

Teaching English in Japan: A Phenomenological Inquiry on the Lived Experiences of Migrant Filipino English Teachers

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Abstract

This phenomenological study aimed to explore the lived experiences of migrant Filipino English teachers teaching in Japan. Data were collected from six (6) participants through a semi-structured interview using open-ended questions. The interviews were recorded via Zoom and were transcribed. Colaizzi's method was applied for data analysis. After a thorough analysis of the transcripts, the following three (3) themes emerged, capturing the migrant Filipino teachers' lived experience: 1) Living the Dream Life; 2) Teaching Encounters in a Foreign Setting; and 3) Teaching in Japan as a Pursuit and a Calling. The study concluded that the lived experience of migrant Filipino English teachers in Japan is captivating and distinct despite the numerous challenges, such as acculturation, classroom management, racialized microaggressions, loneliness, and language barrier the teachers encountered. The study also found that the teachers continue to pursue teaching in Japan as they see it as a dream life, a pursuit, and a calling.

Keywords: *Lived Experiences, Migrant teachers in Japan, Migrant Filipino English teachers, acculturation, language barrier, microaggressions, English teachers*

Introduction

Millions of workers and their families move every year across the border and continents pursuing to reduce the gap between their position and other wealthier nations, a forceful symbol of global disparity (Faist, 2016). Equally significant, tens of thousands of Filipinos migrate yearly to foreign countries to find a better life for themselves and their families. For teachers, migration is a growing trend with various forms and motivations (Caravatti, Lederer, Lupico, & Van Meter, 2014).

Professional growth, better standard of living, salary differential, and family migration were pointed out as reasons for migration by teachers, according to Modesto (2020). Teachers from developing countries are often the ones who move to developed countries due to insufficient wages. Meanwhile, in the Philippine context, the Department of Education has faced struggles due to teacher migration, which has caused the number of teachers to be not proportional to the number of students (Galang, Ancho & Dela Cruz, 2021). Undeniably, the teacher ratio is also growing less ideal—one teacher per 31 students, whereas, aside from professional growth and development goals, inadequate salary, toxic environment, rotten educational system, and lack of professional growth are just some of the main reasons why Filipino teachers leave the Philippines. With funds challenging to increase, the situation makes the government further encourage migration by not keeping its promise to increase teachers' salaries (Novio, et al., 2019).

As of 1981-2019, there are about 10 % or 10.2 million registered Filipino migrants in more than 200 destination countries and territories; Japan ranks 3rd among the top 10 major country destinations of Filipino Emigrants (Commission on Filipino Overseas, 2022), for that reason Japan is seen then as a market and opportunity for educated, and highly competent English Filipino migrants (Balgoa, 2019). An hour of wage labor in Japan is many times higher than that of neighboring Asian countries, and because of that, other Asian countries perceive the streets of Japan to be paved with gold (Brown & Foot (2016). Moreover, teaching in Japan offers a productive ground for deeper cultural engagement for Japanese and other nationalities through incorporating the Filipino community as a whole within Japanese society (San Jose and Piquero-Ballescás, 2010). Consequently, teachers now are moving into the field of English teaching in Japan in a significant number (Deki, cited by Oda & Takada, (2014). Thus, it is important to understand the lived experiences of Filipino English teachers teaching in Japan.

For the researcher, the significant increase in the number of migrant Filipino English teachers is an alarming concern that will result in teacher shortages in the Philippines (Stewart, 2020). Nonetheless, pouring more teachers into the system does not necessarily solve the retention problem. The researcher thereby felt the necessity to identify exactly all the contributory factors to the migration of Filipino English teachers as well as explore the actual situation, challenges, and growth experienced by migrant teachers. Admittedly, previous studies only focused on language teacher recognition, teacher preparedness to teach for diversity, equity, and global interconnectedness, problems with assistant language teachers, and Filipino English teachers' nonnativeness and drawbacks (see Stewart, 2020; Sumalinog, 2020; Merryfield, 2000; Oda & Takada, 2014; Ohtani, 2010; Balgoa, 2019). These studies have different focuses and were also conducted in other countries therefore cannot directly present a clear and current picture that would confirm the true plight of the migrant Filipino English teachers in Japan. To the researcher's knowledge, this

qualitative research is fresh and first of its kind. Being a migrant teacher in Japan, the researcher decided to use her encounters supported by the findings of existing studies in literature, as the foundation in the pursuit of this inquiry. Thus, the researcher applied phenomenology to gain access to these teachers' worlds and their various experiences while teaching English in Japan. The researcher believes that this qualitative inquiry would paint a picture of the life story of Filipino English teachers abroad. Furthermore, the results of this study would be useful to English teachers who plan to migrate to educational institutions that aim to acquire advanced knowledge of the phenomenon.

Literature Review

Relevant studies and literature are hereby presented in this section of the paper. The related studies revolve around the following areas: a) teaching in Japan and other foreign countries; b) assistant language teacher qualification; c) teaching preparation; d) teacher migration; e) English language teaching\assistant language teaching challenges; f) aligning strategies; g) academic freedom; h) Japanese educational system; and i) teacher salary.

Teaching in Japan and other foreign countries. Japan started to open its doors to the world in the year 1853. At that time few Filipinos already worked as Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) and now they are moving into the field of English teaching in Japan in a significant number (Deki, cited by Oda & Takada, (2014). This is affirmed by Stewart (2020) who claimed that the number of Filipinos migrating to Japan has continued to rise since the 1990s, numbering a total of 229, 595 out of 2.23 million foreign residents in 2015. The third place among its foreign residents is Filipinos. Furthermore, San Jose and Piquero-Ballescás (2010) also postulated that teaching in Japan offers a productive ground for deeper cultural engagement with Japanese and other nationalities through broad participation and incorporation of the Filipino community within Japanese society. As far as teaching in Japan is concerned, Frederiksen's (2014) study respondents mentioned that their work as teachers is lighter in Japan since they do not need to talk for the whole class duration, or else the learners will never understand. The time they spend outside of their work schedule depends on their nature and how responsible they are in terms of controlling what occurs in their assigned classrooms and schools. Aside from this, high school teachers normally teach at most 4 hours of the overall 6 hours of classes every day.

