



# The Plight of Filipino Teachers in Dubai: A Phenomenological Study

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12786561>

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## Abstract:

This study was undertaken to understand the life-stories of Filipino teachers in Dubai particular to those in EYS level, those in the public and private branches with focus on teacher's journey at personal and their professional aspect. This has concentrated on the Filipino teachers: their experiences, practices, difficulties, and victories, and that each of them went through. Lastly, this research distinguished the coping strategies and the defense mechanism to be able to uphold one's existence despite the thorns and tribulations inside work or in other places that are not covered in workplace. As a result of the use of qualitative analysis, the study realizes the following six broad themes; Communication Development, Cultural and Societal Awareness, Classroom Management, Instructional Strategies, Professional and Personal Growth and the last one being External Influence. Every theme has sub themes that show how these educators' function, survive, and transform in a multiethnic environment. The study facilitated in providing an ideal perspective to understand the issues and prospects that are faced and encountered by the Filipino teachers working in Dubai while making them realize their remarkable services and contributions to the education sector of the country hence aiming and striving continuously for professional and personal development. This study sought to uncover aspects of these teachers' experiences to increase recognition of the difficulties faced by these professionals and improve strategies to help them achieve their goals and be recognized internationally.

*Keywords:* Collaizi's data analysis, phenomenology, Filipino teachers' life-stories, teachers' journey and strategies, and coping mechanism.

## Introduction:

The global trends of education employment show many Filipino teachers seeking jobs overseas, with a significant focus on Dubai, often referred to as the "Manhattan of the Middle East" due to its impressive cities and towers. Dubai, part of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), is a prestigious hub in the Middle East, offering numerous job opportunities that attract Filipino workers, including teachers. The UAE, a small, oil-rich Middle Eastern nation, is primarily Muslim and operates as a federal monarchy formed by seven emirates. The UAE's rapid transformation from poverty to wealth in less than fifty years is mainly due to oil revenue (Shihab, 2001). The country, unable to produce a trained workforce, implemented policies to attract qualified expatriates to help develop its infrastructure (Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2014).

In Dubai, several schools hire teachers from various backgrounds, including many Filipino teachers. This research focuses on Filipino teachers employed at the British Orchard Nursery, a major provider of childcare and early education services in the UAE and UK, where about 80% of the employees are Filipinos. Despite their presence, most Filipino teachers serve as teaching assistants rather than holding permanent teaching assignments. This disparity may stem from local attitudes that Filipinos excel in childcare roles and differences in academic requirements compared to teachers from Europe, the Western world, or the Emirates. Education International's Global Study (2014) found that migrant teachers often take risks to support their families, improve their quality of life, or advance their careers (Chacko & Lin, 2015). Hauerwas et al. (2017) also note that teaching internationally presents employment opportunities in diverse countries.

Elizabeth Buckner (2017) highlights a significant gap in overall teacher satisfaction, with expatriate teachers reporting higher satisfaction than Emirati teachers. The perceived value of the teaching profession significantly predicts professional satisfaction. The experiences of Filipino educators in Dubai provide valuable insights into international teaching dynamics as they navigate cultural, linguistic, and professional landscapes distinct from their homeland. Neilsen (2009) argues that English Second Language (ESL) teachers hold a privileged position due to high demand and opportunities to engage with new cultures and commerce.

In my research, I found that all interviewed teachers experienced professional and personal growth over the years. Working in a diverse environment broadened their cultural understanding and response to challenges. One participant learned to be cautious with humor after a joke was misunderstood, while another felt inferior due to being Filipino despite finding Dubai a happy place. These experiences underscore the complexities and rewards of teaching abroad, as Filipino educators contribute to and learn from Dubai's multicultural environment.

Interviews and observations revealed that some participants commonly felt inferior based on treatment from parents, colleagues, and leaders, often dependent on nationality. Parents generally preferred teachers from European countries or native English-speaking countries, impacting salaries and self-efficacy regardless of teachers'



tasks or designations. Professional satisfaction is defined as the emotional state resulting from one's job appraisal (Locke, 1976) and teachers' affective reactions to their work (Zembylas & Papanastasiou, 2004).

