

Navigating New Horizons: Cultural Adaptation of Filipino Early Childhood Educators Abroad

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Abstract: A particularly leading problem that Filipino Early Childhood Educators (FCE) face is cultural adaptation. This qualitative study explored the various experiences and strategies that Filipino Early Childhood Educators (FCE) employed in foreign countries as they adapted into new cultures and examined how such adaptations influenced their teaching practices. Nine (9) participants in different countries were subjected to in-depth interviews that evoked some common themes, such as cultural challenges, supportive systems, and coping strategies. The stress and adjustment problems are profound in non-English-speaking countries. Participants actually fell short but were able to take time to bounce-back and develop their personal lives, while appreciating cultural differences. Institutional support, professional development workshops, and mentoring initiatives, combined with good work relationships developed with local colleagues and Filipino communities, helped them adjust. The reasons to work abroad were career progression, personal betterment, financial stability, along with family support. Findings suggest that the adaptation process of FCE is a result of intrinsic motivation at its best, proficient coping mechanisms, along with external supportive systems, all of which contribute to their success in attaining professional achievement as well as personal growth in different international contexts.

Keywords: early childhood educator, cultural adaptation, language barrier, overseas Filipino educators, work abroad

1. INTRODUCTION

A foreign environment for a new career journey is never easy; it could be anything from ecstatic paramount emotions to complete disappointment. To leave personal connections of family and friends only to trade-off for superior living and grand opportunities is one of the most popular reasons why people seek jobs abroad. This transition is always difficult and requires adaptation, including the much-complicated scenario of cultural adaptation issues particularly the status of the growing number of Filipino Early Childhood Educators (FCE) seeking opportunities overseas.

Moving to another country has become frequent, acceptable, and even desirable in the Philippines as a choice or plan for a better life, thanks to a deeply ingrained and ubiquitous culture of migration. For decades, many Filipinos have departed home, searching for permanent settlement or temporary labor abroad, patterns long linked to the weak economy (Asis, 2017). Tsang and Lowe (2018) revealed that Filipino educators' migration is an intricate phenomenon caused by socio-economic circumstances and historical situations. Filipino teachers are migrating to seek greener pastures, mainly in the United States, where educators are scarce. The insecure nature of professional employment in host nations compounds the situation, often leading immigrants to engage in illegal activities in pursuit of a better life and livelihood.

However, the primary reasons Filipino teachers migrate to other countries are economic factors. Due to the

rampant poverty and high levels of unemployment in the Philippines, many Filipino educators migrate in pursuit of better salaries and employment security (Lapid et al., 2022). Places like Taiwan aggressively hire Filipino teachers to meet the demand for English language instruction, utilizing their experience. The United States of America faces a shortage of special education teachers, prompting Filipino experts to seek better job possibilities and working conditions (Brazas, 2023). Human migration is one of history's most consistent and recurring aspects (Castelli, 2018). People have moved from one location to another for various reasons, including the desire for a better life for themselves and their families due to harsh and unsuitable living circumstances in their native places. Lee's push and pull theory, which he initially presented to researchers in 1966 incorporates a wide range of elements, such as economic conditions, environmental circumstances, social dynamics, and political events, that work together to force individuals out of their native country and be a part of a new country. Cultural differences are a significant problem for teachers in their working countries. During the adaptation process, they teach different learning approaches regarding their education. Additionally, other countries use different learning strategies for their students. However, they are similar to the learning strategies of the Filipino traditional learning approach that still significantly impact their academic development.

Filipino migrant educators identify both excellent and negative repercussions of their relocation to their home nation, giving a complex view of the migration experience (Tagala, 2015). Filipino educators constantly face the challenge of embedding a local cultural context into their

teaching methodologies. Wang (2024) indicates that educators must convey educational content using local contexts for it to be relevant and valuable to students. Language differences can hinder effective communication with students and colleagues, complicating classroom management and rapport-building (Murad & Samples, 2015). Building relationships with local colleagues and navigating social dynamics can be difficult, impacting collaboration and support networks (Pardasani, 2022). Teachers who live abroad develop a deeper understanding of other cultures, which help them to design inclusive learning environments that value diversity (Serin, 2017). Moreover, teachers also learn new languages and cultural quirks to incorporate into their instruction to help students from different backgrounds relate to their lessons more (Serbes, 2017).

Gromova et al., (2024) expect efficient socio-cultural adaptation programs to decrease conflicts among representatives of different ethnic groups and improve the social environment. In this respect, teachers must create a psychological atmosphere of mutual respect and positive motivation within students' multicultural competencies development. It has improved the adaptability of migrant children by setting up experimental platforms in some schools, thus making an enabling learning environment available (Mychko et al., 2020). Understanding cultural representations and acculturation consequences is vital in referring educators to effectively support migrated families (Radjack et al., 2023).

Furthermore, globalization created more significant incentives for even more individuals. From an educational standpoint, it has expanded options for teaching and learning by encouraging interconnectedness and cross-cultural encounters. Working in a foreign community demands a person to be goal-oriented, possess the necessary qualifications, and be adaptable to succeed. As a result, it emphasizes the necessity of establishing the correct objectives and mentality to prosper in teaching overseas (Uytico & Abadiano, 2020).