Assistant language teacher qualification. International exchange and language education between Japan and other countries is the official purpose of the Japan Exchange Teacher (JET) program, although its first objective was to improve the Japan-US economic disparity (McConnell, quoted by Ohtani, 2010). The basic qualification of an Assistant language teacher (ALT) is that one must have a high proficiency in the English language, a language teaching experience, or a high level of Japanese language ability (Marchesseau, 2015). However, according to Yokoyama (2018), in his research on the official hiring policy of ALTs in Japan, Assistant language teacher (ALT) applicants should only be required to possess a bachelor's degree in any field, and any statements that prioritize backgrounds in teaching or English language teaching (ELT) should not be included. Assistant Language Teachers or ALTs in Japan are needed by the JTEs to deliver effective English language education and play vital roles in English language classrooms (Sakamoto, 2022). The English language speakers are hired as ALTs to assist Japanese teachers in teaching Japanese elementary and high school learners and are expected to provide improved foreign language education throughout Japan's local communities. San Jose and Piquero-Ballescás (2010) believe that ALTs should not be expected to be the main teachers or handle the classes alone (Yokoyama, 2018). However, according to Ohtani (2010), ALTs assigned to the Japanese educational system have no proper or sufficient teaching qualifications.

Yokoyama (2018) and BIRCH (2017) affirmed that the ALT's duties usually include team teaching or aiding in the construction of educational materials as well as participating in extracurricular activities with learners. In another study conducted by Frederiksen (2014) about Filipino teaching in Thailand, it was found that the main role of Filipino teachers is to teach communication and literacy skills. For the ALTs in Japan, up to 40 to 50 percent of teachers' time is spent on activities other than preparing for and teaching classes (Lawrence, 2016).

Teaching preparation. According to Ohtani (2010), many hired ALT teachers who adopt Japanese education have trouble managing their diverse learners due to their poor pedagogic background. Additionally, many ALTs report that they do not have any idea about their assigned schools' mission and curriculum planning from the Japanese teachers since there is a communication gap between them. Some ALTs are given responsibilities under curriculum and materials development, while some are not [Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR), quoted by Birch, 2017]. However, Mahoney, as cited by Birch (2017), surveyed 971 Japanese teachers of English or JTEs and stated that JTEs assigned to the SHSs are expected to prepare the lesson plan. Furthermore, the results revealed that ALTs in SHS actively take part in developing appropriate instructional materials to match students' level of interest, but the JTEs seem to support ALT involvement and play a more central role in instructional material selection and lesson preparation. Serin (2017) postulated that to create a conducive learning environment and address diverse students' interests, teachers must expand their cultural sensitivity as well as their teaching skills.

As far as teacher preparation is concerned, Shimahara (2013) argued that a teacher program solely depends on the nature of the school or institution. Furthermore, in his study about teaching in Japan, he revealed that teachers work

long hours in Japan, without any lunch break since they need to oversee students during that time. They come to work at 8:00 AM and leave at around 3:50 PM after the learners have left the school.

Teacher migration. Filipinos leave their home country to live and work abroad. Montayre, Neville, and Holroyd (2017) stated that the main factor that causes emigration from the Philippines is the country's short supply of jobs. Also, companies ask for high or excellent qualifications from applicants but cannot provide decent compensation. Frederiksen (2014) supports this claim saying that Filipinos work abroad mainly due to economic reasons. According to Chacko and Lin (quoted by Hauerwas, Skawinski, & Ryan, 2017), the following are push factors that lead these teachers to migrate: a) to take risks to support their loved ones; and b) to have a higher social status or advance their careers. According to Modesto (2020), large teacher movements occur not only in developing nations but also among teachers from developed countries. Teachers from developing countries migrate mainly to earn more while teachers from developed countries migrate to gain new life and work experiences. Moreover, migration enables teachers from developed countries to experience diverse cultures and acquire new teaching abilities, which they can incorporate into their teaching strategies (Stewart, 2020). However, migration provokes social disruption in both home and host countries. Go and Borlongan (2021) stressed that moving from one country to another is not a simple matter since the people involved usually experience challenges in various aspects and these challenges include homesickness, discrimination, and language barrier, especially in Japan, which is a dominantly Japanese-speaking society. The challenges are also affirmed in the study of Caravatti and Lupico (2014). The essential elements in the survival of teachers abroad, specifically the Filipinos, are adaptation, the right attitude, and the goal to succeed in a foreign land. Moreover, teachers long to have upward mobility, escape poor leadership and management, and live in a safer environment (Penson & Yonemura, 2012).

English language teaching\Assistant language teaching challenges. In their journey toward becoming international English teachers abroad, Filipinos experience different challenges such as racial discrimination (Stewart, 2020). For instance, Filipino English teachers are paid less than native English-speaking teachers since Philippine English does not make Filipino teachers qualified to be on the list of native English speakers around the world. The same situation was also exposed in Frederiksen's (2014) study wherein one of the Filipino EFL teachers working in Thailand claimed that American teachers are regarded as attractive and are paid higher regardless of what subjects they are teaching.

Likewise, Ulla (2021) asserted that Filipino teachers encountered the same personal and professional issues such as being labeled as "non-native English-speaking teachers." This statement corresponds to the findings of Balgoa (2019) that Filipino ALTs working in Japan are also regarded as non-native speakers of the language and have Asian accents. Balgoa further revealed that Japanese teachers tend to compare Asian and native accents. As a result, Filipino ALTs do not feel empowered to have a valuable role in the internationalization process in Japan.

In another related study conducted by Lawrence (2016) where the participants were part of the British Council project, it was revealed that the NESTs (Native English-speaking teachers) have a mix of positive and negative experiences while teaching in Japan. One of the participants stated that he felt welcomed since he could speak the Japanese language and was able to interact in Japanese. However, most of the participants said they were treated differently from the Japanese part-time teachers. They also reported having experienced discrimination, hostility, and borderline racism. One factor that may have caused this situation could be the level of Japanese language ability and cultural sophistication the NESTs possess. Moreover, language barriers happen when people do not speak the same language (Rani, 2016) and the overall effect of being not familiar with the new environment, language, classroom setting, culture, and local language is the tendency to feel inadequate teachers (Frederiksen, 2014).

