncertainty, and being far from the family became part of their first instruction steps in Florida.

Coping Mechanism of Filipino teachers in Navigating and Adapting to the Linguistic, Instructional, and Cultural Demands of American Schools

The data obtained regarding the coping mechanism of Filipino teachers in navigating and adapting to the linguistic, instructional, and cultural demands of American schools is summarized into five essential themes. These include the following: (1) Adjustment to American English and communication patterns; (2) Modification of familiar teaching strategies; (3) Adaptation to student-centered instructional practices; (4) Adjustment to diverse learning needs and classroom behaviors; and (5) Negotiation of Filipino and American teaching practices.

Table 2
Coping Mechanism of Filipino teachers in Navigating and Adapting to the Linguistic, Instructional, and Cultural Demands of American Schools

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Adjustment to American English and communication patterns	• Understanding unfamiliar accents (IDI-1) • Learning American pronunciation (IDI-03) • Understanding student expressions (IDI-05) • Navigating different communication styles (IDI-01) • Communicating with American families (IDI-04) • Developing effective communication skills (IDI-06)
Modification of familiar teaching strategies	• Shifting from direct instruction (IDI-02) • Integrating technology into instruction (IDI-04) • Using interactive teaching strategies (IDI-06) • Planning more structured lessons (IDI-01) • Aligning instruction with standards (IDI-05) • Developing differentiated activities (IDI-04)
	• Encouraging active student participation (IDI-01) • Using cooperative learning activities (IDI-03) • Providing hands-on learning opportunities (IDI-05)

Adaptation to student-centered instructional practices	• Building stronger student relationships (IDI-02) • Encouraging student voice (IDI-04) • Promoting student engagement (IDI-05)
Adjustment to diverse learning needs and classroom behaviors	• Differentiating instruction for learners (IDI-03) • Accommodating students with disabilities (IDI-03) • Responding to diverse learning needs (IDI-07) • Managing challenging student behaviors (IDI-04) • Establishing positive behavior expectations (IDI-05) • Using positive reinforcement strategies (IDI-06)
Negotiation of Filipino and American teaching practices	• Retaining Filipino teaching values (IDI-01) • Balancing familiar and new practices (IDI-04) • Integrating culturally responsive practices (IDI-07) • Adapting without abandoning values (IDI-03) • Learning from both systems (IDI-02)

Adjustment to American English and Communication Patterns

Application to American English has become an important part of the participants' experience in their teaching in Florida. They had to train various accents, expressions, pronunciations, and ways of communicating with students, parents, and colleagues.

In relation to this, IDI-01 said:

> *"One challenge I experienced was communicating with students, parents, and colleagues from different cultural and language backgrounds. Sometimes misunderstandings happened because we had different communication styles and expectations."*

Furthermore, IDI-03 shared:

> *"One challenge I faced involved understanding different accents and communication styles. During my first year, there were times when I had difficulty understanding certain expressions used by students and parents."*

The participants showed that linguistic adjustment requires time and continue exposure to local communication methods. In their experiences, their interaction gradually became more comfortable as they learn different communication patterns.

Modification of Familiar Teaching Strategies

Teaching Florida prompted participants to change some of their conventional teaching strategies. They are more flexible in using interactive activities, technology, and other methods that fit the new learning environment.

To illustrate this adjustment, IDI-02 said:

> *"Since teaching in Florida, I have learned the importance of explicitly modeling classroom expectations and consistently practicing routines with students every day."*

Supporting this experience, IDI-06 stated:

> *"My teaching methods have changed significantly since I began teaching in Florida. I have become more technology-driven and student-centered in my approach."*

The participants showed that they had to change some familiar teaching strategies to suit their new classroom environment. Being more flexible, technology-driven, and student-centered have become part of their instructional adaptation.

Adaptation to Student-Centered Instructional Practices

The way of teaching styles of the participants gradually changed to the more active participation of students. They learned to use cooperative learning, interactive activities, and other strategies that give students a more active role in the learning process.

In this regard, IDI-01 said:

> *"I now prepare activities from the beginning to the end of the class because I learned that students stay more engaged when they are actively involved throughout the lesson."*

Similarly, IDI-03 shared:

> *"My teaching has become more student-centered. In the Philippines, I relied heavily on direct instruction."*

They're seen to be more student-centered while they're fitting in the American classroom setting. Participants emphasize the active participation and engagement of students as an important part of their new instructional practices.