Pozon (2024) found that FCE faced challenges due to language barriers. For instance, educators who venture to work in Vietnam need to familiarize themselves with the Vietnamese language. This barrier creates challenges in understanding and communicating effectively with local educators and authorities who can guide them on curriculum standards and policies. The study recommends that Filipino educators attend language proficiency training to overcome language barriers. Future studies should expand to other areas, such as preserving teachers' professional identities while they learn and adapt to the norms and practices of foreign countries. Further, investigating how the foreign environment affects other outcomes, such as educators' job satisfaction and future career endeavors, is also recommended. As a result, new viewpoints and intelligent

debates in the academic community can be sparked if desired (Alicamen & Becamon, 2022).

Cultural differences are often evident through diverse beliefs and values, which are vital for fostering effective connections and understanding among individuals (Delecta, 2015). Delecta added that the Filipino educators often encounter these barriers, specifically in religiously diverse contexts like Singapore. Further, Delecta (2015) emphasized that the knowledge of cultures is critical to create effective communication; this provided an opportunity for individuals to learn and understand a wide range of cultures from multiple countries. This skill contributes to their knowledge of the cultural landscape elsewhere, helping Filipino educators in broadening their understanding about foreign cultures. Nowadays, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has a role in preparing teachers for global competitiveness, and the Philippine government has developed sophisticated mechanisms to manage labor migration (Eder, 2016).

Adjusting to different cultures is crucial for teachers, especially in the learning environment. Understanding how cultural factors influence student behavior—such as their reluctance to speak up or preference for teamwork over competition—is essential. Tailoring instructional strategies to accommodate these behaviors can significantly enhance student engagement and learning outcomes (Jukes et al., 2021). They also added that Filipino teachers need to know their cultural responsibilities in the classroom to form strong connections with their students and also to their colleagues. Filipino educators are determined to explore the cultures of their host countries to gather knowledge and awareness of practices to avoid that may be considered disrespectful. Irtasyah (2023) reveals that nurturing diverse relationships, promoting intercultural conversation and collaboration while recognizing the power of social bridges are crucial social dynamics to which her investigation is directed. While it may be difficult to communicate, one has learned much simply from interacting with them while working in another country.

It is not easy to adapt the teaching strategies according to the cultural experience of students. In fact, Jukes et al., (2021) argue that while changing approaches may seem discouraging, it is crucial for encouraging teaching, yet remains underexplored. Educators must design applicable teaching activities that respect students' cultures to sustain impactful learning. Continuous learning about the local culture is crucial for effectively meeting students' needs.

Finally, Shiveley and Misco (2015) indicate that living and working in a foreign country causes both personal growth experiences as well as challenges. Working overseas offers advantages like salary differentials but it may also require family migration paving the way for Filipino teachers to work abroad.

The challenges that Filipino educators have to go through is extremely relatable. While extant literature focuses on the challenges faced by these educators, Symaco and Bustos (2023) underscore that their unique difficulties are not well documented in their paper. Moreover, Jukes et al., (2021) and Irtasyah (2023) make an important observation related to the lack of specificity in understanding what cultural adaptation strategies Filipino educators use. Furthermore, Delecta (2015) adds that limited attention is dedicated to the way they manage cross-cultural communication barriers. The experiences of FCE abroad were not the main focus of the previous research papers, which is why the researchers were motivated to explore and examine the experiences and strategies that Filipino Early Childhood Educators (FCE) use in adapting to new cultural settings abroad and to understand how such adaptations affect their teaching practices.

2 Aim of the Study

The main objective of this research is to explore and examine the experiences and strategies that Filipino Early Childhood Educators (FCE) use in adapting to new cultural settings abroad and to understand how such adaptations affect their teaching practices.

Specifically, the following questions were sought:

1. What are the primary challenges faced by FCE in adapting to a new cultural environment while teaching abroad?
2. What strategies do FCE employ to cope with cultural transition and adjustment in their professional and personal lives?
3. How does cultural adaptation impact the teaching methods, interactions, and overall well-being of FCE abroad?
4. How do FCE perceive their integration into the educational systems of their host countries, and what support systems or resources have helped facilitate their cultural adaptation?

3 Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological design to explore and examine the experiences and strategies that Filipino Early Childhood Educators (FCE) use in adapting to new cultural settings abroad and to understand how such adaptations affect their teaching practices. A phenomenological approach, when appropriately done, according to Creswell (2018), will be the eye opener on the manifestations of subjective perceptions of participants, which is a valuable methodology to apply in investigating the subtleties of cultural adaptation experiences by FCE.

Specifying the fact that many teachers from the Philippines work in various educational environments in different countries can be a very important explanation to understand their emotional and personal experiences in adjusting to cultural diversities, language barriers, and professional demands. A thematic analysis method was applied to articulate the gathered data. This was made possible by interviews on the nature and experiences of FCE working in foreign countries.

3.2 Participants

The researchers were able to reach a purposive sample of nine (9) participants to ensure that rich, in-depth experiences would be gathered. Being one of the techniques of non-probability sampling, the researchers could pick people with specific and relevant knowledge about the cultural adaptation processes in which the FCE have faced in various cultural contexts (Foley et al., 2021). Creswell and Poth (2018) advised that 5-15 individuals should be the sample size to explore the data collection and analysis process in-depth.

The following were the inclusion criteria: (1) Filipino preschool teacher; (2) currently working as a preschool teacher abroad; (3) at least one year of work experience in a foreign country; (4) must have a Bachelor's, Master's or Doctorate Degree in Early Childhood or Preschool Education; and (5) teaching in a non-native language.

3.3 Instruments

The researchers collected the data by employing a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions. Each interview addressed the following: (1) experiences related to fitting into a new country, (2) problems faced while adjusting to the new culture and school atmosphere, (3) strategies used to cope with the cultural differences, and (4) impact of fitting in on work and personal life.