In terms of the challenges experienced in the classroom and teaching setting, Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) who work in Japan disclosed that they have been isolated from lesson planning due to poor communication issues and lack of input from their Japanese teaching partners. They are left to conduct lessons alone with little to no team teaching at all. On the other hand, some Japanese teachers also complained that their Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), as partners, do not show interest in teaching (Ohtani, 2010). Meanwhile, according to BORG (2020), ALTs reported that, aside from the feeling of loneliness, they had a hard time adjusting to the new environment and the system because of the prejudices made against them.

Aligning strategies. English teaching has historically served a variety of purposes ranging from shaping values to creating a democratic citizenry, developing cognitive abilities, and preparing students for college, future careers, and society's demands (Pasternak, Caughlan, Hallman, Renzi, & Rush, 2017). Teaching strategies help teachers acquire the basics of professional knowledge that are necessary to facilitate the world's diverse learners (Glasgow, 2013). In Japan, the ALTs' main roles are assisting in classes handled by Japanese teachers of English and preparing teaching materials. In the case of team teaching in Japan SHS and JHS, 77% of SHS ALTs feel highly involved in the teaching process. They teach the same group of students once a week or more. In 2013, the following topics are what ALTs spent most of their time on: English Communication 1 (70%), OC2 (57%), English Expression 1 (43%), and English 2 (40%). ALTs would often see the same group of students regularly. At least 72% of JHS ALTs and at least 65% of SHS ALTs taught the same group of students per week or more. The results varied according to which prefecture

they were assigned to. SHS English departments around Japan are enacting the new national Course of Study for Foreign Languages released by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Sciences and Technology (Birch, 2017). In the elementary school in Japan, ALTs are in charge of collaborating with homeroom teachers. They do not operate in conventional language classrooms and their involvement will vary depending on the requests of the school they are assigned to (BORG, 2020).

Frederiksen's (2014) study about Filipino ESL teaching in Japan and Thailand revealed that teachers teach their learners by drilling them with vocabulary, game exercises, reading text, and speaking interaction. However, the study participants disclosed that their teaching strategies are limited to speaking and listening. Their responsibilities are also limited because there is another teacher in the class assigned to perform classroom control.

As far as teaching strategies are concerned, Chen (2017) revealed that the implementation of culturally responsive teaching strategies increased the frequency of learners' classroom interactions and enhanced communication skills.

Academic freedom. Academic freedom is taken for granted not only to receive state funding to advance science and knowledge but also to talk freely about political, social, or economic issues (Stockemer & Kim, 2020). In Japan, the JTEs usually do all the instructions. In other words, the role of the ALTs is only to wait for the JTE's instructions on how and what to teach. There are also situations where the ALTs are obliged to sit for a long period or sometimes all day at a desk. This situation is called "desk warming" (BORG, 2020). The JTEs regard the ALTs' presence as distractions from their central priority as teachers. It is very difficult to conduct lessons without team-teaching with someone proficient in Japanese. It is also difficult to adjust to working with teachers who have different teaching styles (McMillan, 2013).

Japanese educational system. English education has always been sought to attain national economic goals rather than any individual linguistic needs (Hagerman, 2010).

Japan's educational system is composed of a six-year course of elementary education, a three-year course of junior high school, and a three-year course of high school followed by a four-year (or two-year) course of university education. Educational policies in Japan include adopting International Baccalaureate programs to promote internationalization (Rentoule, 2021). Elementary and junior high schools are mandatory. In high schools, learners may choose any foreign language as a second language to study; however, most high schools offer only English since it is considered mandatory in most university entrance examinations. Moreover, the Japanese government has a strong command over its public education system, mainly, in terms of English education. Presently, the Japanese government has been making great efforts to make drastic changes to its educational system for the past several years (Tada, 2016). Moreover, there are major problems relating to English education in Japan.

The JET program (Japan Exchange and Teaching) came from this. Ninety percent of the participants are Assistant Language Teachers. English classes are divided into six classifications within secondary schools: English 1, Oral Communication 1 (OC1), Oral Communication 2 (OC2), Reading, and Writing. English 1 takes on the grammar translation method which concentrates on the form and structure of the language. It is taught side by side with OC1 which concentrates on using what has been learned already in a communicative way with the aim of higher communicative capacity (Kavanagh, 2012). In addition, BORG's (2020) study stated that the educational system followed by the ALTs and JTEs in their assigned localities has a part in driving teachers into roles and strategies. As an example, there is no confirmed English curriculum in elementary schools. However, in junior high schools, the entrance exam system has teachers highly restricted in instructional content and pace.

As far as Japan's Educational system is concerned, the study of XACAHOB (2020) on General and professional education systems found that in Japan, the professional training of specialists and the formation of personality are highly valued. The senior high school students attending specialized professional courses must receive 30 or more credits in special subjects or vocational programs. One credit is equivalent to 35 hours of classes and one hour lasts for 50 minutes. Also, over 62 credits are requisite to acquire a diploma in elementary colleges. Hence, students who have attended over 1700 hours of classes can graduate from vocational college with a diploma.

Teacher salary. A higher salary is a way to let employees feel that they are valued. It also increases the quality of work and levels of productivity. Teacher salary makes up the largest part of education funding in every country. Akiba, Chiu, Shimizu, and Liang (2012) found that countries with higher average salaries for experienced teachers are the ones that have higher national achievement.

In the Philippines, the Filipino teachers' salary, according to the research- respondents of Orlanda-Ventayen (2021), ranges from 10,000 to 20,000 followed by 20,000 to 30,000. In contrast, the average monthly wage of the Japan ALT ranges from 160,000 to 300,000 yen (after income taxes). The salaries are based on the length of service and teaching experience. The benefits gradually increase every year to attract experienced ALTs to renew their contracts (San Jose & Piquero-Ballescas, 2010). In the case of Teachers in North Carolina, the sum will be based on degree

and years of experience and the mandate of the state. The benefits depend on the placement agency (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

The study aimed to investigate the lived experiences of migrant Filipino English teachers in Japan. Specifically, it intended to answer the following questions:

1. How do teachers describe their experiences in teaching English subjects in Japan?
2. What challenges do teachers encounter while teaching in Japan?

Methodology

This section of the paper describes the research design, participants, instruments, and procedure.