Adjustment to Diverse Learning Needs and Classroom Behaviors

The diversity of learning needs and classroom behaviors of students requires more flexible and responsive teaching from participants. They had to learn differentiation, classroom management, and other strategies to meet the diverse needs of students.

In support of this, IDI-02 said:

> *"Before coming to the United States, I expected to teach fewer students in a calmer classroom environment. In the Philippines, I usually handled a maximum of 15 students, but in Florida I had 24 students."*

Furthermore, IDI-03 stated:

> *"One of my biggest adjustments was learning how to differentiate instruction for students with different learning needs. I had to develop new strategies to ensure that every student could access the lesson."*

The participants showed that different learning needs and classroom behaviors require change in their methods. Differentiation and flexibility in teaching have become an important way to better meet their students' needs.

Negotiation of Filipino and American Teaching Practices

In their adaptation, participants did not leave the teaching practices and views they learned as Filipino teachers. Instead, they learned to combine their former experience with new methods and expectations they see in the American educational setting.

In this regard, IDI-01 said:

> *"Another big difference was how respect is developed. In the Philippines, students generally show automatic respect to teachers, but in Florida, I learned that respect is built by creating positive relationships, being consistent, and showing students that you care about them."*

On the same experience, IDI-04 shared:

> *"In the Philippines, classroom management was generally easier due to student behavior and respect for authority. In Florida, I learned to use more interactive strategies, build stronger relationships with students, and incorporate positive reinforcement to encourage appropriate behavior."*

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The participants showed that their adaptation was a process of linking conventional Filipino practices to new American teaching expectations. Instead of continuing to replace their former perspective, they learned to be flexible and choose approaches that fit their students and the new educational culture.

Meaning-Making of Filipino Teachers in the American Educational System

The data obtained regarding the meaning-making of Filipino teachers in the American educational system is summarized into five essential themes. These include the following: (1) Teaching across borders as a transformative journey; (2) Migration as an opportunity for professional growth; (3) Adaptation as a source of personal resilience; (4) Cross-cultural teaching as an expansion of educational perspectives; and (5) International teaching as a pathway to meaningful professional fulfillment.

Table 3
Meaning-Making of Filipino teachers in the American Educational System

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Teaching across borders as a transformative journey	• Experiencing personal transformation (IDI-03) • Experiencing professional transformation (IDI-04) • Becoming a stronger educator (IDI-07) • Moving beyond comfort zones (IDI-04) • Experiencing meaningful life changes (IDI-05)
Migration as an opportunity for professional growth	• Developing new professional skills (IDI-02) • Expanding professional knowledge (IDI-04) • Gaining new teaching experiences (IDI-06) • Pursuing professional development opportunities (IDI-04) • Creating better career opportunities (IDI-05)
Adaptation as a source of personal resilience	• Developing greater resilience (IDI-01) • Overcoming challenges with perseverance (IDI-04) • Building confidence through adversity (IDI-05) • Embracing change with courage (IDI-04) • Turning challenges into growth (IDI-05)
Cross-cultural teaching as an expansion of educational perspectives	• Appreciating diverse educational practices (IDI-03) • Understanding different educational systems (IDI-04) • Appreciating cultural diversity (IDI-07) • Broadening perspectives on education (IDI-07) • Valuing different cultural perspectives (IDI-05)
International teaching as a pathway to meaningful professional fulfillment	• Fulfilling personal and family dreams (IDI-02) • Finding greater professional purpose (IDI-04) • Making meaningful student contributions (IDI-06) • Finding fulfillment through teaching (IDI-05) • Becoming a better educator (IDI-07)

Teaching Across Borders as a Transformative Journey

For participants, teaching from the Philippines to Florida is not only a simple change of workplace but an experience that has changed their personal and professional life. They described their journey as a process of growth, innovation, and molding themselves as teachers and individuals.

In relation to this, IDI-03 said:

> *"This experience represents courage and growth. Leaving my home country was not easy, but it allowed me to develop skills, gain confidence, and discover strengths that I did not know I had."*

Furthermore, IDI-04 shared:

> *"When I reflect on my journey from the Philippines to Florida, I see it as one of the most meaningful and life-changing experiences of my life."*

Thus, participants saw the teaching journey as a significant and transformative experience shaping their personality and profession. Travel abroad has become a way to discover their abilities and have a renewed perspective on their own.