The open-ended questions clearly guided the interview and gave the researchers a rich and reliable data. A semi-structured interview is a type of data collection whereby questions are put within a thematic framework specified (George, 2022). The interview guide was validated by three (3) research experts.

3.4 Data Collection

The data collection followed the following protocol. The researchers obtained a letter of permission to conduct the study duly signed by the Dean of College of Education, their research instructor, and research adviser.

Afterward, they scouted some of their former teachers and their teachers' colleagues who are presently working as preschool teachers abroad. Initially, they were informed if they would be willing to participate in the study given that it has no monetary compensation but will bring a wealth of information especially to those Filipino early childhood educators who may want to seek employment outside the country. From those who were contacted, nine (9) participants agreed to be interviewed and thus they were sent the formal letter of consent for their participation.

The interviews were carried out using either Zoom, Skype, or Facebook Video Call, depending on the most convenient and accessible platform for the participants. Each interview lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes, and with permission from the participants, it was recorded for transcription and analysis purposes. Before interviewing, the researchers also clearly explained to the participants that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could

withdraw from the study at any time if they changed their minds. They were also assured that their personal information would be kept with utmost anonymity and confidentiality.

3.5 Ethical Consideration

The study followed strict ethical guidelines to ensure the participants' rights and well-being. Verified permission was obtained when participants have been fully informed about the study's aim, their involvement in it, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. All participants signed consent papers electronically before the interviews. All information and data related to personal information, provided by the participants for this research were kept strictly anonymous and confidential.

Data security was another step following confidentiality. Recordings and transcripts of interviews were kept in password-protected files on encrypted devices that only the researchers have access. The researchers ensured that pertinent materials were backed up in a secured, limited-access cloud storage.

The Data Privacy Act of 2012 was also followed, and all data collected, including recorded interviews, transcriptions, and information that may lead to the identification of participants.

3.6 Trustworthiness and Rigor of the Data

The study adhered to the standards for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability for qualitative research set by Lincoln and Guba in 1985 to ensure the reliability and rigor of the collected data. Trustworthiness is the defining quality of a qualitative study as being rigorous (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). It involves various points from credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the data and interpretations.

Member checking was done so that the participants would be able to counter check that the interview was complete and there were no added responses from them. An audit trail from an external validator was also sought to establish the credibility and dependability of the study with regards to establishing the confirmability and transferability. The use of an audit trail helped in pointing out issues with possible bias particularly, the transcription, coding, and themes.

3.7 Data Analysis

Researchers adopted thematic analysis as a means to analyze the data, based on the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). This methodology was appropriate for this research endeavor to help to identify, analyze, and report themes in qualitative data in an explicit and structured way. Braun and Clarke (2006) also showed how this method allows one to have a flexible approach toward studying complex experiences like cultural adaptation; it can be used inductively or deductively.

The six phases of thematic analysis are: 1) familiarization with the data, where the researchers will transcribe the

interviews, read through the transcripts multiple times, and take notes to become deeply familiar with the data; 2) generating initial codes, where the researchers will systematically code exciting features of the data across the entire dataset, identifying meaningful segments related to the research questions; 3) searching for theme, where the researchers will collate codes into potential themes, grouping related data that reflect patterns in participants' experiences; 4) reviewing themes, where the researchers will refine the themes by reviewing them in relation to the coded data and the entire dataset, ensuring they accurately represent the data; 5) defining and naming themes, where the researchers will clearly define each theme and describe how it captures an aspect of the participants' experiences; and 6) producing the report where the researchers will write up the analysis, using vivid quotes from the participants to support the identified themes and answer the research questions.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This presents the findings and discussion covering major themes and subthemes that have been extracted after transcription and coding. The findings were then connected back to the four (4) major superordinate themes and ten (10) corresponding subthemes, which allowed the experiences and perceptions of the participants to be fully conveyed.

Cultural and Linguistic Adjustments

This theme illustrates the cultural adjustment process of foreign-trained teachers as they adjust to teaching in different cultures. In support, the research of Ward and Geeraert (2016) emphasizes that cultural adaptation is a multidimensional process, involving cognitive as well as emotional changes through which individuals face new cultural realities. The analysis revealed that three (3) subthemes have been derived out of the above: *challenges in pronunciation and vocabulary words; adaptation to the behavior of children and classroom norms; and overcoming language and accent barriers*. To understand the subthemes clearly, they are discussed below.

Challenges in Pronunciation and Vocabulary Words

Participants' experiences of adapting to new cultures and languages while teaching in a host country. In this case, they needed to concentrate on getting pronunciation and vocabulary right in order to teach children well. The participants faced cultural differences, including social aspects and religious practices. This cultural difference required some sensibility and flexibility to pay respects and navigate the country's customs and expectations. According to Cheng and McPherson (2013) pronunciation and vocabulary are crucial aspects when teaching children.

All nine (9) FCE indicated that their major challenge is adapting to a new cultural environment.

Below were actual participants' responses that intensify this claim:

"Adjusting to British English norms in Singapore was initially challenging, (ahhhmm) dahil iba ang American

English na nakasanayan sa Philippines. (Ahhm) So kailangan tama ang pronunciation and vocabulary while teaching young children."

(Adjusting to British English norms in Singapore was initially challenging, especially as it differed from the American English I was accustomed to in the Philippines. I had to ensure proper pronunciation and vocabulary while teaching young children.) - P3

"In Qatar, (Ahhm) naranasan ko yung cultural differences like social norms and religious practices, na kung saan (ahhmm) kailangan maging sensitivity and flexibility to adapt, especially during Ramadan."