Research design. The current study employed a qualitative research design, specifically the descriptive transcendental research (Husserlian) method. Phenomenology is an approach to understanding and exploring people's everyday life experiences.

In this study, the researcher specifically applied Colaizzi's phenomenological approach. Phenomenology lets researchers investigate a phenomenon—whether real or imagined, empirically measurable or subjective—the way people live it pre-reflectively. This research design is particularly useful in describing the lived experiences, centering on the description and meaning-making of those that are critical, interesting, or not well-understood (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). The research participants were selected purposively based on the inclusion criteria and the phenomenon being studied.

Although the typical sample size is small, one guiding principle in choosing the sample is that all participants experienced the phenomenon and were able to articulate what it is like to live the experience. In this inquiry, the subjects or participants of the research were the Filipino ELT and ALT teaching in public and private schools in Japan in the school year 2022-2023. All the participants were interviewed until data saturation was reached.

Research Environment. Interviews with the participants were conducted virtually, anytime at their convenience. It was because the collection of data was conducted during the pandemic, and it was risky for both the researcher and the participants to do the interviews in person. Besides, the participants come from different prefectures. Thus, virtual interviews are the most convenient way to reach them.

Research Instrument. The study utilized a semi-structured interview as the sole instrument for gathering data. The guide questions for eliciting the subjects' significant statements are open-ended and are worded in the English language. The questions are intended to shed light on the issue being investigated. The interviews were recorded automatically via Zoom. The researcher also used a journal to jot down notes during the interview.

Data analysis procedure. Qualitative data were evaluated methodically so that emergent themes and patterns could be developed. According to Polit and Beck, (2013), data analysis usually involves "breaking down data into smaller units, coding and naming the units according to the content they represent, and grouping coded materials based on shared concepts."

In this study, Colaizzi's method, which is deemed appropriate for content analysis, was utilized. Beck and Watson, as cited by Kornhaber (2009), suggested that Colaizzi's method achieves objectivity in data analysis and considers its fidelity to phenomena. It is a refusal to tell the phenomenon what it is, but a respectful listening to what the phenomenon speaks of itself. The steps involved in this method were as follows:

First, the researcher recorded all interviews automatically via the Zoom app and transcribed the information verbatim. Second, significant statements or phrases were extracted from the participants' transcripts pertaining directly to the research phenomenon. Careful analysis of the statements in the transcript is a must to identify important statements in the transcripts that truly tell the lived experiences of the study participants. Third, formulated meanings were constructed from the significant statements. According to Cornelia (2012) formulated meanings should faithfully reflect the intent of each of the statements. This requires a comparison among the original transcript, the significant statements, and the formulated meanings that will be generated from all the participants. The third stage requires conscientious reflexivity that acknowledges any presuppositions, as this will help avoid misinterpretation of the participants' views. Fourth, formulated meanings were arranged into clusters of themes. These themes underwent constant checking and refinement against the original transcripts to truly reflect the meaning of the experiences. This process takes several times of counterchecking. Fifth, the incorporation of the results into a rich and exhaustive description of the lived experience was done. This should provide a comprehensive insight into the lived experiences of the migrant Filipino English teachers in Japan. Sixth, which is the most important stage, is to validate the exhaustive description with the study participants involved in the research. The return to the participants for validation and possible further interview would ensure that it would represent their experiences. Their comments have to be well-documented. Lastly, the researcher has been involved incorporation of any new or pertinent data

obtained from the participant's validation and used those to attain congruence with the lived experience of the participants.

The seven steps were firmly followed in this study along with constant review and verification procedures so that results would accurately reveal the lived experiences of migrant Filipino English teachers in Japan.

Ethical Consideration

The researcher of the current study made sure that the participants and their statements were kept anonymous and confidential. Most importantly, the participants were given enough time to narrate their experiences without unnecessary interruption from the researcher.

As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) postulated, it is imperative that people, being the participants or respondents of the study, be assured of the safety and protection of their rights, dignity, and privacy. It is also critical that the potential risks are minimized during the extraction of their statements.

The researcher adhered to the ethical protocols established by Foundation University's Ethics Committee. Consultation was pursued to ensure that the research topic was clearly sound, significant, and ethically correct. The researcher also maintained a nonjudgmental attitude throughout the interview process to ensure that censure was avoided. Furthermore, the participants signed a consent form after fully understanding the risks and benefits of the study.

Findings and Discussions

The data gathered from the transcribed interviews were analyzed using the seven (7) steps of Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method. Colaizzi's phenomenological approach was applied to guarantee accuracy, consistency, and emotional congruence. All interviews were recorded, reviewed, transcribed, read and re-read. Significant statements or phrases pertaining directly to the phenomenon were extracted from the participants' transcripts. Meanings were then formulated from the important statements. The formulated meanings were arranged into cluster themes to create an exhaustive description of the participants' lived experiences. Results were validated to encapsulate the migrant Filipino English teachers' experience in teaching the English language in Japan.

Emergent Theme 1: Living the Dream Life

The first emergent theme, living the dream life, examines the migrant Filipino English teachers' perceptions of living in the prefecture they are assigned as teachers and how favorable these places are to them.

One sub-theme is under this first emergent theme. This is (a) theme 1: Highlights on Assigned Area Perceptions.

Sub-theme 1: Highlights on Assigned Area Perceptions. This theme illustrates how a job location and environment affect an individual's motivation. The participants' view of their assigned locations can be identified by their descriptions. More productivity occurs when one is satisfied with their job. Most of the participants revealed that they see their current locations as very convenient in many aspects, innovative, and very cozy.

Participant 2, for instance, shared how her assigned teaching location is very convenient in all features. She said: "It's very convenient not only in terms of not only going to school but also it comes to going to the mall buying like necessary things I need for like everyday life. It's very convenient, it's a city, but it's not the same as usual like in Nagoya but the city is called Suzuka city and it's very convenient in all aspects. It's just that it's a bit expensive in terms of the rent."

The same feedback was given by Participant 4 as she shared how convenient her location is. She stated: "Very convenient we are, because we have access to Osaka and other big cities in the area."

Participant 3 also commented on the environment she is in. Saying: "I'm placed in Yokote City. It's ah convenient for me. It's half of the countryside and the city. Innovative city setting."