Migration as an Opportunity for Professional Growth

The migration to the United States has been seen by participants as an opportunity to expand their professional knowledge, skills, and career experiences. By teaching abroad, they had the opportunity to learn from another educational system and become better in their profession.

To illustrate this meaning, IDI-02 said:

> *"Although it has been challenging, it has also been fulfilling. Teaching 24 kindergarten students, including those with special needs, has allowed me to witness remarkable growth and progress."*

Moreover, IDI-04 explained:

> *"It gave me opportunities to expand my knowledge, develop new skills, and create a better future for myself and my family."*

Migration is interpreted by participants as an opportunity for personal and professional advancement. Teaching abroad gave them new knowledge, skills, experience, and opportunities for their future.

Adaptation as a Source of Personal Resilience

Challenges affiliated with teaching abroad have become an important part of developing participants' resilience. In dealing with fear, uncertainty, cultural differences, and other tests, they learned to be more stable and continue to act even though their situation is not easy.

In this regard, IDI-01 said:

> *"This journey represents personal growth, resilience, and overcoming fear."*

Likewise, IDI-04 shared:

> *"This journey represents growth, courage, and perseverance. Leaving my home country and adapting to a different educational system was not easy, but it helped me discover strengths I did not know I had."*

Hence, participants showed that adaptation became the source of their personal resilience. The challenges of their journey not only surpassed but became experienced encouraging their courage, perseverance, and confidence.

Cross-Cultural Teaching as an Expansion of Educational Perspectives

Teaching abroad gave participants the opportunity to recognize various cultures and educational practices. As a result, their perspective expanded on education and learned to appreciate diversity, various teaching approaches, and strengths of diverse educational systems.

In relation to this, IDI-03 said:

> "This journey has deepened my appreciation for diversity and lifelong learning. It has taught me that challenges often lead to growth and that meaningful learning occurs when people are willing to step outside their comfort zones."

Furthermore, IDI-04 shared:

> "This journey has broadened my perspective on education and life. It helped me understand that every educational system has strengths and challenges, and there is always something valuable to learn from different cultures."

Thus, cross-cultural teaching experience expanded the perspective of participants about education and life. Exposure to other cultures and educational practices taught them to be more open-minded and acknowledged in the value of different ways of teaching and learning.

International Teaching as a Pathway to Meaningful Professional Fulfillment

For participants, teaching abroad has become significant because they have seen the impact of their work on the life and development of their students. In conjunction with professional achievement, it also caused fulfillment as they helped their students while some of their personal and professional aspirations are fulfilled.

To illustrate this, IDI-02 said:

> *"Although it has been challenging, it has also been fulfilling. Teaching 24 kindergarten students, including those with special needs, has allowed me to witness remarkable growth and progress."*

Moreover, IDI-04 shared:

> *"Most importantly, it reminded me that even a small act of kindness or encouragement can make a lasting impact on a student's life."*

Thus, participants saw international teaching as a path to meaningful professional fulfillment because they see the positive impact of their work on students. Their fulfillment comes from not only in career opportunities but in the opportunity to contribute to the success and development of their students.

Discussion

This section presents the discussion and conclusions drawn from the results of the study and supported with various authors. This also includes the implication for teaching practices.

Experiences of Filipino Teachers in Transitioning into the American Educational System

The Filipino teachers who were chosen to be the participants of this study shared their experiences in transitioning into the American educational system. From the responses gathered, six themes emerged, namely: (1) Unfamiliarity with the American educational system; (2) Challenges in Linguistic and communication adjustments; (3) Differences in student behavior and classroom norms; (4) Difficulties in adapting to unfamiliar administrative and professional responsibilities; (5) Reliance on professional support during transition; and (6) Cultural shock, emotional strain, and uncertainty during transition.

Unfamiliarity with the American educational system

Based on the collected data, it appeared that Filipino teachers experienced not being familiar with the American education system as they began teaching in Florida. They had to gradually understand new systems, methods, expectations, and school experiences differently from their Philippines.