(In Qatar, I encountered cultural differences like social norms and religious practices, which required sensitivity and flexibility to adapt, especially during Ramadan.) - P1

Adapting to Child Behavior and Classroom Norms

Participants experienced cultural differences in managing classrooms while abroad. It expects respect for the autonomy of children, putting caregiving before academics, the child-centered, and play-based curriculum. Teachers have to be accustomed to such practices as using first names to call parents and teachers and individualized learning based on each student's need. FCE must refrain from physical interactions such as holding hands or hugging children, unless initiated by the child. This requires a shift toward using verbal communication and positive reinforcement for behavior management. Teachers in diverse cultural settings need to learn how to respect children's autonomy while also establishing clear, culturally relevant expectations for behavior (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020).

Eight (8) of the nine (9) FCE indicated their major challenge in adapting to child behavior and classroom norms. Below were actual participants' responses that intensify this claim:

"In New Zealand, the approach to classroom management ay (hmmm) naka base sa interest ng bata at play-based curriculum. Teachers must respect children's autonomy, such as calling parents and teachers by their first names and using differentiated learning tailored to each child's needs. (Hmmm) Adjusting to these norms nag papakita ng kahalagahan sa academics aspect."

(In New Zealand, the approach to classroom management emphasizes a child-oriented, play-based curriculum. Teachers must respect children's autonomy, such as calling parents and teachers by their first names and using differentiated learning tailored to each child's needs. Adjusting to these norms highlighted the importance of care-giving over academics.) - P4

"In Canada, physical interactions, like holding a child's hand or giving hugs, are not allowed unless initiated by the child. (Ahhmmm) Kailangan kong baguhin ang pakikipag usap to rely on verbal communication and positive reinforcement to manage behavior."

(In Canada, physical interactions, like holding a child's hand or giving hugs, are not allowed unless initiated by the child. This required me to shift my approach and rely on verbal communication and positive reinforcement to manage behavior.) - P9

Overcoming Language and Accent Barriers

One of the major challenges that FCE face is the language barrier and the complexities involved in understanding different accents. Language barriers have a huge impact on individuals who are staying abroad, as far as communicating, socializing, and studying are concerned. Such barriers could lead to undesirable emotional responses and hinder the creation of trust while creating obstacles within organizational dynamics in a multinational context (Tenzer & Schuster, 2017). In multicultural settings, people may be challenged by unfamiliar grammatical patterns, idiomatic phrases, or accents that are not native, all of which can affect the clarity of communication. They struggle to understand and communicate with the locals in the new country, leading to possible miscommunication between their colleagues and parents.

Eight (8) of the nine (9) FCE indicated that their major challenge is language and accent barrier.

Below were actual participants' responses that intensify this claim:

"In New Zealand, (ahhmm) nung una nahihirapan ako sa UK English accent and the Māori language nila. I struggled to understand the fast-paced speech and unique pronunciations, but over time, (ahhmm) natuto akong mag adapted by requesting clarification and familiarizing myself with commonly used terms."

(In New Zealand, the UK English accent and the Māori language posed initial challenges in communication. I struggled to understand the fast-paced speech and unique pronunciations, but over time, I learned to adapt by requesting clarification and familiarizing myself with commonly used terms.) - P4

"In Singapore, (ahhmm) kahit English ang ginagamit, may differences in vocabulary and accents often led to miscommunication with colleagues and parents. (Ahhhm) Gumagamit lang kami ng tools like Google Translate and observed local expressions to bridge the language gap and ensure effective communication."

(In Singapore, despite using English, differences in vocabulary and accents often led to miscommunication

with colleagues and parents. I relied on tools like Google Translate and observed local expressions to bridge the language gap and ensure effective communication.) - P3

Teaching Practices in a Cross-Cultural Context

This theme reviews practices of instruction across cultures and discusses how teachers change their strategies and approaches to teaching across different foreign cultural settings. Gay (2018) revealed that culturally responsive teaching is the process of adapting to the instructional practice to reflect cultural values, beliefs, and experiences of students-an important process. After review, three (3) subthemes were revealed: *adjusting to new teaching methods, adjusting to various curricular structures, as well as incorporating local cultural elements into teaching response*. To have a better understanding the sub themes are discussed below.

Adjusting to new teaching methods

The participants further explained how they had to alter other teaching methods and lessons in the host country. This meant changing their teaching style for local expectations and including pertinent cultural content. The participants acknowledge that this is important to make sure that their teaching fits well with the country's school system. It is negotiating different curriculum approaches, instructional strategies, and classroom management styles that may be different from previous training in adapting to new teaching methods abroad (Pardasani, 2022).

All nine (9) FCEs mentioned that their major challenge is adjusting to new teaching methods.

Below were actual participants' responses that intensify this claim:

"In Singapore, uhmm sa play-based curriculum at pati yung mga interest ng mga yung finofocus namin, hindi kamukha sa Pilipinas, uhmm yung curriculum don is more on standardized. Uhmm this required me na uhmm na gumawa ng mga lesson plans tailored to the students' unique preferences and curiosities."

(In Singapore, the play-based curriculum centered around children's interests, unlike the Philippines, where the curriculum is more standardized. This required me to create lesson plans tailored to the students' unique preferences and curiosities.) - P3

"In Qatar, (Hmmm) the curriculum naka base sa Islamic values, STEM education, and critical thinking. (Ahmm) Kailangan kong I adjust ang pamamaraan ng pag tuturo ko to align my teaching style with local expectations and incorporate culturally relevant content."