Emergent Theme 2: Teaching Encounters in a Foreign Setting

This theme covers the various encounters faced by the participants while teaching as migrant Filipino English teachers in Japan. It includes diverse encounters while teaching the English language. Eight sub-themes encompass this emergent theme. These are: (a) Theme 2: Challenges in Instructions; (b) Theme 3: Racial Microaggressions; (c) Theme 4: Teaching Roles and Responsibilities; (d) Theme 5: Relationship with Colleagues; and (e) Theme 6: Enduring the Hardships; (f) Theme 7: Invisible Significant Barriers; and (g) Theme 8: Unfavorable Experiences from Home Country.

The participants face various challenges being migrant English teachers in Japan. They mentioned not only the obstacles they faced as teachers in Japan but also the hardships they had back in their home country. The encounters include: (a) implicit or unintentional discrimination in the workplace from the learners and colleagues who are the local teachers; (b) responsibilities that have limitations; (c) hardships that they need to overcome; (d) invisible barriers that they need to work on with; and (e) Negative experiences from their homeland that led them to look for a better life.

Sub-theme 2: Challenges in Instructions. Most participants encounter challenges in instructions, especially during the teaching-learning process. The challenges come in the form of language barrier and students' negative behavior during classes. Although one participant revealed that she has no problem with her learners since they behave well during her class, most of them experience student misconduct and they cannot control or discipline the learners since it is out of their jurisdictions as foreign-born teachers and not being the main teacher of the class. Even in terms of lesson planning and the conduct of classes, the participants must have the approval of the JTE. On the other hand, the participants from Eikaiwa also spoke of having administrative tasks or office tasks other than teaching.

Participant 6 shared about her daily schedule. She said: "It's a full-time position. So, I should be working for eight hours. However, in a week, ideally, I'm only supposed to work for 25 to 28 hours in the classroom and the rest should be around 12 to 15 hours. Is for office tasks."

Participant 2 has the freedom to make her learning materials, but before the presentation, those materials need to be approved by the JTE or the Japanese teacher of English who has full control over the class. She expressed: "I make my own. I plan my materials. Ah, just make sure that before I give it to the students it has the approval from the JTE or the Japanese teacher of English who has full control over the class."

Participant 3 shared how she deals with the language barrier as well as students' improper behavior during her classes saying: "The first challenge would be as I've mentioned language barrier. If you're teaching English but if you can understand what the students are expressing, like they're confused, or they don't know what to do. If you don't know how to speak Japanese, you won't be able to cope with the learning process for them. I mentioned that I don't have the autonomy to discipline students. So, whenever there are disrespectful students, silly ones, or loud students, I can't directly tell them to stop. So, language barrier and disrespectfulness."

Participant 6 also mentioned how rude her kid learners are. She said: "I'd say most of the challenges surface from teaching kids, adults, adults are amicable and flexible. I guess that form of Japanese children is a mixed bag. Some of them are well-behaved. Some of them are terrible. I can't even think of a euphemism, terrible."

The statements from the participants only imply that it is always a challenging task to teach English as a foreign language especially when the use of the target language is limited (Tang, 2020). Moreover, hardly any is known when it comes to teachers' challenges in terms of indiscipline inside the classrooms or school campuses or how discipline-associated behavior provokes chaos and disorder in a well-working, organized, and safe learning environment (Samali & Vumilia, 2016).

In addition, learners' unruly behavior inside the classroom can have an extensive detrimental effect on the encounter as well as on the emotional aspects of both teachers and students. These inhibit the teaching-learning goals, resulting in the decline of the overall learning efficacy (Lugrin et al., 2016). According to Nasimovna (2022), one of the main challenges every teacher encounters especially the newbie is keeping students organized, orderly, and focused in the class since keeping control in the classroom is just as important as teaching.

Sub-theme 3: Racial Microaggressions. The participants further encountered prejudices in the workplace. Some participants understood that the lack of exposure probably is the reason for microaggressions, and they dealt with it by having positive mindsets. Nevertheless, most of the participants do not see these microaggressions to be harsh. Still, they combat it by educating those people, performing well, and having a good outlook on the situations for they know that microaggressions are so subtle and the doers are often not aware that they are committing one. One participant, having lived in the US before, experienced being replaced by an adult learner just because of his color. Participant 1 shared:

"So, I think the biggest insecurity a lot of Filipino teachers have regardless of where they're from is the fact that we are attuned to the fact that English as a second language, or their other idea of English is very much race-driven. Japanese students, it's also very race-driven. So again, you they play a very big challenge where they see authenticity in race."

Participant 3 shared the same sentiments: "But generally, as an AL in Japanese society, unfortunately, the concept of assistant language teachers will always come from the Western area of the world. America, it's not only Western but generally America, Canada, Australia, UK, and then some of them would be too focused on the English - it's American English or UK English they're always thinking 'Ah! American ALT, Canadian ALT, Irish ALT.'"

Participant 4 received some feedback from her Japanese colleague, yet she understood that it was unintentional and that the speaker did not mean to insult her. She revealed: "There are also other teachers who don't even know that Philippines is an English-speaking country. So, one time I was being asked, I was being told 'You must be very rich in your country to be able to speak English' I'm like 'No, everybody in the Philippines can speak English (laughs slightly). So, they thought 'coz what they see in the television that the Philippines is very poor n 'There is a lot of garbage."

Participant 5 positively combats microaggressions. He stated: "Yung mga bata naman sabi ko nga they keep on saying yung 'banana' banana' na parang, parang may gusto siyang iparating na unggoy yata ako hahaha. Diba or mga Pilipino eh, banana lang talaga",

(Trans: The young learners as I said keep on saying: 'banana' banana', They seem to imply that I am a monkey (hahaha). Right? Or the Filipinos are just only about bananas.)

Responses from the participants indicate that although they face challenges such as microaggressions, they are not very badly affected. They deal with it by finding ways to cope. Most of the participants understood that the instances they encountered were not outright discrimination. The way the participants handle the situation only shows how strong and professional they are, making them adjust easily to such circumstances. This is better explained by examining the strategies used to cope with microaggressions. The studies of Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, and Browne Hunt (2013) show examples of microaggression coping strategies such as: a) resisting Eurocentric standards, b) using one's voice as power; and c) becoming desensitized and escaping. Another study by Marshall Pack, Owusu, Hultman, Drake, Rutaganira, and Hinton Jr (2021) suggests that microaggressions involve conscious or unconscious remarks and actions that provoke careless discrimination against members of a marginalized group. Moreover, microaggressions may escalate a primary stress hormone that contributes to distress and anxiety.