In this regard, Macapagong et al. (2023) showed that Filipino teachers who teach in the United States experienced challenges in adapting to new culture and navigating the American education system. According to their study, the adjustment process can be overwhelming as teachers try to understand the new educational environment. Meanwhile, Lau and Gritter (2022) discovered that immigrant educators in the United States can have gaps in knowledge about American student culture even though they have extensive training and teaching experience. This suggests that the former experience of teachers does not mean they will immediately become familiar with the new educational system.

Challenges in Linguistic and communication adjustments

Based on the answers of participants, language use and understanding of different communication patterns have become an important challenge in their transition. They had to train different accents, expressions, speech methods, and interaction with students, parents, and colleagues at school.

This result is supported by the study of Alendajao et al. (2023) about the language experiences of Filipino teachers in New Mexico, USA. Researchers found that Filipino teachers experienced language-related challenges in their

teaching and needed to use various strategies to surpass them. In this regard, Lau and Gritter (2022) also discovered that immigrant teachers could experience gaps in their understanding of American student culture and communication practices, even though they had a former teaching experience. It shows that linguistic adjustment is not only about English use but also in understanding the way of communicating with the new cultural environment.

Differences in student behavior and classroom norms

Based on data collected, participants saw a huge difference between student behavior, classroom interaction, and norms between the Philippines and the United States. These differences require them to change their expectations and ways of classroom management to suit their students in Florida.

In this regard, Gomez-Lange (2024) discovered that Filipino special education teachers in the United States experienced differences in educational philosophy, communication styles, and interpersonal dynamics that influenced their classroom interaction and pedagogical practices. Also, Lau and Gritter (2022) show that immigrant educators need to have a deeper understanding of American student culture to make their teaching and classroom relationships more effective. This suggests that the difference between student behavior and classroom norms requires cultural awareness and flexibility from international teachers.

Difficulties in adapting to unfamiliar administrative and professional responsibilities

Participants show that not only classroom teaching needs to be adjusted but also administrative and professional responsibilities that are part of their new job. New documentation requirements, school procedures, meetings, technology, grading practices, and other professional expectations have been part of their learning process in the new educational system.

This result is in accord with the study of Chavez and Archivido (2026), focusing on lived experiences of transnational Filipino special education teachers in the United States. They found that in addition to cultural adaptation and communication differences, teachers also had to deal with documentation requirements and changes in professional and instructional expectations in U.S. school settings. Meanwhile, Macapagong et al. (2023) showed that Filipino teachers in the United States need to adjust to the new workplace and educational environment while facing challenges of their international teaching experience. It shows that professional adaptation covers not only actual teaching but also the responsibilities contained throughout the school system.

Reliance on professional support during transition

Based on the experiences of participants, demanding and receiving support from administrators, mentors, colleagues, and other school personnel became an important part of their transition. Such support helped them to better understand new expectations and to have more confidence in dealing with their responsibilities.

The study of Hechanova Jr. and Cutamora (2023) supports beginning Filipino teachers who teach in South Carolina. They found that internal educational support became an important part of teachers' experience as they fit into diverse learning cultures, teaching practices, and new school environment. In this regard, Lau and Gritter (2022) also showed that Asian teacher educators could serve as an important bridge for immigrant teachers while they are adjusting U.S. classrooms' language and cultural expectations. It shows that professional support can serve as an important resource to facilitate transition by international teachers.

Cultural shock, emotional strain, and uncertainty during transition

Based on the collected data, moving abroad and educational culture caused participants of cultural shock, emotional strain, uncertainty, and other personal challenges. These feelings have become part of their first experience as they try to adapt to new areas, new cultures, and new professional environment.

The result is clearly supported by Macapagong et al. (2023), who discovered that Filipino teachers in the United States may experience cultural shock, isolation, and overwhelming feelings while navigating the American education system. Further, Gomez-Lange (2024) studies that Filipino special education teachers in the United States have experienced cultural differences that influence their communication, interpersonal relationships, and teaching practices. This suggests that the professional transition of migrant teachers is not just a process of learning new teaching practices but also an emotional and cultural adjustment.

Coping Mechanism of Filipino teachers in Navigating and Adapting to the Linguistic, Instructional, and Cultural Demands of American Schools

The data obtained regarding the coping mechanism of Filipino teachers in navigating and adapting to the linguistic, instructional, and cultural demands of American schools is summarized into five essential themes. These include the following: (1) Adjustment to American English and communication patterns; (2) Modification of familiar teaching strategies; (3) Adaptation to student-centered instructional practices; (4) Adjustment to diverse learning needs and classroom behaviors; and (5) Negotiation of Filipino and American teaching practices.