Globally, educators help learners achieve desirable outcomes within efficient education systems. Adequate teacher availability in classrooms is crucial (UNESCO Institute for Statistics-UIS, 2013). In Dubai, Filipino teachers play a significant role in early childhood education despite facing cultural, linguistic, and systemic challenges. Teaching in diverse classrooms requires flexibility and tact, especially in a country where Arabic and English are predominant languages.

Establishing strong support structures among Filipino teachers is essential. Forming supportive networks, offering advice, mentorship, and dealing with difficulties contribute to personal and professional development. Teaching in Dubai offers advantages like professional growth, exposure to new teaching approaches, and experience exchange.

My paper, "The Plight of Filipino Teachers in Dubai," encapsulates various findings within the education discourse. Researchers emphasize early childhood education as key to future success, influenced by cultural and social factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Vygotsky, 1934-1978). Understanding Filipino teachers' narratives reveals their dedication and contributions to early years education in Dubai.

This study provides valuable insights for different stakeholders in education. Teachers gain knowledge about teaching in Dubai, students benefit from Filipino teachers' gentle and detailed approach, and parents gain trust and confidence in schools hiring Filipino teachers.

### **Literature Review:**

Based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, this phenomenological study examined how the experiences of Early Years Filipino (EYS) teachers in Dubai were shaped by multiple layers of social, cultural, and educational systems (Richardson & Watt, 2006; Sinclair, 2008; Bruinsma & Jansen, 2010; Feng, 2011; Raven, 2011; Dickson & Le Roux, 2012). Although qualitative, this study also explored how these experiences impacted their students, examining whether these experiences had positive or negative influences on teacher efficiency and classroom decision-making.

According to students, their relationship with faculty often involves fear, anger, and anxiety due to academic pressure, lack of comprehension, or perceived unfair treatment (Dickelmann, 17-19). This tense atmosphere can negatively affect student performance and well-being. Educational institutions should address these issues to improve the student-faculty relationship.

The microsystem under study included the teachers' classroom context, encompassing all interactions within the classroom environment. This microsystem was influenced by broader systems, including school administrative policies, support structures for early childhood educators, and the global context of Dubai (Livingstone, 2002; Manuel & Hughes, 2006; Ozturk Akar, 2012). The macrosystem involved cultural and environmental factors surrounding early childhood education in Dubai (Jarvis & Woodrow, 2005; Williams & Forgasz, 2009; Brinia, 2012; Weaver-Hightower, 2011). Cultural competence in teaching was emphasized, highlighting the importance of teachers' cultural knowledge and experiences in managing diverse classrooms (Dickson & Le Roux, 2012; Goh & Atputhasamy, 2001).

Philosophically, the study acknowledged individuals' experiences and views as central to the research. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009), research philosophy relates to the production and nature of knowledge, aligning with the phenomenological movement that emphasizes investigating human experiences without preconceptions. This approach respected the narratives of EYS Filipino teachers in Dubai, aiming to explore their daily existence, practices, struggles, and successes within the educational context.

The study adhered to the principle of 'epoché,' separating previous knowledge to analyze teachers' narratives with curiosity. This philosophical stance underscored the importance of respecting educators' opinions and recognizing their role as co-authors of the educational process. The study aimed to illuminate the complex, interrelated aspects of the lives of EYS Filipino teachers, integrating discussions of culture, education, and lived experiences.

Ontology, the theorization of reality's nature, significantly shaped the study's standpoint. Realist ontology suggested an objective reality concerning these teachers' experiences, while constructivism viewed reality as socially constructed and relative, influenced by beliefs and cultural orientations (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This ontology defined the research questions, data perception, and analysis approach.

The axiological aspect acknowledged that value bias could affect study results. Thus, the study minimized researcher bias, focusing on actual research data and educators' experiences to provide an unbiased view of their situations. The constructivist epistemological position involved formulating research questions based on



multiculturalism and individualism in Dubai's education system, using face-to-face interviews and observations to analyze specific views and attitudes (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Methodologically, the study's framework guided data collection, analysis, and interpretation to address research questions effectively. The rhetorical perspective emphasized the importance of language, discourse, and argument organization in presenting findings clearly and coherently, influencing how the study's results were received by academic and other communities.