Sub-theme 4: Teaching Roles and Responsibilities. This theme covers the participants' teaching roles and shared responsibilities in the classroom. It also speaks about how some of the participants incorporate the Filipino culture using learning materials, lesson planning with other foreign-born ALTs, teaching strategies, functions as Assistant Language Teachers, and preparation of students' learning materials. Most of the participants shared that they may suggest new teaching strategies, but they are still subject to approval. The focus of the participants is to improve the learners' communication skills, particularly speaking skills. The activities must reach the learners' level of interest.

Participant 5, who is passionate about teaching, verbalized: "That's always been my philosophy, the personal touch. Also, I try to integrate cultural aspects lalo na sa elementary, it's more of a personal touch inside and outside the classroom."

(Trans: "That's always been my philosophy, the personal touch. Also, I try to integrate cultural aspects, especially in the elementary; it's more of a personal touch inside and outside the classroom")

Participant 3 also shares her duties as Assistant Language Teacher. She declared: "My main role is to support the JTE so inside the classroom, my role would be from assisting JTE as well as assisting the student. If there's a reading activity or listening activity, I'll be the one to pronounce the words and read the text as a model of how to pronounce the words correctly. And yes, just to support the JTE in many ways."

Participant 4 also revealed: "We have other foreign teachers, but they are assigned in different classrooms the same as what I am doing in my classroom and the kindergarten like ah, planning the lessons managing the whole classroom for the kindergarten."

The statements from the participants certify the fact that a teacher's role encompasses far more than just transmitting curriculum outcomes to their learners. As teachers, they must equip learners with essential instruments for them to experience not just academic but social success both inside the classroom and the real world outside. In the same way, teachers need to take responsibility for the various teaching methods and instruction in the classroom. Moreover, to promote productive classroom encounters for all learning pedagogies, effective classroom management strategies must be reviewed (Franklin & Harrington, 2019).

Sub Theme 5: Relationship with Colleagues. Theme 6 covers the participants' working relationships or associations with their local and foreign-born colleagues. It also reveals their interaction with and impressions of their foreign workmates. Most of them have a great and healthy interpersonal relationship with colleagues.

Participant 2 shared that except for being challenged by the language barrier, she is free from discrimination at work. She verbalized: "Maybe only language barrier but in terms of discrimination, I did not feel that coz they treat us the same way even though I have another ALT here who's also from another country who a native speaker was, but they're... they're very respectful, they're very humble. They're very, very helpful. They will assist you whenever

you ask them for help. Like if you ask them for simple things, they will gladly offer you help so overall, the experience here is great, I can describe it."

Another positive experience was revealed by Participant 4. She said: "But I am very, very lucky and I think most, most of my friends the Filipino ALTS here. I think most of them have good relationships with their co-workers as well."

The participants acknowledged their professional and positive relationship with their other foreign-born colleagues as well as the local teachers or Japanese colleagues through their meaningful interactions with one another. Having healthy working relationships adds value to more than just the simple accomplishment of daily tasks. Also, instead of feeling isolated in the workplace, it even allows them to feel more valued and involved and gives them a better sense of job security. It is evident in their statements that their colleagues also become their source of motivation. As Erdil and Ertosun (2011) revealed, positive feelings are strongly related to job satisfaction and well-being. A healthy relationship with colleagues plays an important role in improving teacher development and morale. Yin, Huang, and Wang (2016) revealed that a trustful climate in school and trust in colleagues may serve as both a factor and a signal that teachers also need belongingness and a sense of security and self-esteem, and these aspects allow them to get less emotional exhaustion, which leads to job satisfaction. Thus, improving teachers' resilience and professional development is necessary.

Sub-theme 6: Enduring the Hardships. This tackles how migrant Filipinos survive and overcome their struggles. It shows how resilient these Filipino teachers are. Most of the participants rate the language barrier as the most difficult of all the challenges they have encountered. Loneliness is second and microaggressions are third in rank. Still, some of the applicants somehow managed to deal with microaggressions in their way.

Participant 5 shared the challenges he encountered as well as how he handled microaggressions in his way. He said: "I usually get the remarks na si J Sensei kakkoi, tanoshii, diba sabi pinag uusapan nga naming nang mga batchmate ko, sabi ko feel ko nagiging clown na nga ako dito minsan hahaha. Hahaha. I bully mo yung sarili mo kung para alam mo kung paano maging resilient diba. kaya kahit anong ibato nila sa akin, I'm tough as nails, hahahah."

(Trans: I usually get the remarks that J Sensei is cool and funny, right, we even talk about it with my batchmates, I said, 'I sometimes feel that I am becoming a clown here. Hahaha.' You bully yourself so you will learn how to be resilient, right? So, whatever they throw at me, I'm tough as nails. Hahaha.)

He also shared how he thinks about loneliness. He verbalized:

"But sabi ko I have to make the ultimate sacrifice, it's not for me, it's for all of us. So, loneliness is one thing but if you let loneliness eat you, wala di ka magatama dito"

(Trans: But I said, I have to make the ultimate sacrifice, it's not for me, it's for all of us. So, loneliness is one thing but if you let loneliness eat or consume you, nothing, you will not last long here.)

Participant 1 also expressed his view about the challenges he encountered. He stated: "In a way it is tough, but in a way, it is also easy. It just depends on how well you play the balancing roles to be a good teacher."

Based on the participants' given statements, they can withstand difficulties. The challenges they encountered let them grow more as migrant Filipino English teachers. Their optimism, motivation, and coping mechanisms allowed them to continue and succeed as migrants. Purolo and Chopik (2021) cited that optimism is always a good thing, and optimists enjoy health and wellness. The participants rather focus on having positive thoughts, which serve as their sources of motivation or inspiration. According to Gardner (1985), motivation is a combination of aspiration and effort to realize goals. Further, McCoach and Flake (2018) revealed that motivation is an important element for success whether at work or school. Moreover, motivation produces the fuel to ignite potential and convert it into achievements. Motivation also serves as the catalyst that allows ability to be strengthened to accomplish great successes and without it, potentials or abilities cannot be transformed into performance.