Adjustment to American English and communication patterns

Based on data, Filipino teachers are required to adjust to the use of American English and the means of communication commonly used in their new educational environment. Not only vocabulary and accents need to be studied but also the way of communicating and understanding with school students and colleagues.

This result is in conformity to the study of Lau and Gritter (2022), who discovered that immigrant educators in the United States experienced gaps in their knowledge about American student culture even though they had former training and teaching experience. Their study also showed that Asian teacher educators could serve as an important bridge in understanding language and cultural expectations in U.S. classrooms. Meanwhile, in Aranda (2023) studying Filipino teachers at Native American reservation schools, language barriers appeared as one of the challenges in their adaptation, which they addressed through language immersion and professional development.

Modification of familiar teaching strategies

Based on the experience of participants, they cannot use the teaching strategies they are practicing in the Philippines as it is necessary to adapt to the conditions and needs of their American students. Changing their former methods became the way to make their teaching more suitable in the new classroom context.

This search was supported by Macapagong et al. (2023), which showed that Filipino teachers in the United States had to adjust to the new educational environment and to teaching methods that might differ from their previous experience. Their study also showed that international teaching experience could provide opportunities for professional growth and development. In this regard, Matterson (2022) discovered that international teachers at U.S. schools experienced challenges in adjusting mandated curriculum and instructional practices, with implications in classroom management and effective instructions.

Adaptation to student-centered instructional practices

Based on the findings, Filipino teachers learned to adapt their teaching to classroom practices that provide greater opportunities for participation, independence, and active involvement of students. This change requires teachers to be flexible and provide larger consideration to learners as an active part of the learning process. In this regard, Lavigne et al. (2022) showed that culturally responsive instructions have an important relationship with the way of teaching culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms in the United States. They found that teachers uses with highly culturally responsive instructions also provide better emotional support to their students. Meanwhile, King et al. (2022) showed that cross-cultural teaching experiences help educators to make a change in their view of language, culture, and schooling, which could affect their teaching approach.

Adjustment to diverse learning needs and classroom behaviors

Based on data, participants needed to change their teaching method to meet different learning needs and classroom behaviors of their students. This experience requires flexibility, patience, and a deeper understanding of the diversity of learners to suit their instructional responses.

This result is in accord with the study of Lavigne et al. (2022), which emphasized the importance of culturally responsible instruction in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. Their findings showed that culturally responsive teaching is related not only to instructional practices but also emotional support provided by the teacher to students. Moreover, Lau and Gritter (2022) discovered that immigrant educators need to have a deeper knowledge about American student culture to make their classroom practices more effective and create learning environment where diverse views can be appreciated.

Negotiation of Filipino and American teaching practices

Based on the experiences of participants, Filipino teachers did not leave their former teaching practices when they moved to the United States. Instead, they combined and organized skills brought from the Philippines and the new practices they learned in the American educational environment to develop a more suitable way of teaching.

This result was supported by Lau and Gritter (2022), who discovered that immigrant educators use their own cultural backgrounds while adapting their practices to U.S. classrooms. Their participants also showed appreciation in a classroom with cultural harmony where diverse views can share and appreciate. In this regard, King et al. (2022) showed that cross-cultural teaching experience could change and expand the perspective of educators about language, culture, and schooling.

Meaning-Making of Filipino Teachers in the American Educational System

The data obtained regarding the meaning-making of Filipino teachers in the American educational system is summarized into five essential themes. These include the following: (1) Teaching across borders as a transformative journey; (2) Migration as an opportunity for professional growth; (3) Adaptation as a source of personal resilience; (4) Cross-cultural teaching as an expansion of educational perspectives; and (5) International teaching as a pathway to meaningful professional fulfillment.

Teaching across borders as a transformative journey

Based on collected data, participants interpreted their experience of teaching abroad as a significant journey that caused changes in their personal and professional life. Moving from the Philippines to the United States not only gave them a new workplace but also opened experiences shaping their views, abilities, and personality as teachers.