### **Methodology:**

#### **Research Design**

Following Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, this study investigates the experiences of Filipino teachers in early childhood education in Dubai using qualitative phenomenological interviews. Participants engaged in the epoché process, bracketing personal biases to capture the true essence of their experiences. This approach acknowledges that total neutrality is unattainable, yet it strives to represent respondents' experiences truthfully (KJA, 1999). The research questions appreciated intentionality, posing teaching and learning activities in the new cultural context as intentional acts. Descriptive phenomenological analysis, aligned with Husserl's call for detailed explication, was used to provide a thick description of the phenomenon. Reflective analysis further ensured that interpretations were grounded in participants' experiences.

#### **Environment**

The study focused on British Orchard Nursery School in Dubai, known for its multicultural context and continuous development. With 30 branches, the nursery serves a significant number of young learners, reflecting the city's diversity. The institution's emphasis on quality early years education made it a suitable context for exploring the experiences of Filipino teachers.

#### **Participants**

Five female educators from Early Years School (EYS) in Dubai participated in the study. Their ages ranged from 25 to 55, with practical experience varying from two to twelve years. This diverse group provided a comprehensive understanding of their professional and cultural experiences in Dubai's multicultural education environment. These educators taught children aged 0-6 years at British Orchard Nursery, both private and government schools. Participants were purposively chosen based on their experience, ensuring rich descriptions of their opinions and cultural adaptability processes.

#### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

Participants were selected based on specific criteria: Filipino heritage, current teaching position in Dubai, and fluency in English and Tagalog. Teachers with less than one year of experience or those not teaching in Dubai at the time were excluded to ensure the relevance and depth of the data collected.

#### **Instrument**

The primary research tool was the researcher, employing face-to-face semi-structured interviews to gather detailed narratives. Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method structured the approach, including semi-structured interviews and structured questionnaires to enrich the qualitative data. This method ensured a comprehensive understanding of the teachers' experiences, capturing the complexities of early years education in Dubai.

#### **Data Gathering Procedures**

Approval was sought from relevant authorities, including the Dean of Graduate School of Education and the CEO of British Orchard Nursery. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, and their consent was obtained. Interviews were scheduled at convenient times, with semi-structured interviews conducted individually to capture detailed experiences. Member checking and reflexive journaling were used to enhance the credibility and transparency of the data.

#### **Data Analysis**

Adopting Colaizzi's (1978) steps of descriptive phenomenological data analysis, the study aimed to understand the experiences of early years Filipino teachers in Dubai. The steps included:

1. Familiarization: Reading and re-reading the data to understand its content and the feelings of each participant.
2. Identifying Significant Statements: Highlighting significant phrases and statements shared by participants.
3. Formulating Meanings: Interpreting the underlying meanings of these statements.
4. Clustering Themes: Grouping related themes to reflect common lived experiences.
5. Developing an Exhaustive Description: Integrating themes into a comprehensive description of participants' experiences.
6. Seeking Validation: Ensuring the credibility and validity of findings through participant feedback and expert consultation.



7. Phenomenological Description: Presenting a coherent narrative capturing the essence of the participants' experiences.

## Findings and Discussion:

### Theme 1: Communication Development

In phenomenological research, the essence of creating a language-rich environment in early childhood education is deeply intertwined with the lived experiences of both educators and learners. According to Participant 3, there is a profound realization that integrating language into the daily routines of children—through songs, chants, games, and storytelling—fosters meaningful language use. This approach is not merely a methodological choice but a fundamental aspect of crafting an environment where language learning is interwoven with everyday activities. The importance of embedding vocabulary and language patterns within authentic contexts is highlighted by the participant's experience. As observed by Dickson and Tabors (2001), such environments are instrumental in young children's language development, allowing them to naturally acquire language skills through repeated and varied exposure.