(In Qatar, integrating Islamic values and local culture into the curriculum was essential. I also utilized interactive tools and technology to foster

engagement in line with the country's focus on STEM education.) - P1

Adjusting to Various Curricular Structures

The results show how FCE needs to be accommodative of numerous curricular frameworks and also cultural expectations of the hosting countries in which they offer their service. A participant recalls that the curricula in which she teaches focus on such aspects as Islamic values, STEM Education, and critical thinking, that compel teachers to be responsive to regional expectations and thus integrate information that resonates with the regions. Instead, the other participant said that the play-based, child-led curriculum in Singapore contrasts sharply with the structured and predetermined approach of the Philippines, which has to be flexible and creative, demanding great cultural and pedagogical adaptability to foster effective teaching in international contexts. The Philippine education system has traditionally used a more formal curriculum. A comparative study of early childhood education in the Asia-Pacific region observes that the Philippines utilizes a discipline-based curriculum on the secondary level, differing from the spiral approach utilized in Singapore (SEAMEO INNTECH, 2020).

Eight (8) out of nine (9) FCE revealed that their major challenge is adjusting to the child behavior and classroom norms.

Below were actual participants' responses that intensify this claim:

"In Qatar, (Hmmm) the curriculum naka base sa Islamic values, STEM education, and critical thinking. (Ahmm) Kailangan kong I adjust ang pamamaraan ng pag tuturo ko to align my teaching style with local expectations and incorporate culturally relevant content."

(In Qatar, the curriculum focuses heavily on Islamic values, STEM education, and critical thinking. This required me to align my teaching style with local expectations and incorporate culturally relevant content.) - P1

"In Singapore, I followed a play-based curriculum (ahhm) na naka ayon sa interest's ng mga bata. This was quite different from the structured, predetermined curriculum I was used to in the Philippines."

(In Singapore, I followed a play-based curriculum that was dictated by the children's interests. This was quite different from the structured, predetermined curriculum I was used to in the Philippines.) - P8

Incorporating Local Cultural Elements into Teaching Response

The findings indicate that the FCE adopt their own cultural aspects to assimilate the children into their curricula.

For instance, a teacher changed and added the local cultural greetings and songs to the teaching practices in the daily operations to make the relationship between the children and their cultures more profound while at the same time enriching the teacher's knowledge about the backgrounds of the children. Another teacher resorted to a teaching strategy based on grouping activities and experiential learning. Multicultural storylines and activities were brought to commemorate the local traditions as well as the ones that are international. Using the approach of Reggio Emilia, children are put in charge of an active responsibility for the process within their learning and helps spur autonomy, creativity, collaboration (Gardner et al., 2016).

All nine (9) FCE admitted that their major challenge is incorporating local cultural elements into teaching responses.

Below were actual participants' responses that intensify this claim:

"In New Zealand, I adjusted my teaching methods to include aspects of the local Māori culture, like incorporating Māori greetings and songs into classroom routines. This not only helped the children connect with their heritage but also gave me a deeper understanding of their cultural background."

In New Zealand, I adjusted my teaching methods to include aspects of the local Māori culture, like (hmm) pag integrate Māori sa pag bati at kanta sa classroom routines. (Ahmmm) Nakakatulong ito hindi lang sa mga to connect their heritage but also gave me a deeper understanding of their cultural background.) - P7

"In Dubai, I adapted to the Reggio Emilia approach, which emphasizes group activities and hands-on learning. To align with this, I included multicultural stories and activities that celebrated both local and international traditions."

(In Dubai, (aahhm) I adapted to the Reggio Emilia approach, na naka base sa group activities and hands-on learning. To align with this, (hmmm) sinasama ko sa pag tuturo ang multicultural stories and activities that celebrated both local and international traditions.) - P5

Reduce Homesickness and Positivity

This theme focuses on the well-being of FCE that help them survive their life as an overseas teacher. Miller and Petty (2021) mentioned that educators who live with significant cultural distance from their home countries and countries where they teach develop feelings of marginalization that result in work dissatisfaction and mental illness. Two (2) sub themes have emerged: *emotional resilience and positivity during cultural adjustment, and the impact of cultural adaptation on professional relationships*. In order to gain deeper insight, the sub themes are discussed below.

Emotional Resilience and Positivity During Cultural Adjustment

Both resilience and emotional intelligence are pertinent to successful adaptation to culturally diverse societies. Emotional intelligence and resilience are closely related psychological constructs contributing to an individual's ability to cope with stress and adapt to new situations (Liu et al., 2013; Sarrionandia et al., 2018). Such qualities are likely to be helpful in the process of cultural adaptation, in which individuals encounter unfamiliar environments and possible sources of stress.

New environments may present some difficulties. However, emotional strength and positivity may help to bear the situations and make them more manageable. Exposure to different practices, beliefs, and modes of communication provide many opportunities to grow in patience and understanding. Experiences acquired fall under the general development of personal and professional growth and help foster a constructive attitude to various problems. They gradually build resilience and adaptability, which encourages optimism.

Eight (8) out of nine (9) FCE participants indicated that their major challenge is emotional resilience.

Below were actual participants' responses that intensify this claim:

"Ahm, hindi ko naman naranasan yung stress or disappointment while adapting their culture dito sa canada, kase kasama mo sa trabaho yung mga bata and they are source of joy, and I've learned as much from them as they have from me. And yung positivity and enthusiasm nila ang isa sa nagmomotivate sakin para mas magampanan ko yung trabaho ko."