Sub-theme 7: Invisible Significant Barriers. The participants encountered inevitable circumstances in their adventure. There will always be blocks on the path to success. All the participants mentioned the most difficult challenge they have encountered, and they are still dealing with it to subsist.

Participant 3 expressed her share of challenges in the foreign land. She verbalized: "Mainly for cultural adjustments because in Japanese society no one would tell what you're supposed to do, It's reading between the lines. So, adjustment for me was trying to read the air or looking at what the other Japanese people are doing and do the same thing."

Participant 4 stated the toughest challenge she had to overcome in Japan was the language barrier, especially during emergencies. She expressed: "To be a migrant teacher in Japan is quite difficult at first like when I came as a JET

participant as a JET ALT. Though I was here before from 2006 to 2008 I was teaching already in kindergarten. When I came back in 2016 still my Japanese was not good. So, I think the language barrier is difficult."

Participant 6 also mentioned that aside from being lonely, her daily schedule does not allow her to work on improving her Japanese language skills. She said: "What else, loneliness, language barrier. So, because I work full time, five days a week, and I have to use English in my job, it's really difficult for me to study Japanese."

Based on the participants' statements, most of them mentioned that they still struggle with loneliness, cultural adjustment, and language barriers. It can be understood that the main factor for those barriers is that the participants cannot speak the language of the local people. The lack of intercultural communicative skills and insufficient cultural knowledge are some of the causes of communication barriers. As a result of communication barriers and cultural diversity, many problems arise in the multicultural environment (Jenifer & Raman, 2015). Jenifer and Raman (2015) went on by saying that the outcome of variation in different cultures is a high level of anxiety and uncertainty which ends up in misunderstanding.

Sub-theme 8: Unfavorable Experiences from Home Country. This theme reveals the different negative experiences of the participants back in their home country. Those experiences forced them to migrate to look for changes and a better life. Most of the participants feel that they were not treated well as teachers in their home country. They do not see any balance between the salary they receive and the heavy and stressful workloads they have to endure. One participant shared what she felt about her experience.

Participant 2 when asked about the factors that made her migrate. She expressed: "For us teachers in the Philippines we've been, I had been like doing a lot of tasks, a lot of jobs, a lot of things as a teacher, including all the paperwork and everything. But you know, we're not given what we deserve. And at the same time, it's not you know, you feel good. You feel good teaching Filipino students but then at the end of the day, you'll realize that do I deserve this kind of, you know, treatment and the salary that they gave us? So that's one of the reasons."

Participant 4 also shared her sentiments. She claimed: "I can already compare how is it teaching in Japan and how, how is the situation in the Philippines. In (Japan), in schools like salary, environment wise, culture-wise, I was motivated, but it came to me that I was earning this much when I was teaching in Japan but my responsibility was just this much when I was working in the Philippines, my salary was just this much with a very big responsibility so there's no balance."

Participant 5 experienced and witnessed how his home country's government treated him as well as his fellow Filipinos. He expressed his disappointments and the obstacles he had to experience to get a better life. He spoke out: "We live in other places simply because our country cannot provide for us. We make the ultimate sacrifice to leave our families behind because our country who promised us to provide for us does not provide for us actually and more so steals from us sadly."

The participants' unpleasant experiences back in their homeland encouraged them to migrate as well as make sacrifices to survive and sustain their needs, get better wages, experience a pleasant work environment, and live a better life. Negative experiences such as the economic conditions, social-political factors, poor wages and working environment, safety reasons, and the unfavorable justice system led them to search for greener pastures.

According to Urbański (2022), poor economic factors mainly influence migration, which includes the hope of finding better jobs and a better life in foreign lands. Another reason for migration is political issues such as an unfair justice system, poverty, violent conflicts, underdevelopment, political instability, and corruption. The push factors include the low quality of living and lack of employment. Becker and Ferrara (2019) postulate that forced migration may end up with lasting changes in behavior since it is a more life-changing experience than voluntary migration. Migrants who plan to return to their country of origin maintain connections with their family members who are left behind and send remittances to help them get away from poverty and improve living standards (Wahba, 2021).

Emergent Theme 3: Teaching in Japan as a Pursuit and a Calling. This theme covers the participants' journey towards conquering their dreams, the challenges to overcome, gratifying stories about their new life, and views about migration. It also reveals some obstacles they have to face to achieve their goals in life, and finally, the participants' important learning and pieces of advice to aspiring Filipinos who want to follow in their footsteps. Three themes encompass this emergent theme, namely (a) Theme 9: The Bright Side of Teaching; (b) Theme 10: The Greener Pasture; and (c) Theme 11: Takeaways from the Migrant Teachers.

Sub-theme 9: The Bright Side of Teaching. Theme 9 represents the participants' outlook and impressions about their teaching experience as migrant English teachers in Japan. It discusses the plus side or the positive aspects of their job as foreign-born English teachers. All the participants mentioned more of the advantages of their experience than the downside of it. Their common responses focus on light workloads, readily available teaching materials, and the ease of teaching life.

As Participant 1 stated: "In an Eikaiwa especially for something like this, we take a bigger role than other Eikaiwas are up and my school is a bit different, and I enjoy the good parts of it so".

Participant 4 also shared how much she enjoys her job. She said: "That's one thing also I appreciate about working here in Japan because I can make, I can make all the stuff that I want to without being, without having the restrictions of the materials that I will be using. So, like imagination-wise, creativity-wise, you're very free to do whatever you want without being, limitations by having only this kind of materials to be used. So yeah, I like making my materials. we are provided here with materials."

The participants' pleasant teaching experience keeps their momentum in a positive direction. It also increases their engagement and motivation. This is better explained by examining the role of motivation in promoting a healthy teaching environment. Further, the key to understanding a teacher's motivation can be explained by the self-motivation theory. The self-motivation theory contains the basis for why teachers do their work, continue the teaching job, love what they do, and experience success (Pelletier & Rocchi, 2016).