Participants also acknowledge that daily goals for vocabulary, grammar, phonology, and pragmatics, when set and pursued through engaging activities, contribute significantly to language acquisition (Justice, 2004). The lived experience of educators reveals that ensuring consistent, meaningful communication in multiple forms—whether through child-to-child, child-to-adult, or adult-to-child interactions—enriches the learning environment and supports natural language growth (Stebbing, 1999).

Navigating language barriers presents both challenges and opportunities within the classroom setting. Participant 1 highlights the effectiveness of hands-on, play-based approaches in overcoming these barriers. By using objects and visual aids that children can physically engage with, the educator makes the learning process more accessible and meaningful. However, the difficulty of explaining complex subjects in a way that transcends language differences remains a significant hurdle, impacting communication effectiveness and learning experiences (Participant 3).

The phenomenological analysis of these experiences reveals that communication is a multi-faceted phenomenon encompassing not just verbal exchanges but also written, visual, and intercultural aspects (Shrestha et al., 2019). Participants reported employing a variety of strategies, including innovative methods, visual aids, and translation services, to bridge language gaps and enhance educational engagement. This aligns with findings by Kuroda and Yamamoto (2018), who emphasize the growing importance of English for various purposes and the need for effective communication strategies in diverse educational settings.

The use of multilingual resources plays a crucial role in bridging language gaps between home and school environments. Participant 3 describes their practice of providing bilingual dictionaries and translation materials to support students' comprehension and participation. This practice underscores the importance of multilingual support in facilitating access to content and fostering an inclusive classroom environment (Pandey et al., 2022).

Incorporating such resources aligns with the phenomenological understanding of education as an inclusive practice that adapts to the diverse linguistic needs of students. By offering materials in students' native languages, educators address the challenge of navigating linguistic diversity and enhance students' ability to engage fully in classroom activities.

### Theme 2: Cultural and Societal Consciousness

Cultural sensitivity and awareness are foundational to fostering inclusive learning environments. Participants emphasize the significance of understanding and respecting cultural differences among students, parents, and colleagues. Participant 1's commitment to compassion and cultural sensitivity highlights the importance of creating a learning environment where students feel valued and understood (Participant 3).

The phenomenological approach reveals that cultural awareness involves more than acknowledging differences; it requires actively considering how educational practices impact students' perceptions and learning experiences (Participant 4). This sensitivity enables educators to build meaningful relationships and promote a supportive and inclusive atmosphere.

The ability to adapt teaching methodologies to diverse cultural backgrounds is essential in early childhood education. Participant 1's insight into the necessity of open-mindedness and flexibility reflects a broader understanding of how adaptability enhances teaching effectiveness. Ospina and Medina (2020) and Bassett (2018) support this view, emphasizing the benefits of flexibility in meeting students' diverse needs.

Participant 3's experiences highlight the role of creativity and cultural sensitivity in adapting teaching methods. The incorporation of multicultural perspectives and the adaptation of teaching strategies to accommodate different learning styles and cultural backgrounds are vital for maximizing student engagement and success.



Cultural inclusivity extends beyond mere tolerance to actively celebrating and understanding differences. Participants 1 and 2 stress the importance of preparing students to embrace diversity and adapt to a globalized world. This perspective aligns with the research of Barberos et al. (2019) and Garcia and Pantao (2021), which highlights the need for educators to acknowledge and address the complexities of diverse classrooms.

Participant 3's ability to tailor instruction to meet students' varied needs and promote an inclusive environment underscores the role of educators in fostering a climate of equity and respect for diversity.

### **Theme 3: Classroom Supervision**

Creating an inclusive classroom environment involves fostering a sense of belonging for every student. Participant 1's use of various strategies to support inclusivity reflects the practical application of theoretical principles. The incorporation of teamwork and culturally sensitive practices aligns with the insights from Celik (2017), which emphasize the importance of accommodating diverse learners in multicultural settings.

Participant 3's focus on valuing diversity and creating supportive classroom dynamics highlights the essence of inclusive education as a process of recognizing and celebrating student differences.

Collaborative learning, characterized by reciprocal knowledge construction and peer interaction, enhances students' understanding of cultural differences. Participant 1's advocacy for group tasks and collaborative activities reflects a commitment to creating learning environments where all languages and cultural perspectives are valued.