According to this, Macapagong et al. (2023) showed that the experience of Filipino teachers in the United States can be a transformative experience due to the challenges and opportunities they face while adapting to the new culture and educational system. Samia and Calaguas (2026) also discovered that former DepEd teachers who teach the United States have given a variety of meanings on their journey, including challenges, pleasant experiences, and their views on the future. It shows that teaching abroad can be an important process of changing and molding the lives of teachers.

Migration as an opportunity for professional growth

Based on participants' statements, migration was not only seen as departure in the home country but as an opportunity to develop their career and have new professional experiences. By teaching in the United States, they had the opportunity to learn from another educational system, to have new skills, and expand their professional capabilities.

Macapagong et al. (2023), who has been discovered that teaching abroad gives Filipino teachers opportunities for professional growth and development while they are adjusting the new educational environment. In turn, Bright and Heyting (2024) discovered that expatriate teachers were attracted to international teaching due to opportunities for personal growth, professional development, and teacher autonomy. This suggests that international migration can serve as a way to faculty expand their professional experiences and develop a new perspective in their career.

Adaptation as a source of personal resilience

Based on the experience of participants, the process of adapting to a new country and educational environment has become the way to cultivate their personal resilience. Challenges such as cultural differences, uncertainty, and being far from home country not only became tests but served as the opportunity to become more stable, confident, and persistent in their profession.

This result was supported by Macapagong et al. (2023), who reported that Filipino teachers in the United States experienced cultural shock, isolation, and other adjustment challenges but learned to deal with them as professionals continue to develop. Also, Gomez-Lange (2024) discovered that Filipino special education teachers in the United States had to navigate cultural differences, communication styles, and interpersonal dynamics,

influencing their teaching practices and adaptation. It shows that adaptation to other educational culture can be an important process in developing resilience by international teachers.

Cross-cultural teaching as an expansion of educational perspectives

Based on data, participants saw cross-cultural teaching as an experience that expanded their views on education, culture, and teaching method. Having exposure to two different educational environments gave them the opportunity to compare their former practices with new methods and better understand different methods of teaching and learning.

Gomez-Lange (2024) showed that Filipino special education teachers in the United States experienced a difference in educational philosophy, teaching practices, communication styles, and interpersonal dynamics. These differences influence their classroom communication, pedagogical approaches, and curriculum adaptation. Meanwhile, Macapagong et al. (2023) showed that teaching abroad gave Filipino teachers the opportunity to experience a new culture and educational system, which became part of their professional growth. It implies that cross-cultural teaching not only requires adaptation but also can expand the teacher's perspective on education.

International teaching as a pathway to meaningful professional fulfillment

Based on participants' statements, foreign teaching is interpreted as an experience that caused fulfillment due to the opportunity to serve students, improve self, and achieve personal and professional aspirations. Despite the challenges of migration and adaptation, participants saw their work as a significant part of their life and career.

This result is in accord with the study of Samia and Calaguas (2026), focusing on former DepEd teachers currently teaching in the United States. Their phenomenological study showed that the experience of teaching abroad includes pleasant experiences and future outlooks, showing that international teaching journey is not only about challenges but also the positive meanings and experiences that teachers get. Moreover, Bright and Heyting (2024) show that international teaching can be attributed to personal growth, professional development, and teacher autonomy, which can provide a deeper sense and fulfillment in teachers' professional journey.

Implication to Teaching

The study results show that Filipino teachers moving to another educational system requires enough preparation to make their transition easier. It is important for schools and educational institutions to have orientation programs discussing major differences in curriculum, classroom practices, student behavior, communication patterns, administrative procedures, and professional expectations. In this way, the unfamiliarity and uncertainty of international teachers will be reduced and they will be prepared for their new duties.

The study also indicates the importance of mentoring, collaboration, and professional support for teachers starting with a new educational environment. Schools may assign mentors or peer-support systems to assist new international teachers in understanding school procedures, instructional practices, classroom management, and other professional responsibilities. Having continued support can help not only with their teaching effectiveness but also with their confidence, adaptability, and professional well-being.

Above all, the study shows that international teaching experience can be used as an opportunity for continuous professional learning and expansion of teaching perspectives. Teachers can encourage to identify their former skills and experiences as new practices are openly accepted from their host educational system. Through cultural exchange, reflective practice, and continuous professional development, Filipino teachers can combine their learned practices from the Philippines and the United States to become more flexible, culturally responsive, resilient, and effective educators.

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