(I didn't experience stress or disappointment during my cultural adaptation in Canada. Working with children has been a source of joy, and I've learned as much from them as they have from me. Their positivity and enthusiasm have motivated me, fostering a sense of fulfillment in my role.) - P9

"Yung pag-adapt sa new culture ay mas na e-enhance niya yung emotional resilience ko, kase yung mga challenges na naranasan ko mas natutu akong magkaroon ng patience and understanding sa mga bagay, and mas nagkakaron at na mamaintain ko yung positive mindset ko both personally and professionally"

(Adapting to a new culture has enhanced my emotional resilience. Each challenge taught me patience and understanding, allowing me to maintain a positive mindset and grow both personally and professionally.) - P1

Impact of Cultural Adaptation on Professional Relationships

These findings presented the self-reported experiences of the participants in terms of maintaining relationships in their culture. One mentioned how learning about culture helped her better relate with parents and colleagues, especially in building mutual respect for each other and trust on the job. Another reflected on the importance of learning culture in aiding to appreciate the backgrounds of colleagues both from a local and international background, strengthening teamwork and collaboration in a group's activity and curriculum-making. Gudykunst and Kim (2017) emphasized that cultural sensitivity improves professional relationships, thus leading to enhanced teamwork, especially in multicultural settings. These results show cultural awareness and flexibility in the development of effective, respectful professional settings.

Eight (8) out of nine (9) FCE participants identified that their major challenge is the impact of cultural adaptation on professional relationships.

Below were actual participants' responses that intensify this claim:

"Sa Canada, yung pag adapt sa culture nila ay nakatulong saakin mas magkaroon ng magandang connection sa mga ka trabaho at sa mga magulang ng mga students dito. Also, by learning their traditions and preferences, natututo akong makipag communicate and at makisama sa kung paano yung culture values nila at mas nagkakaroon ako ng magandang connection sa kanila."

(In Canada, adapting to their culture helped me establish better connections with both my colleagues and parents. By learning their traditions and preferences, I was able to communicate effectively and collaborate in a way that respected their cultural values, making our interactions more harmonious.) - P6

"Sa Dubai, I learned to navigate their cultural diversity, inalam ko yung culture nila at nirespect yung tradition nila both european and yung mga local na ka trabaho ko. At naka tulong yon para ma build yung trust and magkaroon ng positive relationship, especially kapag may mga group activities and curriculum planning."

(In Dubai, I learned to navigate cultural diversity by understanding and respecting the traditions of both my European and local colleagues. This helped me build trust and foster a positive working relationship, especially in group activities and curriculum planning.) - P1

Integration into Educational Systems and Support Systems

This theme explores the experiences of the FCE as they integrate with the educational systems of host countries and

use available supporting systems to navigate their working and personal lives abroad. Based on the study of De Guzman (2021), schools that avail systematic support through professional networks and opportunities for continuous development have been said to assist teachers against cultural limitations, thus improving their well-being. Two (2) sub themes have emerged: *the role of integrating professional development* and *mentorship peer support for adaptation*.

Role of Integrating Professional Development

The results show that professional development plays a great role in helping teachers adapt to local educational frameworks and cultural norms. One participant stated that the workshops and seminars provided by the school helped in understanding local teaching standards, and they could implement change in pedagogies with continued cultural responsiveness. Studies found that relevant programs on cultural awareness and differentiated instruction help teachers create culturally responsive and inclusive learning spaces (Dervin, 2016; Tatar & Mavi, 2019). In other countries, Montessori certificates and participation in workshops and conferences enabled the educators to be abreast of the best practices in early childhood education.

All nine (9) FCE participants specified their challenge in their role of integrating professional development.

Below were actual participants' responses that intensify this claim:

"Dito sa Qatar, yung professional development workshops and seminars provided ng school na kung saan nakatulong ito para matutunan ko yung local educational system nila dito. And with these opportunities natutunan ko yung teaching standard and practices nila at mas naging madali yon sa akin para ma adapt ko yung methods while staying aligned with cultural expectations."

(In Qatar, professional development workshops and seminars provided by the school were crucial in helping me integrate into the local educational system. These opportunities allowed me to understand their teaching standards and practices better, making it easier to adapt my methods while staying aligned with cultural expectations.) - P1

"In Canada, mas pinili kong kumuha ng certificate in teaching toddlers through the North American Montessori Center. And online training yon, along with workshops and conferences, nakatulong siya sa akin kase I continuously gain knowledge about in Early Childhood Education, na mas napadali ako na malaman yung local educational system nila."

(In Canada, I pursued a certificate in teaching toddlers through the North American Montessori Center. This online training, along with workshops and conferences,

helped me continuously update my knowledge in Early Childhood Education, enabling me to integrate effectively into the local educational system.) - P6

Mentorship and Peer Support for Adaptation

Substantial benefits of adjustment and coping have been found for the support activities through peer mentoring in marginalized communities and individuals. Participants expressed their experience of being mentored and having peer support from their colleagues. Such programs provide specific advantages compared to traditional vertical models because they offer more accessible coaching (Cree-Green et al., 2020). The help from senior peers directed them on how to understand more about the national curriculum and pedagogies and helped them gain confidence in teaching skills.

All nine (9) FCE participants indicated that they experienced mentorship and peer support for adaptation.

Below were actual participants' responses that intensify this claim:

"In singapore, malaki yung naging benefit niya sa kin yung mentorship program na yung mga colleagues ko na nag guide sa kin to understand their local curriculum and teaching practices. Yung support nila nakatulong yon sa kin na mas maging confident and to be capable in my role."