Marjan Laal and Mozghan Laal (2012) support this view, suggesting that collaborative learning fosters cultural awareness and appreciation. Participant 3's emphasis on group assignments and peer interactions further underscores the role of collaborative learning in promoting cultural understanding and acceptance.

The creation of an inclusive learning environment involves employing diverse teaching methods and materials to cater to various learning styles and cultural backgrounds. Participants 1 and 3 emphasize the importance of differentiating instruction and using a range of pedagogical approaches to engage all students effectively.

Altun (2015) supports this perspective, highlighting how cultural sensitivity and diverse teaching methods contribute to positive educational outcomes. Participant 3's focus on tailoring instruction to individual strengths and interests illustrates a commitment to fostering an equitable and engaging learning environment.

### **Theme 4: Teaching Methodology**

The adoption of varied teaching methods is crucial for addressing diverse learning needs. Participants 2 and 4's experiences with blended learning and differentiated instruction reflect an understanding of the importance of adapting teaching strategies to meet students' needs. This approach aligns with Obielodan et al. (2021) and Briggs (2019), which emphasize the impact of effective teaching methods on student performance.

Participant 3's use of visual aids, hands-on activities, and differentiated instruction underscores the role of diverse teaching approaches in enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes. Culturally responsive teaching integrates multicultural dimensions into the curriculum, fostering a sense of belonging and relevance for all students. Participant 3's incorporation of multicultural literature and cultural festivities highlights the importance of making the curriculum inclusive and representative of diverse perspectives. M. Vayrus (2008) supports this view, emphasizing the role of culturally responsive teaching in promoting active democratic engagement and understanding among students.

The effectiveness of teaching styles and strategies depends on their alignment with students' needs and learning preferences. Participants 2 and 4's experiences with various teaching methods, such as small group work and interactive learning, illustrate the importance of adapting teaching styles to accommodate diverse learners.

Grasha and Hicks (2000) and Grasha (1996) highlight the significance of teaching styles in achieving effective learning outcomes. Participant 3's focus on using different instructional methods and adapting to students' needs reflects a commitment to creating an optimal learning environment.

### **Theme 5: Career and Individualistic Enrichment**

Professional development is a continuous process of growth and adaptation. Participants 1 and 3's experiences underscore the importance of ongoing learning and collaboration with peers to enhance teaching practices and adapt to multicultural environments.

Serin (2016) and Macapagong et al. (2023) support this view, emphasizing the role of professional development in improving teaching skills and effectiveness. Participant 3's engagement in multicultural education highlights the value of professional growth in adapting to diverse classroom settings.



Personal challenges and growth are integral to professional development. Participants 1 and 4 reflect on the difficulties and learning experiences associated with teaching in diverse environments. These experiences underscore the importance of resilience and adaptability in overcoming challenges and enhancing teaching effectiveness. Participant 5's reflections on the challenges of working in a new cultural context highlight the personal growth that comes from navigating these experiences.

Career competence involves the continuous enhancement of teaching skills and professional networks. Participant 5's experiences with skill development and networking reflect the importance of ongoing learning and adaptation in achieving career competence. Rodriguez (2011) and Participant 5's insights underscore the significance of building competencies and maintaining an open mind to positively impact students' learning experiences.

### **Conclusion:**

This phenomenological study sheds light on the experiences of educators in integrating cultural education within early childhood settings, revealing its significant impact on communication development, cultural and societal consciousness, classroom supervision, teaching methodology, and career enrichment. The study highlights how creating a language-rich environment and employing multilingual resources enhance communication skills and foster inclusivity. It emphasizes the importance of cultural awareness, adaptability, and celebrating diversity to create supportive and equitable learning environments. Effective classroom supervision is shown to involve fostering a sense of belonging and utilizing diverse teaching methods to cater to various learning styles and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, the research underscores the value of culturally responsive teaching and continuous professional development in addressing diverse learning needs and improving educational outcomes. Ultimately, this study illustrates the transformative potential of integrating cultural education, offering valuable insights for educators aiming to create inclusive and enriching learning environments that support the development of all students.

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