Sub-theme 10. The Greener Pasture. This theme explores the lovely experiences of the migrant Filipino English teachers in the Land of the Rising Sun. Even though the participants are bombarded with struggles in their quest for a better life, they always see the brighter side of things. After leaving the unfavorable situation they had in their home country, all of them define their experiences as wonderful and they cannot find any reason not to stay longer.

Participant 2 shared: "Actually, being a migrant teacher in Japan, I enjoy it, because I work and to be honest, the loads, it's not as heavy as what I do in our country. Honestly speaking the salaries are very different from what we used to get. I get to work; I get to travel and it's not so stressful. It's, I actually (sic) enjoy it here. So, in the future, I'm not so sure but I still have plans of continuing to work here."

Moreover, participant 4 talked about how her job as an English teacher made her get a higher salary than in her previous job back in the Philippines. She sees Japan as a country that can help her secure a better future for herself and her family. She stated: "Because as maybe you are aware to all teachers are aware that income of teachers in the Philippines is not even half of what we are earning here. Not even 1/4 of what we are earning here. So, it's a big factor to consider. And the third one is because I have my own family now. I think my daughter's future would be better if she were raised here and not in (the) Philippines."

For Participant 6, her love of Japan life does not make her feel so lonely as she has adapted well to the Japanese lifestyle. She explained: "In one word it's colorful, some days are dark, some days are black, gray, brown, but some days it's fun. I did mention that it's colorful so, some days it can be dark, and boring coz some of the classes are repetitive, but overall, maybe, it's fulfilling."

Based on these statements, the participants have no regrets about their decision to take the path of being migrant teachers. They have developed a sense of love in the new environment they are in. Despite the challenges, they prefer the new standards of living they have in Japan way better than what they had experienced in their homeland. The host countries' norms can be adopted by the migrants because of migration (Bedford, 2008). However, some natives can sensibly decide to return to their country of origin after they have accumulated a specific amount of knowledge abroad, while others will prefer to stay permanently in the same economy either in their home country or abroad (Santos & Postel-Vinay, 2003). Work environment, reward and recognition, and employee empowerment constitute fulfillment and job satisfaction (Norbu & Wetprasit, 2021).

The participants' high satisfaction rate in the country they migrated to further inspired them to stay longer. Job satisfaction, basically, is a mental aspect that represents emotional consequences allowing the employees to perform well. In simple words, job satisfaction is the concentration of a good environment as well as physiological and psychological states. In addition, a good working environment is composed of appreciation for work performance, employees' safety, wage rate, and flexible working periods (Taheri, Miah & Kamaruzzaman, 2020).

Sub-theme 11: Takeaways from the Migrant Teachers. This theme showcases the remarkable reflections realized by the migrant Filipino English teachers in the Land of the Rising Sun. Through their encounters in Japan, they are able to understand what it means to be in a foreign land. The participants want to give pieces of advice to their fellow Filipinos who plan to migrate abroad.

Participant 3 desires to share an important virtue with those Filipino English teachers who plan to work in Japan. She wants to inspire the Filipinos to raise their flag. Raising the flag signifies more than just showing your country's pride; it also means speaking up. She said: "It's not only about having a bigger salary, but it's also about showing to everyone else in the work community that Filipino ALTs or Filipino teachers are as good as native speakers. And that we have that strong work ethic, passion, and dedication."

Participant 4 provided another valuable information as she claimed: "So far, life here in Japan, as others would think others would say it's easy. But we also face challenges. We also face challenges here in Japan. Like loneliness, we face loneliness. They think life is easy here but actually, we also have our challenges. We also have our difficulties, our mountains that we have to climb."

Meanwhile, participant 6 wants to warn everyone about what can happen when one is in an unfamiliar setting. She spoke: "I would like to tell them that Japan is not the dream that perhaps they're fantasizing about. Do not expect it to be what you'd imagined to be. Maybe there are very microaggressions not outright discrimination, right? Don't paint Japan like a paradise because it's not!"

The learning and reflections that the participants have acquired will allow others to obtain more information on how migrant Filipino English teachers live their lives in a foreign country where the language is not English. This theme contains the participants' additional insights into their lived experiences. Migration can have a positive or negative impact on individuals depending on how they cope with the situation. That is why it is important to be prepared when planning for migration.

According to von Werthern et al. (2018), migrants can experience depression, post-traumatic disorder, and deep levels of stress. That is why the participants warn people that living in a foreign land is a journey that is not for the faint of heart. Living abroad can be a challenging experience. Participants of international exchange programs are quick to warn people that living away from home, in a foreign country at that, is not like a walk in the park. Moving to another country can come with a lot of surprises and difficulties. There can be language barriers, cultural differences, and other challenges that are not always easy to overcome.

Conclusion

In the light of obtained findings, the researcher arrived at these conclusions:

First, the migrant Filipino English teachers' teaching experience in Japan has had a positive impact on their careers. Based on their pleasant perceptions of their assigned teaching locations, it is obvious that they are satisfied with their new working environment. Second, despite the migrant teachers being bombarded with challenges such as acculturation, classroom management difficulties, and racialized microaggressions, they continue to show resilience and positive responses to difficult circumstances by adopting different coping strategies. Lastly, having a good support system from the Filipino community in Japan, friends, and families and having a professional and healthy relationship with their colleagues, along with less stressful working conditions, higher compensation, and better quality of life, strengthen their motivation and encourage them to stay longer as migrant teachers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions obtained in this study, the following recommendations are hereby given:

1. capacitate the migrant Filipino English teachers by encouraging them to enroll in Nihongo classes, take the Japanese language proficiency test (JLPT, and if possible, experience interacting with Nihongo speakers before migrating to work, especially as a teacher, in Japan;
2. strategize an enhancement program like a seminar/workshop designed to improve the teachers' English language proficiency and train them to speak like native speakers of English so they can avoid microaggressions;
3. encourage school support and consider new teaching strategies offered by foreign-born teachers such as differentiated instructions;
4. join the Filipino community and learn new coping strategies from one another;
5. that the Philippine government check the true grievances of teachers to identify points of development in the current system and address current issues;
6. that the school heads create a new teaching plan and give the foreign-born teachers more freedom of instruction;
7. that future researchers conduct further studies and explore more variables that are not covered in this research.

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