(In Singapore, I benefited greatly from mentorship programs where senior colleagues guided me in understanding the local curriculum and teaching practices. This support helped me feel more confident and capable in my role.) - P7 & P2

"Sa Canada, Meron ako kasama with experienced mentor na kasama yon sa boarding process. And nagkakaroon kami ng regular meetings with mentor and colleagues na may chance ako na mag ask ng questions and clarify uncertainties, para maging smooth yung transition ko dito."

(In Canada, I was paired with an experienced mentor as part of the onboarding process. Regular meetings with my mentor and colleagues gave me the chance to ask questions and clarify uncertainties, making my transition smoother.) - P2

Maintaining Filipino Identity and Host Country Integration

This theme explores how the FCE experience within this two-folded challenge in attempting to reconcile their Filipino identity with accommodating the new culture, and professional requirements. Verkuyten et al., (2019) shows that bicultural individuals who have experienced cultural

harmony and integration have stronger interpersonal relationships and higher career success. This theme can be categorized into two (2) subthemes: *balancing cultural ties while integrating locally* and *exploring local traditions to strengthen cultural connections*. Each subtheme is explained below in giving an in-depth look into what they are going through and how they go about things.

Balancing Cultural Ties While Integrating Locally

The findings revealed how the FCE maintain their cultural identity in the host environment. They keep their culture and roots alive by displaying the traditional cuisine, making native language use at home, and participating in any events that may take place within the community. Hu and Ødemotland (2021) studied the role of community-based projects in enhancing cultural awareness and connection. They mentioned that local traditions in education activities helps preserve the culture but also enhances the bonds within the diverse community. At the same time, they adopt the local culture and local teaching style and promote harmony in their working places. Such balance between maintaining the culture and incorporating it from the local environment helps them in bridging the cultural gap, forging close relationships with colleagues, and enriching their professional and personal life while abroad.

All nine (9) FCE participants indicated their challenge was in maintaining cultural ties while integrating locally.

Below were actual participants' responses that intensify this claim:

"In, Singapore, nag stay pa rin ako sa pagka filipino ko like sharing our cuisine nad nag paparticipate din ako sa mga filipino community events. At the same time, nagoobserve ako ng local customs and inaadapt ko din yung teaching culture nila to have harmonious balance."

(In Singapore, I perceived my Filipino identity by sharing our cuisine and participating in Filipino community events. At the same time, I observed local customs and adapted to their teaching culture to ensure a harmonious balance.) - P8 & P3

"In Qatar, yung filipino language naten sa atin sa bahay, at yung kung paano tayo magluto it allowed me to stay connected to my roots, and while nakakapag engage and exchange ako in different culture wherein nakatulong yon para ma bridge yung gaps sa mga local colleagues ko dito."

(In Qatar, speaking Filipino at home and cooking traditional dishes allowed me to stay connected to my roots, while engaging in cross-cultural exchanges helped bridge gaps with my local colleagues.) - P1

Exploring Local Traditions to Strengthen Cultural Connections

The results in this study further showed that studying local culture will make more cultural relationship develop inside a classroom. During an interview session, a teacher described how they study and explored local customs and traditions where they introduced themselves to people through language learning and became active participants during their national days. Similarly, another teacher experienced exploring between hosting local holidays and the introduction of Filipino practices in classroom sessions. Teachers who participate in local cultural practices in their school build relationships with the community, from which they enhance communication skills and cooperation (Eden, Chisom & Adeniyi, 2024).

Eight (8) of the nine (9) FCE participants indicated that their challenge was in exploring local traditions to strengthen cultural connections.

Below were actual participants' responses that intensify this claim.

"Dito Sa New Zealand, I immersed myself in local traditions, katulad ng learning the Māori language and pag participate sa cultural events nila dito. Actually, hindi naman nakatulong yon to integrate in their society pero it allowed me para maka share ng filipino traditions naten, and magkaroon ng cultural exchange na nagbebenefit siya both to children and their families."

(In New Zealand, I immersed myself in local traditions, like learning the Māori language and participating in cultural events. This not only helped me integrate into their society but also allowed me to share Filipino traditions, creating a cultural exchange that benefited both the children and their families.) - P4

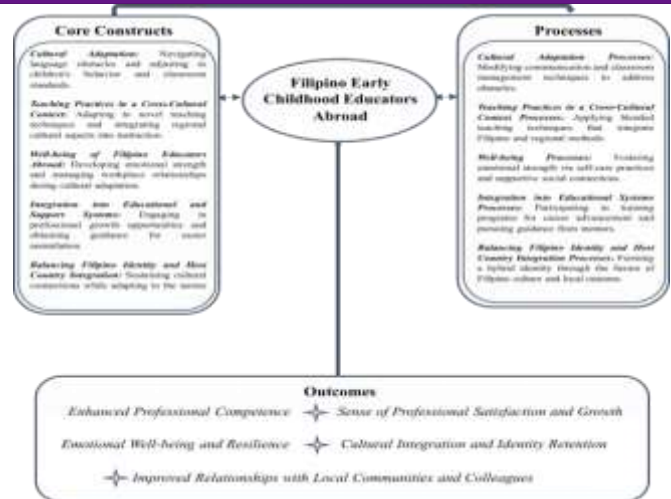
"Even then, lagi kong binabalance yung knowing their local customs, like pagcelebrate ng national holidays, while ini introduce ko din yung Filipino practices during classroom activities. With that, nakakatulong siya para magkaroon ng inclusivity and ma bridge yung gaps between different cultures."

(I've always tried to balance embracing local customs, like celebrating their national holidays, while introducing Filipino practices during classroom activities. This approach helps foster inclusivity and bridges the gap between different cultures.) - P8 & P4

4.1 SYNTHESIS OF INTERPRETATION

In this study, the researchers have come up with the synthesis of interpretation through an emerging framework which was obtained from the themes and subthemes based from the analyzed data of the interviews.

Figure 1. Emerging Framework of the Filipino Early Childhood Educators Abroad



The researchers encapsulated the intricate process of cultural adaptation that Filipino Early Childhood Educators (FCE) experience while working abroad. It focuses on the difficulties their pupils face and important aspects of their experience, such as adapting to a new culture, switching to new educational methodologies from other cultures, maintaining their personal well-being, integrating into the foreign education system, and striking a balance between their Filipino identity and the host country's norms. These constructs demonstrate the ways through which teachers cross cultural and linguistic differences, adjust to new teaching and learning methods, sustain emotional endurance, and maintain relationship ties from the cultural heritage within a new environment.

This framework also places much importance on the ways they use to deal with these issues. These are changing their communication methods, integration of local and Filipino methods of education, self-care, and hybrid identity approach where they blend their culture with that of their adopted country of origin. As people face the hardships of operating in foreign educational systems, such adaptive strategies give evidence to their autonomy, creativity, and resilience.

These efforts earn more community ties, increased professional skills, emotional well-being, cultural cohesion, and career growth, all testifying to the transforming power of cultural adjustment. The framework has an expansive view into their experience, demonstrating how they take on challenges and become resilient individuals while navigating through different cultures and educational settings. The framework may serve as a guide and an overview of the cultural adaptation for Filipino educators who may want to work abroad.

5. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall results of the qualitative data analysis are presented in this chapter, along with recommendations and conclusions that address the study's problem statements.

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the themes and responses as well as the problem statements of the study, these conclusions have been drawn:

1. The primary challenges faced by FCE in adapting to a new cultural environment while teaching abroad are the language barriers and differences in classroom standards. However, such challenges build resilience, enhance communication skills, and increase confidence as they work through cultural and linguistic obstacles adjusting toward cultural localism by embracing different curricula and child-centered approaches, like the use of play. Through imparting elements of the immediate or local culture, the pedagogical content can greatly consist of greetings, and stories among many others, which will keep children attached to their own cultures, hence enhancing further professional development and educational proficiency of the teachers.

2. The strategy employed to cope with cultural transition and adjustment in their professional and personal lives are the integration of FCE into foreign educational systems. Such support systems have helped them understand regional pedagogy, follow the curriculum, and dive into the cultural practices of the places where they teach. Schools and institutions that host foreign teachers should provide some education and mentorship programs to ensure smooth transitions in academic environments.

3. Cultural adaptation created a huge impact on the teaching methods, interactions and overall well-being of the FCE abroad. First, Filipino workers incorporate into new socio-cultural settings through their cultural identity. Second, they remain culturally grounded in the sense that they share some of the Filipino food, language, and community activities, yet participate in local ones and celebrations. Lastly, they have a mutual appreciation of cultural values and promote a sense of belonging in the classroom that positively influences teaching and learning.

4. FCE perceived their integration into the educational systems of their host countries as challenging because they had to adapt to make their relations with colleagues, parents, and the larger community easier. Through the challenges in adaptation, their Filipino colleagues supported them which helped in their cultural adaptation. They respected and appreciated the cultural values of the host country, thus gaining trust and cooperation from their peers at the local level. This example shows that cultural awareness is relevant for effective communication, close collaboration, and

cohesive working relationships to benefit the children being educated.

5.2 LIMITATIONS

The following have been considered as limitations of the study:

1. The research was conducted in a short time period and thus could be limiting the depth of data collection and analysis.
2. This study could only describe the adaptation experiences of a small group of Filipino Early Childhood Educators (FCE) working in a few selected countries, and may not be representative of the variety of cultural adaptation experiences in practice.
3. The study did not consider, however, male educators, which limits the extent to which gender may influence the cultural adaptation experience.
4. The study merely focused on the general view of the cultural adaptation of Filipino Early Childhood Educators abroad.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

From the conclusions and limitations above, the researchers are proposing the following recommendations:

1. Filipino teachers abroad not only FCE should be given continuous support for professional development in schools and other institutions. This can be in the form of mentorship programs, cross-cultural training, and workshops on teaching the local curriculum, negotiating local teaching standards, and adjusting pedagogies in multiple cultural settings.

2. FCE abroad must make improvements in learning the language and culture of the place where they are teaching. These improvements will help them overcome linguistic barriers. In addition, they will be able to communicate better with students, parents, and colleagues.

3. Educators must be culturally aware and sensitive of their relations with colleagues, parents, and the rest of the school community. This positive environment of mutual respect and understanding helps to make better collaboration and develop partnerships in children's education.

4. FCE should be encouraged to still maintain their cultural identity while integrating with the host country's culture. Schools should support initiatives meant to promote multicultural appreciation both in the classroom and within the wider school community.

5. Schools should also consider developing the appeal of increasing the number of enrollments in their ECE programs by showing the impact it would have on the future generations of educators, together with consideration to the rapidly increasing demand for more qualified teachers. The school

must highlight the high standard of curriculum and expertise among the faculty, opportunities for practice, and thus demonstrate the ability to launch graduates who succeed in teaching different international contexts.

6. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) needs more endorsement and support for ECE programs in universities and colleges. These programs will satisfy national standards as well as to give quality training for ECE educators in response to the lack of early childhood educators in the Philippines and abroad.

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